

First Missions – Korea

First Missions – Pioneering Workers – Korea

Korea

August 28, 2025

SOUTH KOREA

When did the workers first arrive? Willie Jamieson spent a little while in Korea in the 1920s.

Who were the first workers? Sproulie Denio and Don Garland went there together in the late 1940s. The *Korean War* began June 25, 1950 and ended July 27, 1953. These two workers stayed in Japan and returned to Korea sometime after the war ended (1958?). A number of Americans and Canadians also went to Korea in the 1950s, such as Gordon Winkler, Paul Boyd, Dick Owen, Merlin Howlett, Marion Robinson, Isabel Boyd, Alice Ramsden and Jeannette Munn.

Who was the first native to profess? A lady commonly called "Gapsu's Mother."

Who was the first male native to go in the work? Kison Ko was the first Korean worker, starting in 1960. Kison was a sailor [petty officer] sent to San Diego for schooling. There he met an American professing sailor who took him to his home in town and attended meetings. This was his first contact with the fellowship.

Who was the first female native to go in the work?

When & Where was the first meeting?* Probably the first fellowship meeting at a friends home was at Gapsu's Mother's.

When & Where was the first baptism? ———?

When & Where was the first convention? Spring 1962, probably at a hotel in Yuseong, Taejeon. It was for 2 days and 100 were present.

Where have subsequent conventions been held? The first convention held on a friend's property was at Sampori, Youngam in either 1969 or 1970; the second one on Wando Island early 1970s; the third one in Jinhae, near Busan, started in 1982 on property of Doug & Rahni Cho.

Where are the conventions currently held? In 2020: Seoul 1 & 2; Jinhae 1 & 2; Joo-am.

Outreach: There are a number of Koreans in other Asian countries, as well as in Russia and other former Soviet republics, and a couple of Korean sister workers are laboring in South America. The Korean workers are one of the largest groups of workers in the world.

Who have the Overseers been?

Sproulie Denio (born in Bakersfield, California on 1/18/1910), was the first Overseer; died in Seoul from massive embolism on June 10, 1964, aged 54.

Don Garland (born in Rex, Oregon on 3/23/1918) succeeded Sproulie Denio, was overseer until 1993; died in Oregon of cancer on 4/28/2002, aged 84.

Ernest Robinson (born in South Africa on May 3, 1935) came to Korea in 1967, assumed oversight in 1993.

Jiwhan Yu became Overseer circa 2000.

[Click Here to View Photos of Korean Workers](#)

***Interesting fact.** In a letter dated December 19, 1989, from a worker signed P.T.O.:

Koreans are not fond of bread; in fact they cannot understand how we Westerners can live on it. They think we eat it in large quantities three times a day like they eat rice. Before foreigners came to this country, they didn't even know what bread was. In the Korean Bible bread always appears as "rice-cake" (a gooyie lump that seems like uncooked dough). On Sunday mornings, we thank God for the wine and the "rice-cake" (even though we do use bread).

Sproulie Denio: Just after WW2, I picked up a magazine and read an article on Korea. I became deeply interested and for the next two or three years I read all I could about Korea. In 1948 I was talking to Jack Carroll, Overseer of Western USA, and he said that he wanted someone to go to Korea, so I and Don Garland, who was from Canada, offered. We were to go when the way opened up.

Nov. 7, 1954 – Talk by Sproulie Denio in Phoenix, Arizona

Perhaps this evening we could spend a little time talking about some of the work in the Far East. I don't think the time would be wasted in speaking about this thing tonight because it should be in all our interest to know how God's work is carried on in some of those other lands. We have often been asked what caused us to want to go to Korea. That is a question that is difficult to answer. Quite a number of years before I went out to Korea the thought was in my heart and if I had any doubts whether it was of God or not, those doubts have been banished since I have returned to this country. The reason I feel now more than ever before that God laid it

on my heart is because I have a greater desire to go now than before I knew the country the people and the language but I have a deeper desire now than in the beginning.

When we decided to go to Korea. We were given two opportunities to study the language. One at the University of Calif. or we could go to Hawaii. We chose to go to Hawaii because there were seven or eight thousand Korean people in Hawaii. We felt it would be better to go where we could talk to and be among those people.

Shortly after we landed in Hawaii we began looking for a teacher. I visited a church. Was told there was an old lady that spoke English very fluently and we went in see her. She said, "no, I am too busy. Come in anyway, I would like to talk about your faith ". We went in and Don Garland and I gave her a little bit of our testimony. While we were in talking to her about the things we believed, her heart had become deeply interested in that thing. She had been bitterly disappointed in the Methodist church.

We sat around her table every day for about a year and three months and the only text book we had was the Bible because Korea for forty years was dominated by Japanese and they were trying to stamp out the Korean language. They did not allow any books to be printed in Korean. If any Korean was found speaking the Korean language he was flogged unmercifully.

We had a new Testament that we studied out of. The Korean language is very easy to learn to read and write to learn to speak the language takes a long time. About five years before one can have much liberty speaking the language. We studied the Bible chapter by chapter. The first month we could only take a few verses a day because it was so difficult. Soon we were able to take a chapter a day. We studied all the New Testament in the Korean Bible.

After about a year and three months we were given a permit to enter Korea. We spent six days in Japan then had to take an airplane in to Korea because there were no ships. The day we landed was in Aug, it was very warm. That was one of the loneliest days I ever spent. We were total strangers. It is not a very nice thing to land in this country a stranger but even worse when you don't even know the language.

We handed them our passports, I handed mine first. He asked me if I were Mr. Denio. He said there was a man here asking for us a couple of days ago. You can imagine my surprise. I learned that while I was in Hawaii about a month before, I Had gone to a Korean church and while I was there I met a man that was traveling from America to Korea and he spoke English fluently. He was a Korean. He said: "Look me up when you get to Korea." I had forgotten but he hadn't. He knew the exact date of our sailing and he was looking for us. That man befriended us many times. We feel we owe him a great deal. He advised these men to send us to a hotel in the center of Seoul. We got two rooms and had to stay there for eleven days while we looked for a place to stay. It is a city of one and half million people.

The second day we were out walking and we met a young man that spoke good English. He said. "Would you care if I came to your room and you would tell me a little of the way of God.' That was the beginning of almost a continual string of young men and women coming to our room to talk about God. We learned later that we were the first missionaries that had opened their homes to the Korean people to come in. Most missionaries live in compounds with walls around where no Korean man or woman can enter without a permit.

Through these contacts we discovered a man in the city that wanted us to come live with them. We moved over with this family and the first night we stayed there we met a young man about 25. He said:" Would you have a little Bible study with us?' These people were Buddhists. There were about eight or nine there that night and we spoke about the Bible and the way of God. We will never forget how intently and eagerly they listened. Then we decided to have one every night for three months.

After three months we had to leave due to circumstances they had to sell their home. They had become interested and were very anxious for us to find a place where they could go to meetings with us. We found that some of their relatives were anxious to have us come live with them. These rooms were too small for meetings so these young men tried to find a place that was big enough. They found a classroom in a girls' high school. We started meetings in English.

From that time until we finished, about nine months later, we had an average crowd of fifty or sixty every time we had a meeting – Some of these young men and women, just a week before we had to flee that city said. "We believe the things you are talking about are the truth of God and we would like to become one in this fellowship."

Little did we know in a few days we would be scattered to the four winds. The day the war broke out we were walking home from our meeting and we saw trucks fully equipped for battle. We didn't know what this was. These men seemed so deadly in earnest. I asked a passer by and he told me about a war breaking out at five that morning. It didn't trouble us so very much. We went back to our rooms. We had a few visitors that night but the next morning when we got up we could hear the sound of the guns not so very far away. We knew the war had drawn closer in the night.

That evening we stood on our porch and saw the sky alight in the north with those great shells. When we went to bed that night we didn't sleep very well. We got up early and my companion said we better get to the American Embassy. I said: 'Lets go about nine or ten'. He said, 'I think we ought to go now". Just then one of our Korean friends came in and his face was as white as a sheet. He said: 'Are you going to the American Embassy this morning? "And he said, " Please go now." Then he walked out. We decided we better go now.

When we got out on the street we understood why this man was troubled. I haven't seen such confusion and panic. The street was clogged with people fleeing from this great enemy that was marching into the city. We didn't know it then. We rushed to the Embassy building and when we got there we found there were ten large American buses loaded with Americans ready to leave in 15 or 20 min. We had left the house with nothing, not even our pocket books.

The Americans tried to get us on quickly – We decided to go to our house and back again. My companion started to run. I asked him not to run because I know we could never get back without something to take us, He got lost in the crowd. I wondered if I would ever see him again. I turned and walked to the center of the city – I was struck forcibly by the fact that there were no cars on the street. It occurred to me that the South Korean army had confiscated all automobiles.

There on the street was an American jeep with a Korean driver and another man standing on the street. I asked, will you please take me to my house? NO. I don't have time. I pleaded with the man on the street. He said, "You better take that man to his house." We drove off and I was looking for my companion but could never see him. We soon got to our house and rushed to pick up what I could. About two weeks before this I had a feeling that some thing might happen that we might have to leave, quickly so I packed the things I valued most. Then I packed another suitcase with some other things. That day I packed three suitcases with things I wanted to keep. I don't know why I felt that way because there was no sign of the communists making a break. I didn't say anything to my companion because I thought maybe it was just a strange feeling I had. So when I got ready to leave I had everything ready.

When I was leaving, Don came rushing up and he was almost exhausted. He had run that mile from town. He had lost almost everything. We carried our things down to the jeep. I will never forget that scene around the jeep. Our Korean friends were gathered around weeping. They urged us to go. They knew if the communists caught us it would be the end. When we got back every one of the big buses had left and there was a driver only in one bus. He was using the bus just to get himself out of the city. We got into the bus and that was the wildest ride I ever had.

When we got on the highway to the airport, there was a red plane strafing the highway and shooting at buses and cars but he didn't shoot at us. We got to the airport and they told us we would have to go down into the basement because planes were shooting at the building. Then we were told that General MacArthur was sending seven airplanes to take us out. We would have to go out on the field and take our chances. We lined up in groups of 60. These planes didn't want to stay long.

The women and children were put in first group. Don and I were in the second. When we had just gotten organized, we saw one of those Red planes coming in. We didn't know what to do. While we were discussing the matter, we heard strange noises and above were 35 or 40 jet war planes circling the field. I cannot tell you how much comfort that was. One of these jets dropped that Red plane in a paddy field not far from where we were standing. These planes circled the airfield until even plane had left.

There were 61 of us with quite a load of baggage. When ready to take off they were unable to remove the steady rest from under the tail section of the plane due to the overload, so they asked us to move ahead in the plane that it might be better balanced. I was sitting there watching behind the pilots. We took off and when they turned into the wind he open the throttles and the plane picked up to flying speed but when he pulled back on his wheels to lift it in the air, it didn't lift.

He tried to make it go faster and was working his controls to pick it up, it didn't lift. You can imagine how I was feeling sitting there watching this! Out ahead was a little group of Korean houses. Just maybe 100 feet before we reached the end of the runway we felt the plane beginning to bounce and just before we got to the end of the runway we became airborne. We weren't over 20 ft above the houses.

With everyone of these planes there was an escort of five planes that followed us clear to Japan. Our plane was attacked twice on the way to Japan. The jet shot down two of the Red planes on our trip. We were kept 6 or 8 days by the American army and then were delivered into the hands of workers in Japan.

[Click Here](#) to read Sproulies' talk about his time spent in Japan on the seprate page for Japan

The question asked of me was, was I coming back? I have just tried to tell you of a little of some of our experience as we tried to sow the Gospel. I can say I love those people just as much as I love you. I am just as willing to give my life for them as I am here in America. Most of you know I plan to go to Korea next year if there is not another war. I can say this, that if I never preach the Gospel in Japan again there will be a part of me that will ever remain in that land. I could gladly spend the rest of my life in Japan if I cannot return to Korea. I hope you will pray that young men and women will lift up their eyes to the harvest field that is white.

Over here we have seen many things to distract us but these people appreciate and value the Gospel of Christ so much that it is easy to preach the Gospel to them. I do not know if we can return there. It is very difficult to enter that land because we have to have a military permit. In one of my last letters from there the lady pleaded for us to return as soon as we could. Those young men that came to the meetings have kept in touch with us.

Not one of those people that took such a deep interest were affected by the war, I mean physically. Many lost their goods but their lives were left untouched. Nearly two million Korean casualties in this last war. Another thing, those two families that took us in, their home was left untouched by the bombing. Most of you know that the war swept through that city three times and it was left almost in total ruin. The first home was left untouched. We feel the Lord remembered these people for their kindness in taking us in.

I hope we can go back before too long. I feel that Korea would be a most fruitful country if ever the door opens for workers to return there. There are several young men and women whose eyes have been lifted up to that little country and they desire to return to the country with us. We feel that there is hope for that country because God is laying it still on the hearts of men and women to go give their lives.

The following was spoken by Brother Worker Paul Boyd at the **Korean War Veterans Reunion**
held March 22-26, 2006, Mesquite, Nevada USA (Pages 35-39)

It's been a great privilege to observe different milestones there in the kingdom of God in Korea. One of the big ones, of course, was when **Sproulie Denio and Don Garland** first went there, and we heard a little about that. A very short year and they had to be evacuated because of the invasion of North Korea. Then when they went back, some more workers came. **Merlin (Howlett) and Gordon (Winkler) and Mark and then Jeanette Munn and Alice Ramsden**.

Then a very famous ship took a bunch of us. There was Lloyd and Lorraine Jacobson and their two little boys, Marian Robinson and Isabel (Boyd), and I was with Don Garland, returning from his first home visit. That was a big milestone for me.

Well then there was the time when the first Korean entered the Work, that was **Kison Ko**. In the Orient they always use the family name first so that's **Ko Kison**, but when he went to San Diego in the Navy, they heard that Ko Kison so they named him KoKi, and that's very funny in Korean. So he was the first brother worker; that was a milestone.

Then a few years later the first Korean sister worker. It's very nice. Milestones, you know, help you kind of gauge your progress or growth. Two Korean sister workers, that was great.

Then we noticed that the foreign workers, that is, non-Korean workers and the number of Korean workers was just even, and that was a milestone. We were very happy to see that.

Then there was the first time when two Korean sister workers went out [together] after convention and I'm sure it was in great fear and trembling because they'd somehow gotten the notion there had to be a foreign worker for anything to happen in a mission. They, as well as we, were very pleasantly surprised to see they had a very good mission and a nice number professed that year. That was another milestone.

Among those that professed, there was a young woman that went in the Work, and that was a Korean that professed through Koreans and went in the Work; that was the first one like that. Incidentally, that Korean sister worker was the first Korean worker to die in the Work. She suffered a brain aneurysm and was gone in just a few days. But that was very nice, the first Korean native worker to die in the Harvest.

Well, it was wonderful, and then after a while, we observed that the Korean native workers outnumbered the foreign workers. And now, today I suppose it's about 85% versus 15% and we're very, very thankful for that. It isn't just the numbers, it's the quality of some of those younger Korean workers that have demonstrated that they're well able to carry on when we are gone, and that may not be so long in the future.

Then the first Korean worker to go to another country to labor, and that was **Lee Jungho**. She went to Taiwan and she's labored faithfully there these twenty odd years. Then they needed more brothers in Japan, so **Ko Kison** and **Shin Jaewha** went to Japan and helped out there for about ten years. That was very nice. Then **Jung Ookyoung** went to Ecuador.. The big problem for Ookyoung, they didn't have any Korean/Spanish dictionary, so her English was pretty good so she had to learn Spanish through English.

I think the next ones probably started the big exodus up into Russia. **Dale Benjamin and Pahk Chansun** went up to Kazakstan and that had already become an independent republic, and they've had some very years. Of course, Chansun has labored more in Russia the last few years, then they wanted sister workers. I can't recall so I had to make a cheat sheet here. There's **Jo Jahyun and Jo Soonhyun**, they were among the first to go to Russia to labor, then **Kim Hyosun** and then **Kim Jinjoo**, her niece is over here someplace. It's quite a family, that Kim family.

Then **Jung Soonok and Aim Pyungun**. That's Kim Jinjoo's niece. Pyunguni wanted to go to Brazil, she put in all the papers and they got all stamped and approved and the fees all paid, at least once, and submitted and waited and waited and waited and after about nine months they had someone check, "How's it going?" "How's what going?" Well, no application there, so they had to start all over again.

So they suggested maybe it would be better for you to labor awhile in Uruguay, that just borders Brazil on the south. She'd have to learn Spanish, of course, and she was figuring on learning Portugese, so she learned Spanish and labored in Uruguay. South Brazil and Uruguay are just about like one field, there are several little conventions there, and they go freely back and forth from Brazil to Uruguay and Spanish or Portugese, either one, is freely used. You know that makes me feel like — not underprivileged, but under something-or-other, here these young folks learned three languages and that's what they do, and we struggle with one.

There's also **Cheh Wonju**, who was born in Korea, but the whole family emigrated to the U.S. and that's where he grew up and professed and almost became a doctor, almost finished medical school when God said. "I want you." That message was so strong that he just opted out of medical school a few months from graduating o go in the Work. He's labored in China, he speaks Chinese, he's labored in Indonesia; he speaks some of those dialects. We've got him back in Korea now though. His dear old mother is quite aged and almost stone deaf and I just thought it would be good if he was at least in Korea the next while. We count him as one of the Koreans that's been exported.

Sohn Sookhee labored for awhile in Greece. You know, not all the workers that go to another country remain there until they die. There's tremendous mental stress adapting to another culture and it takes its toll. It appears as any number of ailments and diseases, but it takes its toll. We are at war, and our adversary is a very capable adversary and he's much stronger than we are.

There are some from America that have gone after their basic training in Korea on into China, Russia, **Dale Benjamin**, one of the first went into Kazakstan and Russia; **Dennis Wilhoit** went on over to China and Indonesia awhile, and back to China.

Jan Bergman and **Judy Madison** (that was Dick Owen's niece) were in China as language teachers in order to even be in China. Taught English in a university; and Judy was giving her class their last assignment, so she asked them to write an essay of so many

words or less on the purpose of life and that set off rockets and land mines and all kinds of repercussions. The head of the English department came and told Judy, "I'll have to report this because if I don't somebody else will catch it higher up and then that's my neck because I didn't catch it." So he told her, "I feel for you but I'll have to report that." And he did.

Nothing was said but they noticed after that every time they left the college to go to the apartments where they were billeted, a car pulled away from the curb and chug, chug, chug, followed them along. When you go into those billets, or apartments, there's a big old Sumo type woman there, and you have to give her your ID card and as long as you're in that building, she has your card and when you leave you have to ask for that again. The girls could look out of their window and see there's a police car waiting down there. Cold winter time, too, sitting there idling. When they go to school in the morning, a car follows them.

Well, poor Judy, it got her. She just about went to pieces. There's all different phases of warfare, you know, and that psychological warfare that's not a minor part, either. So she had to go back home and she's had good days and very bad days and her heart's in the Work, but her body is just all ...?. She's one of the casualties. She would desperately like to come back even to Korea, and we could use her, so there is that kind of milestones, too.

I like to try to remember some of our brothers that lost their lives in the Korean War, I don't know how many there were, I think five maybe or six. One was Liebrand, Bob's twin brother, I think. Frank Davidson lost all of one leg and the other one pretty well shot up and the remaining years of his life were like that.

Another milestone was when Sproulie Denio died (1964). Shocking. We were at Post Falls convention when the news came. How can it be? But it does, and poor old Don Garland. Yes, you know Don did a lot of funny things. I'll be very frank with you, and we weren't always in complete agreement with him, but every time it turned out that what he planned was right. I understand from that, that God's grace was what kept Don. That's nice when we think about poor elders and those that bear the responsibility for us. I'm sure you've seen here in the U.S.A., also, sometimes the overseers have done things that would seem to be, well...just remember, it's God's grace that enables them to even stick it out and continue in that place of responsibility. It's not easy.

NOTE: Paul Boyd died July 17, 2013

For more Two by Two Korean War Veteran information, see: <http://rkivs.com/kwvr/>

1954. Sproulie Denio – Back to South Korea

We went back to Korea (1954) and began to contact the ones we had met with before.

Most of you know that the war swept through Seoul three times, and it was left in almost total ruin. There were 1.6 million Korean casualties in the war and 85% of Seoul was either destroyed or damaged. Despite this, although many lost their goods, the lives of our friends were left untouched. The homes of those who took us in weren't touched at all, not a window broken. I feel that the Lord had remembered those who had shown such kindness to us.

When we started meetings, there again in Seoul, we had six people the first night, then ten, then eighteen and then found that the room was not big enough to hold all. So then we went to the school and had the mission there and it is still going on after six years. Out of that mission a number have professed. It was so hard for us trying to preach in the Korean language, and it worried us, but it was with those meetings that some hearts were touched. One old woman said, "I believe these are the servants of God." She professed and there were several others. We came to see that it is not the preaching that counts but the Spirit of God.

1963-64. Eight young workers Gordon Winkler, Paul Boyd, Dick Owen, Merlin Howlett, Marion Robinson, Isabel Boyd, Alice Ramsden and Jeannette Munn **came to Korea 6 months ago**, and there was still the willingness for what it meant, and they are still fighting on.

Today (1962) there are three churches in the city of Seoul and another four out of it. There are now 16 workers in Korea, and we could do with 16 more. If you could see the hunger in the hearts of people over there, you could not rest, and I hope that more hearts would be lifted to the Lord of the Harvest. In Korea, they had their first Convention this spring (1962). It was only for 2 days but there were 100 present. As I sat in the meetings, I breathed a prayer of thanks for all that God had done for us, I feel so grateful for the mercy of God. It is necessary to keep the fires burning to open new frontiers. Remember those who left your shores.

Only the educated people can speak English. Nearly all that have professed are people that are quite well educated but the other workers touch all classes of people. I hope you will be able to pray a little better for the work and workers in that land.

NOTE: Sproulie Denio died suddenly in 1964, aged 54

NORTH KOREA

No workers have ever gone to North Korea that we know of. A few workers were born in North Korea, but fled the war as children with their parents, and ended up in the South, where they met workers. A North Korean (by birth) sister worker stated a few years that at that point, they were all totally cut off from family members remaining in North Korea, with no communication and no way of knowing if they were dead or alive. According to the news, there has been some easing of that in more recent years, but it's in most ways truly a "hermit" country, not permitting free movement of any sort.

TTT Editor's Note: In the absence of a written account, the above information has been compiled by the TTT Editor from various sources. Corrections or additions are most welcome; as well as other historical accounts for this country [Email TTT](#)