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**Twelve Influential Early  
Korean Preachers**

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## Twelve Influential Early Korean Preachers

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## Kim, Ik-Du (1874-1950)

Sungyoung Huh<sup>1</sup>

*He does not command us to do anything beyond our ability. We must earnestly pray so that we do not remain as we were before, but are transformed into new persons. I wish for you to receive everything abundantly before God in fervent prayer and to give all the glory to God.*<sup>2</sup>

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### Introduction

Given the unquestionable influence of Christianity in Korea, we could not say it without Kim, Ik-Du. The Reverend Kim, Ik-Du (1874-1950), was a representative figure in the revival movement in the early Korean Protestant Church, is aptly called "The D. L. Moody of Korea."<sup>3</sup> He was noted as a revival preacher whose ministry was marked by the strong presence of the Holy Spirit and manifestation of miracles of healing.<sup>4</sup> God raised up Reverend Kim Ik-Du to begin a great work of salvation for the Korean people.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were patterns which appeared in the radical-holiness revival around the world.<sup>5</sup> This revival started with indigenous Christians rather than the missionaries in areas such as Madagascar and northeast India. Evangelists Gil, Sunjoo and Kim, Ik-Du pushed the Pentecostal dimensions of the Korean revivals in directions that similarly unsettled the Presbyterian missionaries there.<sup>6</sup> The Reverend Kim, Ik-Du was following in the footsteps of the pioneering evangelist Gil, Sunjoo. He is often described as the most dynamic evangelist during the Japanese colonial period, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. Kim is also best known for his healing ministry. His healing ministry was so popular but some people didn't believe the miracle. Therefore his followers investigated the miracles and published their findings in a volume called *Ijeok Myeongjeung*.

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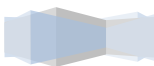
<sup>2</sup> KIATS ed., *Kim, Ik-du: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Jay Riley Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 244.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.



## Background – Hermit Nation

The last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Korea was a time of attempted adjustment to a modern world.<sup>7</sup> Before that, Korea had long been isolated from all nations except China and Japan. Because of the ruthlessness of the Japanese invasion in 1592 by Hideoshi, the minds of the Korean were poisoned against all foreigners.<sup>8</sup> And Korea became the “Hermit Nation,” determined to resist every attempt of the outside world to pry open her closed doors.<sup>9</sup> Because of these circumstances, Korea restricted opening up to foreign religions.

During Joseon (Lee Dynasty, 1392-1910), Confucianism was dominant in Korean society and it had unlimited sway over the minds and hearts of Koreans. Before the Lee Dynasty, Buddhism was a major religion. Like Buddhism, Confucianism came from China through international exchange. Strictly speaking, Confucianism is not a religion, but a system of ethics, or it may be better called philosophy. Therefore there was not a strong sense of worship of a divine power even though there was still Shamanism and Buddhism, but rather a sense of moral living. This sense of morality already pervaded the people’s life and it was a huge obstacle for missionaries to evangelize Korea.

Among early missionaries in Korea, Horace Allen’s arrival to Korea in 1884 signaled the opening of Protestant missions in Korea.<sup>10</sup> Later Horace G. Underwood was soon to join Allen in Korea. At that time, missions and evangelizing were not allowed in Korea therefore they prepared to work. In 1986, R. S. Maclay reported that Christianity was allowed by the royalty. He mentioned it below:

*The success of our appeal to the king when I visited Korea was complete. The royal permit to Christianity removed all legal obstacles and the way was opened for Christian work in Korea.<sup>11</sup>*

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## Life – from Gangster to Pastor

The Reverend Kim, Ik-Du, the only son of the farmer Kim Eung-Seon, was born in the village of Pyeongchon in the district of Daewon, Anak County, Hwanghae Province (in what is now North Korea).<sup>12</sup> Kim was initially drawn to Confucian texts and Zen Buddhism, but after failing the

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<sup>7</sup> In Jong You, “The Impact of the American Protestant Missions on Korean Education from 1885-1932,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1967, 42.

<sup>8</sup> George T. Brown, *Mission to Korea* (Board of World Mission, 1962), 5.

<sup>9</sup> L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* (Union Christian College Press, 1929), 11-16.

<sup>10</sup> Everett N. Hunt, Jr. *Protestant Pioneers in Korea* (Maryknoll, NY: Oris Books, 1980), 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> KIATS ed., *Kim, Ik-du: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 13.

*Gwageo*,<sup>13</sup> government exam, and going bankrupt in a business endeavor, he turned to drink and fistfights for amusement.<sup>14</sup>

The person who made Kim to confess his sin was the wife of missionary William Swallen. One day in 1900, she propagated Christianity by distributing papers and she met Kim. She tried to evangelize him with the paper and Kim threw away the paper by wiping his nose. Therefore she said to him. “If you do like that, your nose will be rotten.” Her words remained his mind for a while and he attended the gathering led by William Swallen and he was changed.

From that day to his baptism ten months later, Kim strove to lead a holy life by restraining his words and actions, and by reading through the Bible a hundred times. Kim was also baptized by Reverend Swallen in 1901.<sup>15</sup> The following year he worked as a *jeondosa*<sup>16</sup> in the Jaeryeong and Sincheon areas, and eventually graduated from Pyeongyang Theological Seminary in 1910 to begin his official pastoral ministry.<sup>17</sup>

Beginning in 1911, the year after his graduation from Pyeongyang Theological Seminary, Rev. Kim led revival services, and began manifesting the miracles that became characteristic of his ministry.<sup>18</sup> Since his first miracle of healing, he was noted as a revival preacher whose ministry was marked by the strong presence of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of the miracles of healing.<sup>19</sup> After this, Rev Kim, Ik-Du agreed to become a pastor at Seoul’s Namdaemun Church and the Seungdong Church. At the outbreak of the Pacific War, he temporarily suspended his ministry, but in 1946, the year after Korea gained its independence, he joined an alliance of Christians in North Korea and travelled among North Korean churches to lead services. On October 14, 1950, while coming out from an early morning service, he was shot and killed by retreating North Korean soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sermon – Passionate and Variety**

Rev. Kim, Ik-Du was not educated well. Even though he was not educated he was like an expert in biblical knowledge. Even in his eleventh year after leaving the Sincheon Church, Rev. Kim, Ik-Du continued to visit once a year to lead revival services and look over the church and the school. It would have been impossible to pastor a church for twenty-four years, then return to preach each year for eleven more years, without having an incredible knowledge of the Bible, or without being a preacher of unusual anointing. Rev. Kim’s sermons were marked by fiery passion and great variety.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The highest-level state examination to recruit ranking officials during the Goryeo and Lee Dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 15.

<sup>15</sup> KIATS ed., *Kim, Ik-du: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 14.

<sup>16</sup> A non-ordained minister, or pastor’s assistant; catechist.

<sup>17</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> KIATS ed., *Kim, Ik-du: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



Through Rev. Kim's sermons, Rev. Ju Gi-cheol was moved and other great revivalists of Korean Church such as Rev. Jeong Jae-Seon and Rev. Lee Seong-Bong were also inspired. During the half-century from when he began serving the Lord, Rev. Kim travelled throughout Korea and as far as China, Siberia, and Japan. He led 776 revivals, built 150 churches, and delivered some 28,000 sermons, truly standing at the forefront of the work of saving souls in his country.<sup>22</sup> For these reasons many people gathered to listen to his sermons whenever he had a revival service even though they lived far from the place held the revival service.

### **Theology through Preaching**

Rev. Kim's sermons were generally welcomed the most by marginalized groups, such as people of low income or those suffering from physical ailments. Rev. Kim praised the virtues particular to these groups, such as humility, acquiescence, poverty, and simplicity.<sup>23</sup> Also, partly out of his own life experience, his sermons emphasized humility, sacrifice, and the dignity of the poor. His message was predominantly oriented toward life after death – he often commented that the end of the present social order would be the final judgment of God – and his vision of Paradise was enthusiastically espoused by the underprivileged.<sup>24</sup> Because the society of that period was so poor, his messages of judgment and end-times were welcomed by people. Through his messages, we can find out two main streams of his sermons.

#### ***Understanding of the Holy Spirit***

Rev. Kim's sermon, "Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-12)," gives us a glimpse of his understanding of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> He preaches that a person can become a complete Christian only when he receives the Holy Spirit. Without receiving the Holy Spirit, no one can do anything. He explains the Holy Spirit as follows:

*Then, what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Church? Baptism means washing. Physical baptism is a sign of being washed clean with water in the name of the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is different. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is compared to fire, and the Holy Spirit is compared to a dove. This doesn't mean that a dove is the Holy Spirit. It means that the Holy Spirit is as gentle as a dove. It is speaking*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>24</sup> Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 222.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 21.

*about the character of the Holy Spirit. To have received the Holy Spirit as a dove means that one's character has become gentle like that of a dove.*<sup>26</sup>

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Rev. Kim also insisted that we should discern how to receive the Holy Spirit. He preached using four guidelines how we receive the Holy Spirit; (1) Temporary inspiration, (2) Outward inspiration, (3) Inner inspiration, and (4) Overflow of Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Through his sermons, he emphasizes we should receive the Holy Spirit and be able to discern how to receive the Holy Spirit. By receiving the Holy Spirit, he insists people will be blessed.

*Therefore, dear Christians who believe in Jesus, I eagerly desire that through the Holy Spirit we receive all the blessings mentioned above by serving the Lord with devotion, by way of truthful prayer, and by true Bible study and obedience to God with sincerity.*<sup>28</sup>

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#### ***Law or Gospel?***

Rev. Kim used Matthew 7:13-14 to preach a sermon titled “Enter through the Narrow Gate.” and he made the following points in the opening of the sermon;<sup>29</sup>

*There is no power within the church. There is no wealth of the world in the church. There is no glory of the world. That is why the road to the church is very narrow. Once you enter the church you can neither smoke nor drink nor have concubines. Thus, that road is narrow. On the other hand, the road is wide outside the church. Since the roads are well paved and advanced, you can even travel anywhere far with the convenience and benefit of transportation if only you have money today. You can do whatever you want. The range of your activities is unlimited, and there are many roads that lead you to sin. The road that makes you sin is truly wide and broad. However, if you follow that wide road there will be destruction and submersion and no eternal life must go through the narrow gate of conversion into the church.*<sup>30</sup>

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But the final words of this sermon were, “The wide road eventually becomes narrow, and its end is death. So let's go along the narrow road, just as the Lord has taught us.” This message

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 110-113.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 148.



did not arise from an attitude of asceticism or legalism but it was an indication of the steps of a holy life.<sup>31</sup> Rev. Kim, Ik-Du seemed to proclaim Gospel rather than Law even though most pastors including him insist to keep the Law. This means this was an element of that period even though there were legalistic elements in his sermons.

## His Works

There are few of his writings in print in spite of his fame and influence. These are categorized in two kinds of writings. First type of writing is about his sermons and second type of writing is about his miracles.

The first is his sermon texts, published in 1924 in Sinangui Ro (The Road of Faith), and by Choe In-hwa in 1940 under the title, *Kim Ik-Du Moksa Seolgyojip* (Collected Sermons of Rev. Kim Ik-Du). The Second category is the work *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (A Testament of Miracles in the Joseon Jesus Church), which established Kim as a miracle worker. Although this book is not authored by Rev. Kim, it is an examination and published record of his achievements and is an important resource for the study of Kim Ik-Du<sup>32</sup>. Also this book is a testament to the miracles that God allowed in this country through Rev. Kim's ministry during the early days of Korean Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

## Healing (Miracle) Ministry

Korean Protestantism has had a history of revivalism, the most notable being the Wonsan revival and the "Korean Pentecost" that commenced at a meeting of Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries at Pyongyang in 1907. In 1906-10, 80,000 Koreans became Christians and there were preachers whose ministry was accompanied by miracles and healings.<sup>34</sup> Especially Rev. Kim, Ik-Du was one of the most popular preachers with Gil, Sun-Joo and Yi, Yong-Do. He was very famous for his healing and deliverance ministry.

### *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung*

*Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (A Testament of Miracles in the Joseon Jesus Church) is a collection of the miracles manifested through Rev. Kim, Ik-Du, and which, "Through faith [...] have flowed out from Sincheon, and into all of Joseon via the Yellow Sea; such miracles of which to testify across the great expanse of East and West." These accounts were passed through the examination and research of the "Miracle Witness Committee" centered around Rev. Im Taek-Gwon of the Hwanghae Presbytery and published in 1921 by the Joseon Yasogyo Seohoe<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>32</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 16.

<sup>33</sup> KIATS ed., *Kim, Ik-du: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136.

<sup>35</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 17.



(Joseon Jesus Church Press).<sup>36</sup> About 60 photographs are included in this book. These are of the people who confessed to have experienced the miracle of healings, the pictures of revival services, and the photographs of Rev. Kim, Ik-Du.

This book carries several points of significance for the history of Korean Christianity. Concerning this, Kim Jae-Hyun mentions three points. First, the novelty with which Rev. Kim's miracles hit the early church and the debates surrounding them transformed these events into a central topic in the development of the Korean church. Second, this book points out that Rev. Kim's miracle ministry did not remain restricted to an individual sphere, but influenced the society and the culture of the time. Third, this book shows that miracles are brought about through human cooperation with God's grace.<sup>37</sup> There is no doubt that these miracles have brought revival to Korean churches, have helped believers to think more clearly about the Christianity, and led many people to repent of their mistakes. In this sense, this book has influenced our faith up to now.

### *The Characters of His Healing Ministry (Miracle)*

Rev. Kim is best known for his healing ministry and there are several characteristics of his healing ministry. First, his healing ministry was not made by himself but with God. After his ordination to the ministry in 1910, Kim performed a couple of healing "miracles," the first of which involved his wife who had a running sore on her neck. She had been treated at the mission hospital for three years, but to no avail. As the last resort, Rev. Kim and his wife prayed for several days for healing, and within two weeks she was completely cured of the disease.<sup>38</sup> Second, accounts of Rev. Kim's healing ministry had published as a volume, *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* for the record. Most people do not believe the miracles and the miracles often used to be orally transmitted. On the other hand, Rev. Kim's healing ministry has still remained through the book and inspires us.

### **Contributions**

After the Sam-Il Movement, the Korean Church had a period of spiritual recession for a while.<sup>39</sup> However, there was an increase in the number of Christians in the Korean church in the following years. Rev. Kim, Ik-Du was one of the contributors to this phenomenon. His ministry made people to believe Jesus Christ through the miracles. Because of his healing ministry, there were many people who came to listen to his sermons and see the miracles wherever he had a gathering. This evangelized not only persons who had an illness but also their families. In addition, his ministry gave a power to the church to revive through gathering. As people could recover their faith, people had more concern to build churches. Whenever he had a gathering in

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<sup>36</sup> This press later became the Daehan Gidokgyo Seohoe (The Christian Literature Society of Korea).

<sup>37</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 20, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 222.

<sup>39</sup> March First Independence Movement. The March 1st Movement, or *Samil* Movement, was one of the earliest public displays of Korean resistance during the occupation of the Korean Empire by Japan.



order to evangelize people, there was a miracle, and he said to people to pray for his ministry. He emphasized that there is nothing without prayer for his ministry. This lead people to set great store by prayer, and following famous pastors like Rev. Lee Sungbong also emphasized the importance of prayer. This might be a great footnote of spiritual leadership in Korea.

## Conclusion

Rev. Kim, Ik-Du was the greatest healing miracle pastor of Korean Protestant Christianity. He was mentioned like “A Sage of High Repute” (*Dong-a Ilbo*, No. 92) or “One of the Three Wonders of the World” (*Gidok Sinbo*).<sup>40</sup> Through books about him and his miracles, I realized that he was a person of Holy Spirit. He is not only like a lion when he preaches in revival service but also has a warm-heart toward the people. Through him, many people were healed and began to believe Jesus. This flowed into the church, and churches had their faith restored. This is what we have to do as Christians. While I was reading his sermons and his healing ministry accounts, I felt that his voice is near my ear like he is standing beside me, and his messages moved my heart. Even though he was an old man from the past, he still challenges us with his wonderful faith that was demonstrated in and through his life.

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<sup>40</sup> KIATS ed., *Joseon Yesugyohoe Ijeok Myeongjeung* (Seoul: KIATS, 2008), 22.