



Biography of David Sang Chul Kim

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Celebrating the Life of a Heavenly General



David Sang Chul Kim (1915 - 2011) lived his life as a pioneer missionary and Heavenly General. Like his namesake in the Bible, David who defeated Goliath, he was never afraid to take on any giant. But he fought not with the weapons of a physical battle but rather with the power of truth and love and unwavering faith in God.

A Korean man, born in a time so different from contemporary Western culture, he was able to transcend the barriers of culture, language, race, religion, whatever, and touch the hearts of minds of so many people, becoming our beloved "Grandpa" Kim.

Family Background

An interfaith community!

Sang Chul Kim (he received the name David later) was born in 1915 in Seoul, Korea. His family background was a great preparation for interfaith work - his father was a well-educated Christian and his mother came from a combined Buddhist and Confucian background.

But it was his grandmother who really made things interesting! She was associated with many religious groups in Korea and it was common for astrologers, Buddhist priests with psychic powers, and various other spiritual people to meet at their home all the time. It must have been quite exciting, especially since he was an only child, and he developed a keen interest in religious questions from a very early age.

With such an interfaith-oriented background he researched higher truth not only from Christian churches but also from religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and other small Korean groups with Messianic expectations.

Early Years

Preparation time



First, though, he studied at the prestigious Chosen Christian College (now Yonsei University) established by Presbyterian missionaries from America. It was this path that led him to meet his future wife, Eui Hong Kang.

He was serving as deacon and choir director at a Presbyterian Church in Kunsan and she obtained a job at the church school. This was in the early 1940s, a time when marriages were arranged by the parents. Eui Hong Kang did not want to marry someone chosen by her parents so she moved to Kunsan and found a job there and she met Sang Chul Kim. As he put it, "So she ended up marrying me!"

They had five children, one daughter and four sons, and lived a comfortable life for several years.

During the Korean war, however, Sang Chul Kim's life was in danger. While praying for guidance on which road to take to avoid communist guerrillas, he had a vision of an "old, gentle, loving man" with purple robes who guided him to a Buddhist monastery in the mountains. He stayed there for three months, until the United Nations forces liberated the area.

A Special Meeting

In February 1954 Sang Chul Kim had a meeting that changed his life, and his name!

One of his friends had encountered a new spiritual group and recommended that he check them out. He

made an appointment to see the leader of this group in Taegu. However, when he arrived the leader was not there, only a woman. Being a typical Korean man (that means not ready to listen to a woman!) he was ready to leave. But she told him she had had a vision that morning in prayer of a young man she didn't know, and that young man was him. So he agreed to stay a while.

Suddenly this woman began shaking and her voice changed to the voice of the "old, gentle and loving man" in purple robes who had guided him to the safety of the Buddhist monastery! Realizing that God was speaking to him again, he listened. This is what the voice said:

Listen, dear Sang Chul! I have been training you for 30 years, since the age of nine, to search for the truth through various religious experiences and groups. The time has now come; this is the place I wanted to lead you. From now on, your new name is David, after King David who destroyed Goliath in the Old Testament. You will be going overseas for pioneer missionary work for this group.

Well, that's quite a message! And not only that, as he slept that night Sang Chul Kim, now David, had a spiritual experience where a man was running towards him. They met and shook hands and he saw the man's smiling face. This man was Sun Myung Moon.

Based on these experiences David Sang Chul Kim became Reverend Moon's loyal follower for the rest of his life.

Missionary Years



It turned out that the lady who channeled God that day was right! Within months, David Sang Chul Kim was on his way to the UK as the first missionary there. This was in 1954 and I'm sure it must have been quite an experience, both for Reverend Kim and for the British people he spoke to!

After a couple of years he returned to Korea, but was soon sent off as a missionary again. This time to the

US! It seems quite ironic that a man who studied at a college founded by American Presbyterian missionaries to Korea would, a few years later, be sent as a missionary to America bringing a new understanding of the Bible. But that's what he did. This time some other missionaries also came to this country, but they ended up in different states and had little communication with each other, so it was pioneer time again. Even his wife and family couldn't join him for several years.



Finally, though, Reverend Moon arrived in the US and things really started heating up - both in terms of activities and persecution. This was the 1970s, and speaking tours were organized around the country. Reverend Moon's picture started appearing in the media and everyone talked about the "Moonies" and how crazy they were.

Yes, David Kim had many challenges! And he lived up to his name, taking on all the "Goliaths" without ever flinching.

Unification Theological Seminary



Then, Reverend Moon founded the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in Barrytown, New York. He chose David S.C. Kim to be its first president. You might think this meant he could settle down, have a slightly more peaceful life. No way! That's not David Kim's way at all!

First off, there was a battle to get the seminary accredited - another chance for David to take on Goliath, this time the Board of Regents of New York State, quite a giant! This was when I first encountered him. I was hired by UTS and one of my first projects was to help with this accreditation process. We had to submit a document to the Board of Regents in Albany. In my way of thinking this document, which was quite lengthy but not over-sized in any way, could easily be mailed or perhaps sent by Fed Ex. No, that wasn't the plan!

David Kim called me and two other members of the administrative staff to his office and told us it was our task to drive up to Albany (about an hour and a quarter drive) and deliver the document to the appropriate office. And we should pray together on the steps of the building. And he would pray for us! And he called us the "Three Musketeers." I was quite surprised, but realizing that the other two were used to this kind of task (and taskmaster) I went along with the plan. And we succeeded!



UTS under President Kim was no ordinary seminary. It wasn't just that the faculty members were all from different faiths - a Jewish rabbi, a Confucianist scholar, a Catholic priest, a Methodist preacher, a Greek Orthodox scholar, and so forth, although that made for some interesting times! There were so many other activities that President Kim arranged for all the students and staff. Fishing was a favorite! Sports were on the agenda too.

And then, of course, everyone was married, or engaged to be married (you know Reverend Moon conducted a lot of mass weddings!) so there were lots of children too. In fact, our daughter was born during these years and when he saw her with her bald head (she was actually born with lots of black hair standing up in true mohawk style) and round face (not sure if she had the serene smile) he named her the "Barrytown Buddha"! And even after she'd graduated high school and gone off to college he'd often ask us how the "Barrytown Buddha" was doing.

"Retirement"

Grandpa Kim

Then, after 20 years as president of UTS, David Kim "retired." Again, not in the usual fashion. One of his favorite people to quote at this time was General Douglas MacArthur who famously said "old soldiers never die; they just fade away." He revised it to apply to his life as a "Heavenly General":

*A general never dies or fades away,
but prays continuously for Kingdom-building on Earth.*

For another 12 years David Kim worked hard, his energies focused primarily on the Mid-Hudson Valley. He spoke at numerous prayer breakfasts and other events, giving spiritual food and guidance to everyone. He never forgot anyone's birthday, or our children's birthday, sending cards with words of encouragement and love. No wonder he became our favorite "Grandpa."



He became famous for his monthly birthday celebrations where he would gather everyone who had a birthday that month, and often many of us who had birthdays on other months, and have a wonderful lunch party at a local Chinese restaurant. We would take over a side room if they had one, or a huge section of the main room if not, rearranging tables to look like a banquet!

There was always ceremony - prayer, recitation of scripture, lighting candles, cutting cake, singing happy birthday, and so on. Sometimes he would hold forth at length and the whole restaurant would turn their attention to us, trying to listen. There was eating too, of course! We all would fill our plates several times over, and then have the ceremonial reading of the fortune cookies. Everyone got to stand up and read their fortune out loud, and David Kim would comment, often hilariously, on how appropriate the fortune was. Then we'd have three cheers of "Mansei" (the Korean equivalent of Hip Hip Hooray, but with more meaning).



One of David Kim's final projects was to install a huge stone monument on the UTS grounds, inscribed with a special "letter from God" in Korean and English. While president of UTS he had installed plaques on huge rocks around the property to commemorate various events of significance. This final monument is close to the rock where Reverend Moon made the decision to purchase the property almost 40 years previously.