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**Twelve Influential Early
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Twelve Influential Early Korean Preachers

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Choi, Jashil (1915-1989)
“Hallelujah Lady” -Evangelism with Fasting Prayer-

Moo Je Cho¹

When I led the revival services for three days and prayed for them, the children who had been sick for a long time were healed miraculously. Wherever I went, the Holy Spirit worked, and the blind opened their eyes, the lame stood up, and anyone who desired so received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ.²

I prayed for 100 days with this purpose. I lifted up this earnest prayer for two hours, starting every night at 10 o'clock. But I did not hear anything about him even on the 100th day of my prayer. So I prayed for another 100 days.³

If I die, I go to heaven. If I live, I can spread (proclaim) the good news (gospel).⁴

All to spread to Koreans and foreigners worldwide the message of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the three-fold prayer practice of fasting, overnight prayers, and tongues.⁵

Introduction

Rev. Choi Jashil was known as the “Hallelujah Lady” which is the title of her autobiography. She was the spiritual mother of Rev. Cho Yong Gi who co-founded with her the 750,000 member Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea which is still the largest congregation in church history worldwide. Actually, she was the mother-in-law of Rev. Cho and she began her

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² Jashil Choi, *Hallelujah Lady* (Seoul, Korea: The Kiats Press, 2009), 310.

³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.



ministry in cooperation with Rev. Cho in a 5-member family church and built it up to a record as the largest mega-church in history. The roles of Rev. Choi and Rev. Cho in ministry seem like the two faces of one coin. While Rev. Cho focused on preaching the words, she focused on pastoral care with visitation and prayer.

She emphasized the works of the Holy Spirit. She used her own life experience as testimony when she proclaimed the gospel to convert non-believers. She prayed with fasting to bring about miraculous healings for the sick and the poor. She was the healing minister of miracles with the help of the Holy Spirit based on her own personal experiences. She influenced the spread of the theology of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, praying in tongues, *Tong-sung Gido* (loud voice prayer), fasting prayer in a massive prayer facility or in individual cave-style rooms, over-night prayer, and healing ministry throughout the Pentecostal denominations and even to the Korean churches in general. She was dedicated to the Korean churches when she opened the age of prayer movement in the mega size prayer center. With her ministry role model, fasting prayer could spread widely to the Korean churches as a popular way of prayer. Above all, she revealed her theology through her own life faith journey rather than through preaching. She built up her peculiar theology of divine healing with fasting prayers for spread personal evangelism worldwide.

Historical Background

Korea was under the oppressive Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) when Choi Jashil was born in 1915 and grew up. While poverty prevailed on the Korean peninsula, Christianity was also widespread. It began with American missionaries' endeavors in the late 19th century as well as the early 20th century and bloomed with the so-called Great Revival Movement at Pyong-Yang (now the North Korean capital city) in 1907. It begot several Korean spiritual leaders of the first generation such as Rev. Gil Seon-Ju, Rev. Kim Ik-Du, and Rev. Lee Seong-Bong. Specially, Rev. Lee Sung-Bong was considered as a key leader of the Revival Movement in Korean church history in 1930-1960. While Rev. Lee Sung-Bong advocated the healing ministry in Korean Christianity based on his own healing experiences with the grace of Jesus, his influences prevailed in Korean churches.

After the Korean War, South Korea produced numerable desperate people such as war orphans, the sick, the poor living in absolute poverty. South Koreans were eagerly looking for freedom from absolute poverty. They wanted success and prosperity at any cost. From the 1960s South Korea also experienced a miraculous economic development under the political iron-clad dictatorship of Park Chung-Hee through a military coup. In Christian churches, South Korea also experienced astonishing growth in numbers resulting in some mega-churches. One of the representative mega-churches since 1960 in South Korea was the Yoido Full Gospel Church founded by Rev. Choi Jashil and her son-in-law Rev. Cho Yong Gi. Its Sunday worship attendance reached 450,000 which has yet to be equaled by an individual church.

Personal Faith Journey

Choi Jashil was born in 1915 in the city of HaeJu, Hwanghae province (the border line between China and North Korea now) as the eldest daughter under parents who had the strong heritage of Buddhism, Confucianism and Shamanism. When she was 12 years old, Choi Jashil became Christian after witnessing the miraculous healing power of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ by Rev. Lee Sung Bong. With strong impressions of two miraculous healing occurrences by means of prayer in the name of Jesus, she received an unforgettable impression in her heart; the power of Jesus is in healing for the sick with prayer.

In 1935 while she was in her twenties she became an obstetric nurse in an effort to overcome her family poverty. It drove her to a life of pursuing financial success. She became an entrepreneur in Soul taking over a match manufacturing company. It soon made her millionaire. She neglected her church as well as her family due to business.

With bankruptcy of her business in 1953 as well as the death of her mother and daughter within the timespan of four days, she decided to commit suicide on a mountain near Seoul by means of starvation. During her fasting in the cave of the mountain, she met a special prayer gathering by Rev. Lee Seong-Bong in the same valley of that mountain. Rev. Lee's special prayer preaching reminded her of the first encounter of the gospel 30 years ago by him with same message. Choi Jashil prayed *Tong-Sung Gido* overnight and experienced herself praying in tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

With the advice of Rev. Lee Seong-Bong, she became a student of the Full Gospel Seminary under the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination in Korea. As the only forty year old student while all other students were in their early twenties, she introduced her classmates to the prayer in tongues as the proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She met Cho Yong Gi as a classmate. They were team leaders for student mission activities. While a student Choi Jashil was strong in taking care of classmates with prayer in tongues and witnessing to Jesus based on her own personal experience, and the student Cho Yong-Gi was gifted to proclaim the word through powerful preaching. They complemented each other in the street preaching missionary activities.

After her graduation from seminary, she started the home worship in 1958 in Seoul with only her own family and Cho Yong-Gi attending. She focused on taking care of the children in a poor town of northwest Seoul, Korea. Focusing on healing ministry with prayer, she took care of the sick, weak, and poor through visitations. It resulted in the miraculous healing occurrences in her small ragged tent church. The miracles of healing through her united ministry with Cho Yong-Gi made her church grow miraculously. In ten years, her church had grown to 8,000 members. The rapid growth in numbers followed miraculous healing occurrences in their ministry.

Choi Jashil became famous worldwide in the 1970s as the news spread of her church's rapid growth with miraculous healing power of her prayer. Her fame resulted in invitations for her to visit other countries such as Japan and Taiwan in the mid 1960s to many cities in Canada,

USA, Germany, and elsewhere during 1970s-1980s. She introduced the power of prayer of fasting, witnessing Jesus Christ based on her own experiences, and showed numerable healing occurrences in other countries during prayers. She initiated the fasting prayer movement based on her experience. There is the Choi Jashil Full Gospel Prayer House (Prayer Mountain) in Osan-ri, in the northern outskirts of Seoul, Korea to institutionalize her fasting prayer movement.

Ministry & Theology

Her ministry was focused on miraculous healing the sick with prayer to convert them to become Christians. The key factor in her theology was the baptism of the Holy Spirit whose proof is the prayer of tongues. For complete repentance, she argued that all Christians need to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and then they shall communicate with God in the prayer of tongues. With prayer in tongues, she focused on pastoral ministry for healing, and personal evangelism.⁶ Her assurance on the healing power of the prayer in tongues based on her own experience gave the strong theological foundation to build up her united ministry with Cho Yong-Gi into the miraculous healing occurring ministry. Her autobiographical theology on prayer developed from the baptism of the Holy Spirit to fasting prayer and collective fasting prayer.

Prayer in tongues: “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”

She experienced prayer in tongues during the prayer of three days after Rev. Lee Seong-Bong’s revival meeting at the mountain in Seoul where she gone to commit suicide.

In her experience, she argued that the goal of the prayer of repentance should lead to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The work of repentance that began like this finally exploded like a volcano on the third day. ... My tongues seemed twist and began speaking strange words that were neither English nor Japanese.⁷

Since then, every time when she tried to pray, strange words came out her mouth and, she said, no matter how much she tried to stop herself, it was useless. With prayer in tongues, she experienced the fullness of peace and joy in her heart. Her aggressive advocacy of prayer in tongues as the proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit affected the theology of Cho Yong-Gi when he was a seminary student. Rev. Cho confirmed his assurance later in his book that prayer in tongues is the proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁸ While admitting various proofs of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Rev. Cho emphasized that the ultimate main proof among all proofs is the prayer in tongues. The experience of the Holy Spirit of Choi Jashil opened the door to introduce Rev. Cho to the experience of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ Choi, *Hallelujah Lady*, 321-322.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

⁸ Yong Gi Cho, *Five layers of Gospel and Triple Rhythm of Blessing* (Seoul: Young San publisher, 1983), 100.

Partnership Ministry

Yoi-do Full Gospel Church founded by Choi Jashil and Cho Yong-Gi has been the world biggest mega-church in membership through their partnership ministry. Choi was not only the spiritual mother but also the real mother-in-law of Cho. They were perfect partners in long term ministry since they met in seminary as the classmates. While Cho focused on preaching, Choi focused on personal evangelical activities and pastoral care including visitations. Choi emphasized that the pastor should experience the gospel before proclaiming in evangelical activity. She said that “the Gospel of the pastor is living power and miracle in life. It is the power of God which let the dead soul live again, let non-being turns to being, let the pains be healed, and let the despair change to the hope. Therefore the pastors who proclaim the Gospel should experience in their life first and then get assurance in faith of the power of the Gospel.”⁹

The slogan of Choi Jashil in ministry was “If I die, I go to heaven. If I live, I can spread (proclaim) the good news (gospel).”¹⁰ She thought her mission was evangelization. She was eager to do church planting with personal evangelical activity. She wrote concerning the methodology and importance of personal evangelical activity. Her evangelical activity was basically the confession her faith on Jesus Christ with her own personal testimony. It was powerful to persuade people to come to Jesus. She explained in her book why she focused her ministry especially on personal evangelical activity. 1) It is a guide for the sinner to go to Jesus. 2) It is to transfer my experience of Jesus to the people. 3) Evangelization is the purpose why Jesus came. 4) Evangelization is God’s last commandment. 5) It is what God wants. 6) It is the greatest responsibility of Christians. 7) It is the secret of spiritual growth. 8) It is the channel of blessing and rewards. 9) It is the practice of love. 10) Without evangelical activity, there will be wrath.¹¹

From the first 5 members’ worship in planting a church in the 1950s till the worship for the 750,000 member mega-church in the 1980s, the partnership in ministry between Choi and Cho was solid like a rock.

Fasting prayer campaign

Choi thought fasting prayer is the expressway for the Christian seeker to get the blessing of the power of God. She founded Osan-ri fasting prayer center, one of the biggest fasting prayer facilities in South Korea. And also she presided over the international fasting prayer conference annually. While she went out of country for missionary trips, she emphasized the importance of fasting prayer because she experienced the overcoming of her own tribulation in her life by the fasting prayer. The emphasis on fasting prayer also came from her testimony. She explains about the fasting prayer in her book of *The Power of Fasting Prayer*.

⁹ Choi, *Gae-in Jeon-do-ue Yeol-shaeh: The Key to Personal Evangelism* (Seoul: Youngsan Publisher, 1979 and Seoul: Logos Co., 1998), 153.

¹⁰ Choi, *Hallelujah Lady*, 345.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34



*Christianity is not any theory nor ideology but the movement of life, truth, the Spirit and love. Fasting prayer is strongly recommended to be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ to experience correctly the movement of life, truth, the Spirit and love.*¹²

She offered three levels of profits from the fasting prayer as follows¹³; 1) spiritual profits to get the power of faith with the personal experience which makes positive thinking, which shall beget success in life, 2) good for physical health, and 3) it improves mental health. She said fasting prayer would give the power to get freedom from sin, disease and all curses and protect from all bad things. In fasting prayer, she said, the nature of God is healing.

She said, “If the usual prayer is like a regular bomb, the fasting prayer is the nuclear bomb one thousand times more powerful in power than a regular one.”¹⁴

She also provided the road map of fasting prayer for Korean Christians. According to her theology of fasting prayer, 1) fasting prayer is not a spiritual training but the most urgent appeal to God, 2) never do it for showing-off, and 3) do not fall into to the temptation of arrogance. The mythical experience of self-humbleness with death of flesh to live the soul will make experience to meet the power of God, 4) the order of fasting prayer is important; repentance prayer, seeking prayer of fasting goal with meditation of the Scripture, and patient waiting time of faith to see the result of prayer, 5) it is a change of my ego, and 6) it should not be righteousness.

Choi’s personal experience of fasting prayer in the cave begot a 20,000 person capacity prayer center which includes numerous individual praying spaces of a one person capacity cave. The miraculous church growth in her partnership ministry with Rev. Cho based on fasting prayer influenced the fasting prayer movement among Korean churches with a crossing over denominational lines since the 1970s. She also became the role model for female pastors in the Korean churches of the 20th century as well as the pioneer in praying and pastoral caring.

Divine Healing ministry

During 47 years, her church grew from 5 members to 750,000, the world’s biggest church ever. It is estimated that the miraculous church growth in Korea is due to her divine healing ministry based on the fasting prayer movement.¹⁵ From the time of church planting, she showed the divine healing for the sick people. Her divine healing ministry with Rev. Cho resulted in the explosive church growth. She became the representing woman evangelist of revival meetings and divine healing pastor in Korea.

She explained how divine healing worked in her autobiographic book, *Hallelujah Lady*. She argued that divine healing works when the sick people have a strong passion for recovery.

¹² Jashil Choi, *Gum-sik Gi-do-ue Nung-reok: The Power of Fasting Prayer* (Seoul: Youngsan Publisher, 1976; and Seoul: Logos Co., 1996), 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47-50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁵ Sang Gun Choe, *Choi Jashil-ue Sang-ae wa Sa-yerk Yon-Goo: The life and ministry of Rev. Choi Ja Shil* (Seoul: Ho-Ser University, 2012), 112.

For her, salvation occurs simultaneously with divine healing. Therefore, the person saved by God should be freed from the disease. The divine healing can occur when the sick appeal strongly with prayer. Secondly, repentance is an indispensable requirement for divine healing. Thirdly, forgiveness for me and neighbors is requirement for divine healing. Fourth, it is through faith that supernatural miraculous healing can occur. Fifth, the commandment and announcement for divine healing is in the name of Jesus Christ. Sixth, collective prayer includes the laying on of hands on the head.¹⁶

The goal of her ministry was to evangelize the people. And the most powerful methodology was divine healing with the fasting prayer. It made her a miraculous success in Korea, which drove her to foreign missionary trips with revival services through the East Asian countries to North America, and to Europe. The ministry of short-term missionary visits was also focused on the same pattern of her divine healing.

In her later years, she made efforts to export her own style of ministry and theology worldwide. In her biography, she said

focusing on Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and Germany, I put all my effort into fixing the flag of the Full Gospel all over the world. Sometimes I stayed up all night on the plane, and sometimes I fasted, all to spread to Koreans and foreigners overseas the message of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the three-fold prayer practice of fasting, overnight prayers and tongues.¹⁷

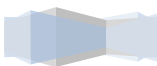
Conclusion

Choi influenced Korean churches to encourage the prayer center movements, fasting prayer, and divine healing ministry. Especially her miraculous church growth helped *tongsung gido*, divine healing ministry and fasting prayer to spread over the Pentecostal denominations in Korea. Her influence of prayer with building the prayer center made the birth of hundreds of large prayer centers in Korea. Her emphasis on spirituality of fasting prayer made it a universal prayer mode in Korean churches. Her ministry focused on individual salvation with fasting prayer accompanied by miraculous divine healing resulting in an astonishing church growth.

Her ministry and theology based on her experience testimony might be an alternative model for the western churches including those in the U.S. which are experiencing decline and where there are the words of Scripture without the power of the words as through the divine healing in the real life of the sick and the poor. She also showed the successful role model of partnership in ministry as well as the frontier role model as a female minister in Korea.

¹⁶ Choi, *Hallelujah Lady*, 186.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 357.



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