

Sank Ik Choi, the First Unification Church Missionary - Part 2

Bong-chun Choi
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Becoming a member of the Church

I went to Japan and stayed there for a time to study theology and then I returned to South Korea. Since this was soon after the Korean War, most of the churches at the time were being operated by American missionary organizations and were receiving aid. Since I had done some interpreting for an American army base in the past, I used some disaster aid to build a church and I also operated a social organization.

Honestly speaking, after returning to South Korea and serving in my church I had a lot on my mind. Not only did I not hold a satisfactory position, there were many parts of the Bible I had trouble understanding when I read them. Moreover, I couldn't help but be disappointed by observing the pastors and the elders who were the leaders of the church. For a time, I left the church and worked on a farm in the countryside.

But since I was still young, I couldn't just stay in the countryside, and I came back to Seoul. After a while, I did some work at a school in Incheon, but my work didn't go well, which caused me grief. Just then, I met a friend who was working in the art department at the US embassy with Elder Song Do-bin. Since I had been having lots of trouble with work since coming to Seoul, I was spending time at my friend's house. I got to know Elder Song and found out what church he was going to.

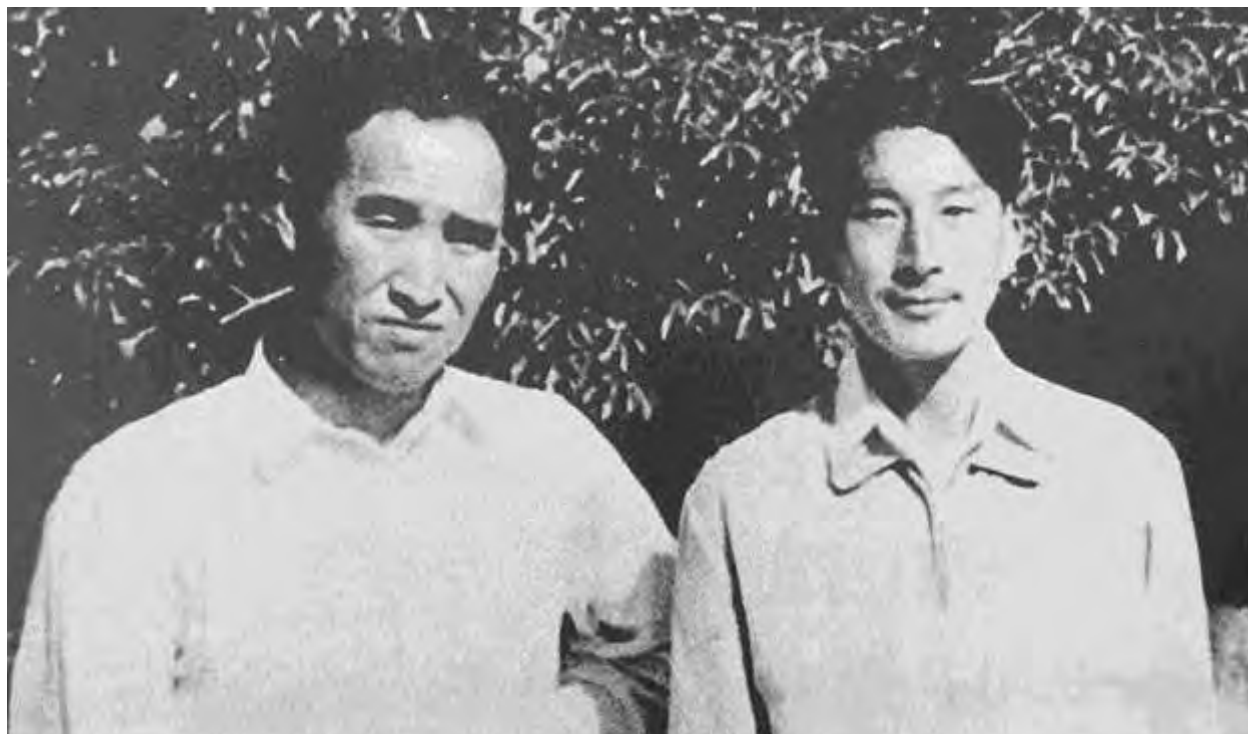
I was quite wary of Elder Song and didn't pay much attention to what he said. However, while the two of us were at a restaurant having a cup of coffee, he said, "Not a single pastor or elder in this world can boast of his faith. Even Jesus Christ was crucified by the High Priests and the teachers of the law -- and they were supposed to be the most knowledgeable of all." His words struck me in a different way than anything had before, and with shock, I felt that I would have to think things over. Once again, I felt that I ought to be humble.

After that, I came to feel that the love Elder Song showed me was not simply routine but, rather, sincere.

Because my work wasn't going well at the time, I sometimes had to skip meals, but he took me out to eat and even paid my debts when I was really hard up. Given those circumstances, I couldn't turn him down when he suggested that I come to the Unification Church and learn about the Divine Principle. So I attended an introductory class, and was greatly touched. I made up my mind to join that church. This was April 10, 1956 (I became member No. 361).

During the summer [40 days] witnessing period the following year, 1957, from July 20, I went to the city of Chungmu in South Gyeongsang Province and established a church there.

I had been moved by the Principle. The thought that had come to mind early was that I wanted to convey the Word to Japan. My thoughts raced like a kaleidoscope as I quickly told Mr. Eu that I wished to witness with the Word in Japan. Mr. Eu said, "You have a mission to do that," and this made my resolve firmer. From then on, I was constantly preparing and wanted to leave for Japan as soon as possible, but the time had not yet come.



The calling to be a missionary

I was deeply interested in the Last Days. As God said his kingdom would come before too long, I believed that His will would be accomplished when the time was right. I wanted to do what I could to accomplish God's will. And so I earnestly asked Master to send me to Japan as a missionary.

The following year, he called me to him and instructed me to go to Japan.

I had an appointment to see Master in Daejeon, so I left Seoul station the morning of May 29, 1958. Elder Cheong, Mr Gi-joo Song and Mr Gwang-yeong saw me off. I arrived at Daejeon later than scheduled. Master had sent a church member to wait for me, but that person had left, so I visited Master at Gapsa Temple, together with Jang-lim and Gi-yong, the three of us. We arrived at Gapsa late at night. It was a quiet place in the mountains, a beautiful retreat. We met with Master, who was out taking a walk with the disciples, and I handed him the letter of recommendation that Mr. Eu had written him. He read the letter right away under the moonlight, and I was happy, because I believed he would be pleased.

After the walk in the dusk to cool off, we returned to the retreat, opened a gift of food from Mr Gwang-yeong, a Seoul member, and shared it. Thinking that tonight would be my last night with Master, I wanted to sleep next to him. Master did not say anything, and I was also silent, keeping calm in front of the others.

When I woke up, Master was gone. I wanted to see him quickly before taking the morning train and went looking for him in the mountains. Master was there. Neither of us said much. We returned to the room, and had breakfast. I asked Jang-lim to take a photograph with his camera, and we took a final picture [the photo shown in last week's installment].

The last time I saw Master was at Gapsa Temple. I had fervently asked him to say a prayer for me, but since there was no response, I had repeated myself, assuming he hadn't heard me. He told me he wanted to pray for me and give me his blessings, but that if I wasn't able to go, he would have to pay indemnity. When I insisted I wouldn't cause any problems and begged him to pray for me, Master finally did so, as if

he had no choice.

After saying my final greetings, I came down the mountain, singing the holy song He Has Called Me. "Without esteem, without renown, I only wish to follow," I sang. The weather was nice and warm. The trees and grass were a lush green, and I walked down the hill alone, in high spirits. I would take a few steps and look back, sorry to part with Master, but departed with joy, hope and determination. I thought, "Even if I die and die again and die a hundred times, I will never fail to go down the path I have chosen." In my heart, I made many vows.

Many members know the story of how Papa-san Choi smuggled himself into Japan and overcame almost impossible odds to remain there, and how he successfully started the church in Japan. For now, this testimony is to allow the reader some small insight into Choi Bong-choon's most formative years. It is hoped that one day we will be able to serialize the story of his work as the first overseas missionary of the Unification Church.