

A Personal Testimony: On the Suffering Path of the Lord - Part 2

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In 1946 we left Anju. We bought a house in Pyongyang and moved there. Sometime later, the communists made me the head of my neighborhood. I was in difficulty, because I disliked the communists deeply but if I refused they would have accused me of being a reactionary. I did not want the job of checking on twelve households every day. After racking my brains about it, we sold the house and moved again, from Gyeongsang-gol to a big house situated in the middle of the Shinchang-ri market. During the day, Russian soldiers filled the streets, and during the night thieves were everywhere. Once, we were robbed at midnight. Thieves opened the door of the shop and took everything without restriction. We could do nothing but sit still and breathe quietly. During the night, the townspeople used to chase

away thieves by wildly drumming on brass basins.

I had sent my husband to Seoul a few months before. After I gave birth to my youngest daughter in February 1948, I heard a rumor that a presidential election was scheduled to take place on May 10 in Seoul,[1] and that afterward the roads would be blocked completely and no one would be able to cross the thirty-eighth parallel. I could not endure it any longer, and twenty-five days after giving birth, I resolved to go to Seoul. I first sent off my two oldest boys to Haeju,[2] after which I left home, after paying two guides to show us the way, with Hye-sook, Yoon-joo, Eui-joo, and the newborn baby on my back. I did not give a thought to the house in Pyongyang or all our things, but it broke my heart to part with my beloved mother.



General Douglas MacArthur

My mother could not stop me from leaving, and she could not tell me to go, so all she did was sigh and ask why I was going to Seoul when the Lord was going to come to Pyongyang. Some time back, the people who were making preparations to receive the Lord had received the revelation that Pyongyang would become Eden, and they had even prepared a site at the foot of Moran Hill to build a palace as they waited for his coming. My older sister was one of the zealous followers. It was a time when no one even thought about Seoul. I alone stubbornly insisted on going there, thinking vaguely that we would meet again in three years.

At the time, it was my opinion that if the Lord did come to Pyongyang he would have to move to Seoul because he would not be able to find a place to settle down in a communist state. I left, saying, "Mother, please be well. I will see you in three years."

Thirty years have now passed as I tell this.[3] It is truly heartrending.

Fearing that others might see us, they could not even come to the gate to see me off. I turned my back on the house and went to Pyongyang Station, where I bought train tickets and made my way to the ticket barrier. All my companions were allowed to pass through, but they stopped me. Perhaps Satan knew I was leaving; at any rate, I was very uneasy. I finally made my way through, telling lies though I wasn't good at it. This woman who had just delivered a child and had been lying in bed only a while ago was forced to risk her life. We got on the train to Gaeseong[4] but were forced to alight from the train midway. They investigated each of us, asking why we had come there and if we were planning to go to Seoul. I broke into a sweat. With God's help, we were finally freed. We spent the night in an inn. We

rested during the day and walked through the night. Four days later about sunrise, we met a policeman who told us that we were in southern Korea. When I realized that we had finally crossed that infamous, invisible thirty-eighth parallel, I all but fainted. This meeting with the policeman felt like a meeting with the Savior. I sat down right there and then and wept.

We had walked all night, crossing mountains and rivers, and because my rubber shoes were slippery, I had taken them off and had walked wearing nothing but socks. The policeman said, "Ma'am, you have done well."

I replied, "I will never go back to Pyongyang" and handed him my northern Korean citizen's identification card.

When I came to my senses and examined myself, I saw that I had lost my shoes, my legs were swollen and I looked like a crazy person. In short, I was a mess. With much difficulty, I went downtown and bought a pair of rubber shoes, put them on, and took a direct train to Seoul via Gaeseong.[5]



The hastily conceived division at the thirty-eighth parallel was originally part of a plan to facilitate Japanese surrender and repatriation; for how it changed through the Korean Armistice.

When I got off the train at Seoul Station with my little children, I felt helpless, not knowing where I should go or what direction I should take, being the country person that I was. After much thought, I remembered hearing that Dr. Jang Ri-wook, a relative of my husband, was the head of the teacher's college. Not knowing anything about streetcars, I hailed three rick-shaws -- there were rickshaws at the time -- and told the pullers to take us to the official residence of the head of the teacher's college. We soon arrived at the residence. They let us stay with them for a while.

Though I met my husband, he did not tell me even once that I had done well. Instead, he harassed me every night, asking why I had come and how we were to live. I endured it, without answering him, and resolved in my heart that if we had to die we would die in Seoul, and that I would educate my six children as well as anyone else.

We finally found a small home in Huam-dong[6] and settled down in Seoul.

The children were going to school and we were all but settled down when the Korean Civil War broke out on June 25, 1950. The North Korean communists came to Seoul. All our neighbors in front of us and next to us became communists as well. Seoul was in turmoil. Including the family of my brother-in-law, we were fifteen people in total, and we were unable to leave Seoul in time. Moreover, we had no end of trouble hiding five men. One of the communists asked me if I believed in Jesus, and I answered yes. Then he asked me how long I had believed in him, and when I answered truthfully that it had been thirty years, they started to pay special attention to us. To get away from them, we fled northward, not southward, walking about thirty kilometers.

At our place of refuge, we suffered much, and my husband and oldest son were taken at one time. Then the South recovered their lost land on September 28[7] and we returned home, only to find that two of our next-door neighbors had died and our porch had been burned. Not only that, when the South Korean Army marched north and took Pyongyang and Anju,[8] my impatient husband and oldest son went with them to Pyongyang and Anju and met with the family members we had left behind. They also met with my mother and sister, who were still waiting, saying that the Lord was going to come to Pyongyang.

We were all overjoyed, thinking that the nation would be united soon, but there came a rude awakening. The Communist Chinese army came flooding down,[9] and everyone had to retreat. We left early this time, with the intention of going south, but the train was already full. In the end, our family rode on top of a train car, on blankets spread out to protect the children, and we shouted to each other not to fall asleep because we would die if we dozed. We finally reached Busan[10] after riding in this way for five days.



Wartime refugees stream south

[1] On this date, Syngman Rhee won a seat in the first national assembly of the new republic. Three months later, he would win a national election and go on to govern South Korea until 1960.

[2] A town near the coast of what is today southwest North Korea; Mrs. Oh does not say how or if her oldest sons joined her in the south.

[3] Mrs. Oh must have related this story in the mid-1970s, at which time she would have already been in her sixties.

[4] The thirty-eight parallel crossed Gaeseong's northern outskirts.

[5] Gaeseong proper was then in southern Korea. The line of division changed through the Korean War Armistice, resulting in Gaeseong being in North Korea. Today, it is the location of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex.

[6] A short distance to the east of Cheongpa-dong; ten years later it would be on the route Father would walk when he went to the mountain (Namsan) in the center of Seoul to pray with members.

[7] With General Douglas MacArthur's landing at Incheon on September 15, the tide of the Korea War turned and the UN-commissioned forces recaptured Seoul very swiftly. Mrs. Oh is describing this time.

[8] The advance of the combined ROK and allied forces would, within weeks, liberate True Father from prison in Hungnam; this was one of the only times (if not the only time) the border between North and South Korea was open for people to traverse. Father also managed to come to South Korea about two months after this, just as the border was closing again.

[9] The entry of China into the Korean War in October 1950 reversed the tide of the conflict again.

[10] True Father was at this time in Pyongyang looking for his followers. He would not arrive in Busan until January 27, 1951.