



## FROM THE 38<sup>th</sup> PARALLEL

Global Connection International



In my office I have a map of the Korean Peninsula taken by satellite at night. Everything north of the 38th parallel is black. Everything south of the 38th parallel is alive with light.

For 40 years I have been a student of the Korean Peninsula. As a teenager growing up in Kansas, I remember the Korean War. The pictures of our soldiers fighting in the cold mountains of Korea are still etched on my mind.

Little did I know then, that I would visit the Korean Peninsula more than 60 times and one

day travel north to Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. During four visits to North Korea I learned that while big events are going on in Pyongyang the rest of the country is without power or light. Continually, North Korea is in the news as they stand at the edge of economic bankruptcy and the possible possession of a nuclear bomb.

In the late 1800's Christianity first came to North Korea. Before the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula, Pyongyang was called "The New Jerusalem."

After the fall of Japan, Korea was divided at the 38th Parallel and shortly after the division, Guerilla fighter Kim Il Sung, trained in Communist China, invaded the south. Seoul and much of the country was decimated.

Out of the rubble of the Korean War, South Korea has grown its economy to the 12th most powerful in the world. Parallel to the economic miracle has been the growth of Christianity. Today, 38% of the population are Christians - more than the number of Buddhist. When you fly into Seoul at night, hundreds of red crosses can be seen. There are more than 8,000 protestant churches in Seoul alone, more than any city in the world. Almost every church has a red cross.

In the North Korea, there are only two (2) protestant Churches and one Catholic Church. They are small and only attended when foreigners come to visit.

Today, the 38th Parallel stands as a dramatic contrast of darkness and light; of people living under a dictator and people living in freedom; of those who cannot exercise the power of free choice; and those who are flourishing in a society where each individual can seek to achieve individual dreams.

Traveling through Pyongyang today, you will see giant billboards with the picture of Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jung Il. You will read this message. "The Spirit of our Beloved Leader is eternally with us and his spirit is in the life of his son, Kim Jung Il and their spirits are in the life of the people."

When you go to sleep tonight take a moment to reflect on the peoples of the world - like those living in North Korea - who long to experience the freedom we often take so very lightly.

Jim Groen