



Robert Thomas (1839 – 1866)

A Man of ZEAL

Robert's Story

Robert had never felt such sadness. He and his wife, Carrie, had lost their unborn baby, and then Carrie died. He and his wife had been prepared to face anything together, but now she was gone. A few years earlier, as a young man in Wales, Robert had had a promising future.

Robert preached his first sermon at age 17. Later, he was ordained as a pastor. He was zealous to take the gospel to the people of East Asia, where most had never even seen a Bible. Carrie shared his passion.

Sadly, Carrie died within five months of their arrival in China as missionaries. Robert was so grief-stricken that he stopped being a missionary for a while and got another job in China. Then Robert met two Christian traders from Korea. Few Koreans followed Jesus. Korean leaders at the time hated people and ideas from other countries.

But Robert was more zealous for lost people than he was for his own safety. When the two Korean Christians set out for their return trip to Korea, Robert joined them. Officials threatened severe punishment for anyone who talked to foreigners, but some listened to Robert's preaching and accepted his gift of a Bible, anyway.

Later, Robert found a way to take the gospel to Korea, as a translator aboard a Chinese trading ship. On a trip to Korea, the ship's crew fired cannons on hostile Koreans on the shore. Fearing they would lose the battle and the Bibles would be lost, Robert threw the Bibles into the water. He managed to get some of them to the shore himself, in his final effort to reach the Koreans.

Years later, missionaries discovered that Koreans had come to Christ after reading the Bibles. Today, about one-third of South Koreans are Christian, with Christian missionaries from South Korea serving God all over the world.

Key Bible Verses:

"Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." (Romans 12:11)

Key Word: ZEAL

Zeal: Passion, determination, devotion. An eager desire for a cause to succeed.

Wales Facts

- Wales is part of the United Kingdom, along with England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.
- About 3 million people live in Wales.
- English and Welsh are both official languages, but almost everyone speaks English.
- Road signs are written in English and Welsh.
- Many ancient castles still stand in Wales.
- The complete Bible was translated into Welsh by the end of the 16th century.



The Hermit Kingdom

A hermit is someone who lives alone and doesn't spend much time with other people. In Robert Thomas's time, Korea was known as the Hermit Kingdom. The leaders did not want visitors, traders, or ideas from other countries to enter Korea.

Choi

A 12-year-old Korean boy, Choi Chi Ryang, received one of the last Bibles Robert Thomas gave away. The boy's uncle, who was with Choi when he took the Bible, then struck Robert down. For years, no one outside of Korea knew what happened next.

Hearing the Story

More than 20 years after Robert's death, missionary Samuel Moffett landed in Korea. He and other visitors heard the story of the man who threw Bibles into the water from a burning ship. And they also met Choi Chi Ryang, now an adult. Choi's uncle used the pages of the Bible as wallpaper inside his house. Choi later bought the house, and Koreans read the wallpaper.

The Kims

Kim Il Sung was North Korea's first leader. Pyongyang, where Robert's ship, the *General Sherman*, ended its voyage, is the capital of North Korea. It is now against the law to follow Christ there.

Hundreds of statues of Kim Il Sung are on display in North Korea. After he died in 1994, his body was put on display in a case for citizens to visit and worship. The government wants citizens to honor Kim Il Sung, his son, Kim Jong Il, and his grandson, Kim Jong Un, more than they honor God. After Kim Jong Il died in 2011, Kim Jong Un took over as the country's leader.



Kim Il Sung

April 15, 1912 – July 8, 1994



Kim Jong Il

Feb. 16, 1941 (or 1942)
– Dec. 17, 2011



Kim Jong Un

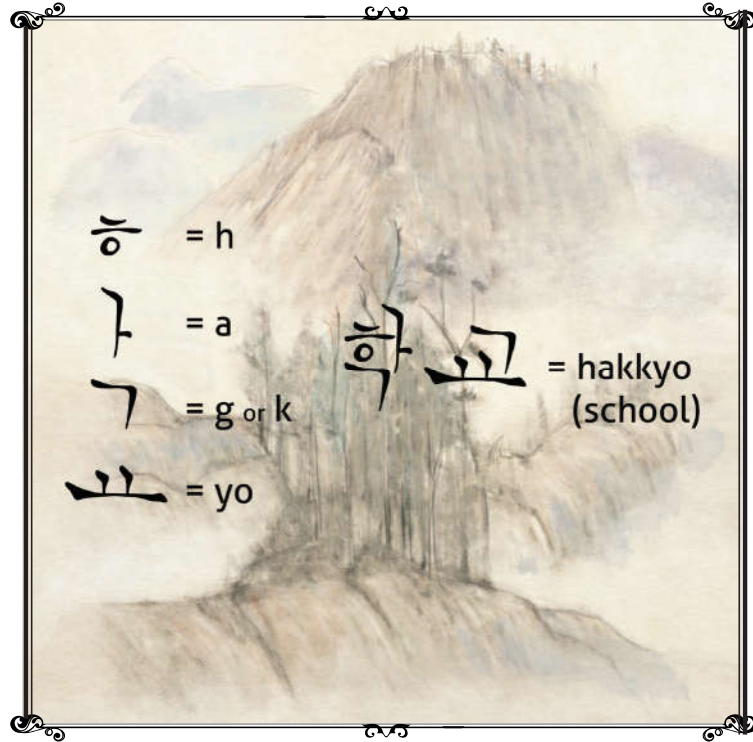
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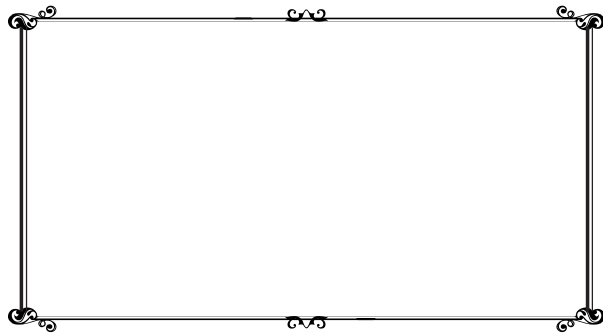
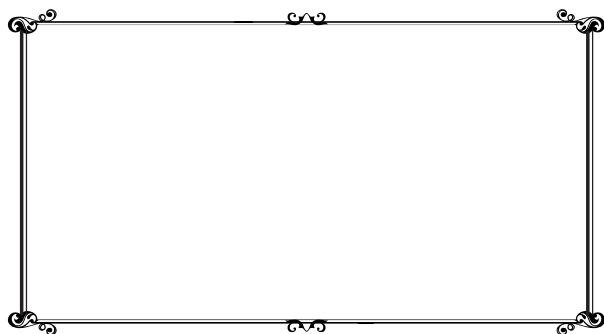
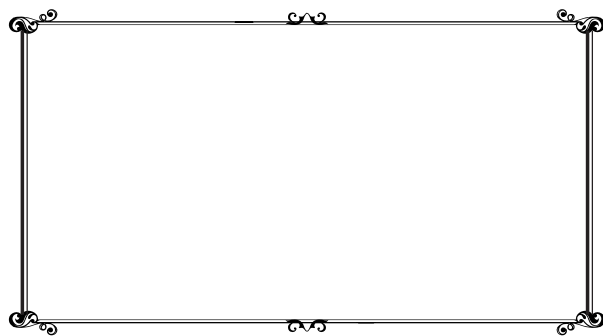
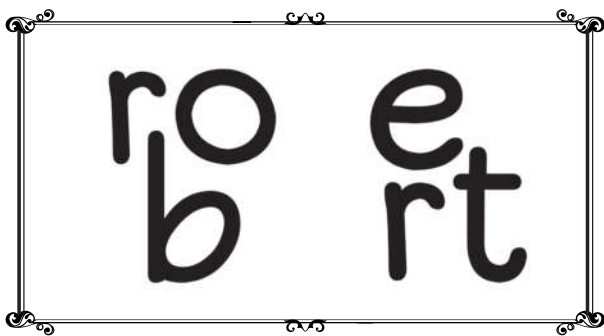
King Sejong

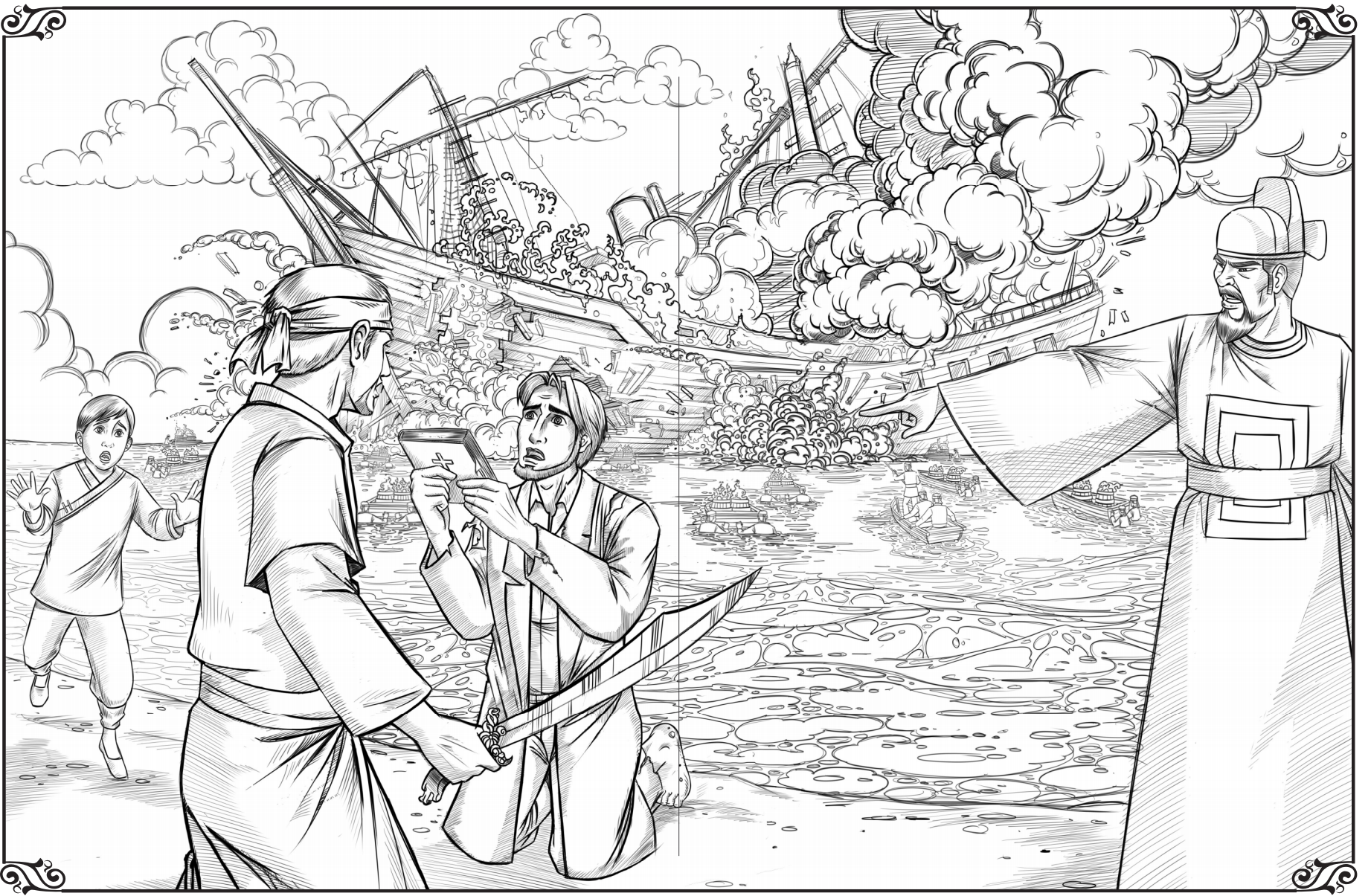
Hangul, the Korean alphabet, was invented during King Sejong's reign. (Today, North Koreans call the Korean alphabet "Chosongul.") The symbols in the alphabet stand for sounds in Korean words. To form words or syllables, letters are clustered together in groups.

For example, the Korean word for school is "hakkyo" (HAHK-gyoh). To the right you can see how the letters in hakkyo are written using Korean letters and how the letters are combined to form the whole word. Can you find and circle the individual letters in the symbol for hakkyo?



What if English words were written clusters of letters (symbols). Using lowercase letters, draw what your first name might look like in the boxes below. See the example for Robert.





Robert cared more about the Koreans' salvation than about his own safety.

Braid a Bible Rope



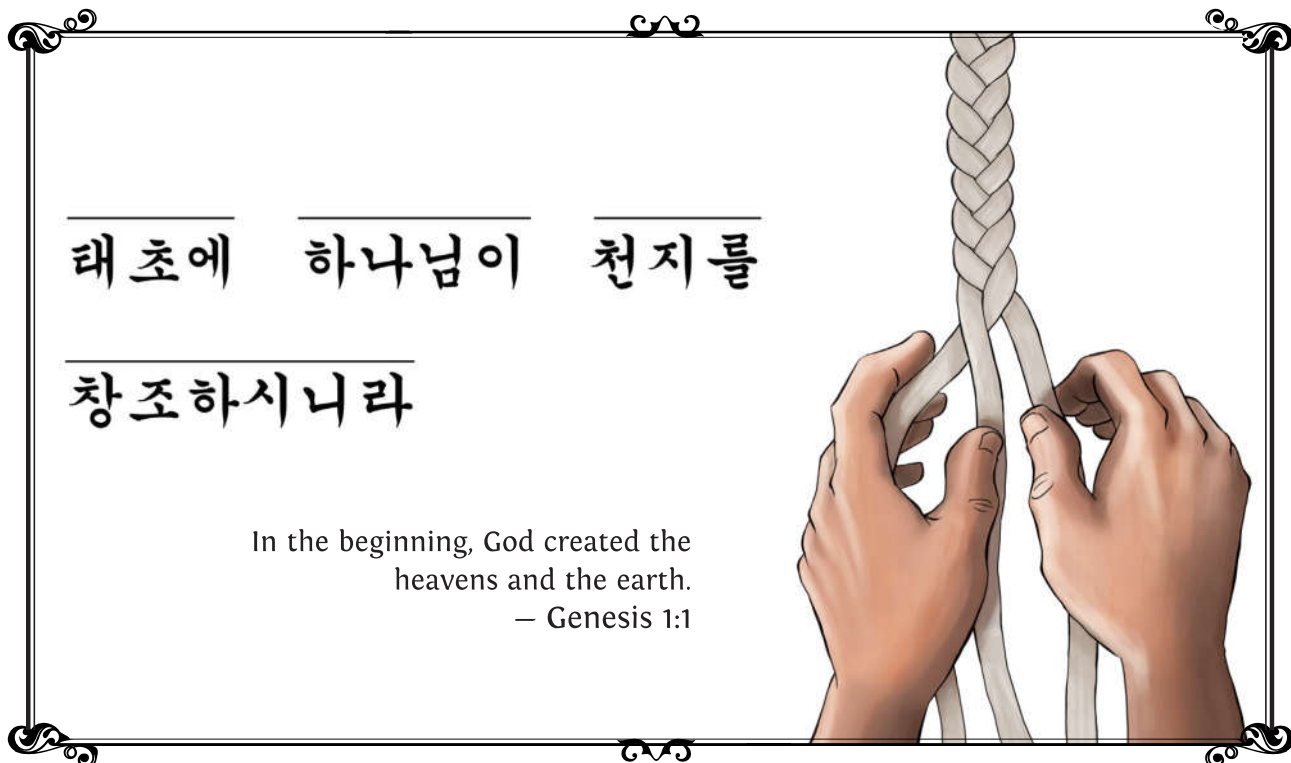
In the 1800s, three Koreans went to China to find work. While they were in China, a Christian shared the gospel with them. They decided to follow Jesus! The men wondered how they could take the Good News to the people back in their home country, where it was against the law to preach the gospel.

The first two men tried to hide a bible in their belongings and smuggle it into Korea. When they got to Korea the officials found their Bibles and executed them.

The third Christian knew he had to try something different. He carefully tore out the pages of his Bible. Then he folded each page into a narrow strip. Next he wove the strips into a long rope and tied his pack with the rope. He easily got past the guards at the border with his Bible rope. After he untied the rope and put the Bible back together, he shared the gospel wherever he went.

(Source: On This Day by Robert J. Morgan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997)

Cut an 8½- by 11-inch piece of paper in half lengthwise. Write or tape a copy of Genesis 1:1 in Korean on one of the halves. Fold or roll the page lengthwise into a tight narrow strip, and tape it shut. Ask someone who is good at braiding to help you braid the page into a homemade “rope,” using yarn or thick string for the other two strands of the rope.



What Do You Think?



Do you bow your head and close your eyes when you pray? Do you know why Christians do so? Many Christians believe bowing their heads and closing their eyes shows respect and humility, and is less distracting.

In North Korea, believers sometimes pray with their eyes open to keep others from knowing what they are doing. They may look at the person they are with as if they are having a conversation with them. Instead of referencing God, they may use a phrase like “Dear Leader,” a title used for former leader Kim Il Sung. In this case, Christians are using the title to talk secretly about God.

Instead of bowing their heads and closing their eyes, they might look at the person sitting next to them and say, “I am so concerned about Sister Kim, who is sick. But I am thankful that our Dear Leader will show special care for her, as she needs love and attention.”

What do you think?

- Is it OK for North Koreans to pray without bowing their heads and closing their eyes?

- Is it OK if they are very careful to share their faith with only a few people who might be open to hearing the gospel?

- Is it ever OK to keep your faith secret when Jesus said, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”? (See Matthew 10:32–33.)

- Should Robert Thomas have been more careful about how and where he shared his faith? Why or why not?



Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were zealous for the Lord. The king in their land set up a giant statue of himself and commanded everyone to bow to the image. (See Daniel 3.)

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that God had said, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.” (Exodus 20:4–5a)

Like Robert Thomas, the three friends were more zealous for the Lord than for their own safety. They refused to bow to the statue, even though the king threatened to throw them in a fiery furnace. In obedience to God and trusting in His wisdom, they went to the furnace. (Read what they said in Daniel 3:17–18.) God miraculously saved them from harm.

Robert Thomas also trusted and obeyed God, but his story ended differently.

Sometimes God is glorified when martyrs die for their faith in Him. At other times He is glorified when He delivers people from the hands of their persecutors. No matter what, our lives are in His hands.

In the 1930s, when Japan ruled Korea, they ordered citizens to bow to Shinto idols. The rulers said even students in Christian schools must bow. The leaders of the school, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to bow, and many Christian schools closed.

Today in North Korea, the people are expected to bow to statues of their leaders and to honor them as gods. Because they refuse to bow, some faithful Korean Christians are in prison, trusting God with their future and honoring Him above all.

To Talk About

- Were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego delivered from the flames because they had more faith than people who die for Christ? Or was His deliverance of them simply the testimony God wanted to give them?
- Read Proverbs 3:5. Will you trust God when you don’t know what will happen as a result? Will you trust Him when you don’t understand how He is working in others’ lives through suffering or difficult times?