

# 1 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

## The History of the True Jesus Church (1)

- **Listed Scriptures**

Mt 3; Mk 1; Acts 2; 1 Cor 9:27; Jas 5:17-18; Gen 2:8, 3:24, 9:26-27; Isa 24:15, 61:4; Ezek 43:1-2, 47:1; Mt 24:27; Lk 1:78-79; Rev 7:2-3

- **Lesson Aim**

- 1). To understand the background by which the True Jesus Church emerged
- 2). To let the students understand that our church was established by God in the end times
- 3). To stress the importance of humility when serving God

- **Memory Verse**

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor 4:5-6)

- **Bible Reading For This Week** *(for students and teachers)*

Acts 1-5

**The History Note to teachers:** This quarter's lessons do not contain the Bible Background section since they pertain more to the history of our church of the True Jesus Church

## WARM UP

*The students in J2 would have learned about the history of the True Jesus Church if they had covered Lesson 11 of Year 2, Book 2 during J1. As a warm-up and review, ask them what they remember from their previous lessons on church history. Do they know when and where the church was first established? Who were some important workers? What happened to them? What Christian movement preceded it and led to the origin of our church? How did it begin?*

# **BIBLE STUDY**

## *The Early History of the True Jesus Church*

*The True Jesus Church developed from the east and does not belong to any denomination. We are a revival of the apostolic church established not by the will of man but by the will of God. The history of our church may be divided into four eras: the Pentecostal movement, the Pentecostal movement in China, the birth of the true church and the early childhood of the church. The information that follows is adapted from the anniversary publication, "30 Years of Preaching in Taiwan," pp. 1-3. Published by the True Jesus Church General Assembly in Taichung, Taiwan, 1956.*

### **NOTE TO TEACHERS:**

It has been difficult to compile a complete and lucid picture of the origin of our church because it is simply unclear. Due to the destruction of the Shanghai General Assembly in 1949, many historical documents pertaining to our church are either lost or destroyed. Only a handful of publications on loan from the Shanghai GA to the Taiwan GA at that time had been preserved. Today, these documents rest in the Taiwan GA library in Taichung, Taiwan. Among them are early issues of the "Correctional Church of All Nations Newsletters" (The original name of the True Jesus Church was Correctional Church of All Nations True Jesus Church), the early issues of the "Holy Spirit Times," and the "10th Anniversary Publication" (published April 1937 by the Shanghai GA), the "30th Anniversary Publication" (published December 1947 by the Nanjing GA). However, these sources are either poorly printed or possibly unreliable. Even the 10th anniversary publication, which records the earliest investigation of church origin, includes conflicting accounts and some exaggerations.

When the Taiwan GA reprinted and distributed the 10th and 30th anniversary publications in 1988 (out of the local churches' request to learn more about church history), the chairman of the GA wrote in the preface that because "the origin of our church is murky, unclear, and difficult to research, we can only glean a general overview of what happened." He acknowledged the exaggerations as a childish phase during the church's growth from immaturity to adulthood. What is included in the body of this lesson is an adapted translation of church history from the anniversary publication, "30 Years of Preaching in Taiwan," published by the Taiwan GA in 1956. The chapter is felt to be appropriate not only because it gives a succinct and comprehensive look at TJC origin, but also because it represents the current church view. Moreover, unlike the simplified version of church history in J1, Year 2 Book 2, Lesson 11 (which is highly recommended for teachers), this chapter on church history includes the later part of Barnabas Chang's life. The account is a reminder of the danger in idolizing workers of God, the importance of praying for our church leaders, and the necessity of having humility in servitude. Additional notes also include the backgrounds to the Holiness Movement and Pentecostalism. Learning about our church history is like learning about our family background. When we discover how our family was established and how it grew, we also learn a little bit more about our own identity. We hope that this lesson will be an enjoyable and informative journey into the past, and that our students will come out of it with a better understanding of God's mercy and will for our church.

## **A. THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT IN CHINA**

The Pentecostal movement reached China in 1907. In 1908, a western missionary with the Chinese name of Mo Lizhi began publishing the “Pentecostal Truth Newsletter of Hong Kong” (Xianggang Wuxuenjie Zhenlibao). During the same year, the Apostolic Faith Mission entered Shanghai via preachers such as Elder Peterson (Bi Dexin). In 1911, the Apostolic Faith Church was established in Shanxi Province. The “Gospel Newsletter for the General Public” (Tongchuan Funyin Genli Bao) was also published as a vehicle for literary ministry. Later, the Apostolic Faith churches such as the Assembly of God and Church of God were established in Beijing. Newsletters published by Mo Lizhi and Elder Peterson (Bi Dexin) stressed the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and the second coming of Christ, but the churches never experienced much growth.

Just as John the Baptist paved the way for the Lord, (Mt 3:3, 11, 12; Col 1:25, 28), the purpose of the Pentecostal movement was to pave the way for the true church. Hence, the early pillars of the True Jesus Church, Lingsheng Chang, Paul Wei and Barnabas Chang, were all affiliated with the Apostolic Faith.

Lingsheng Chang came into contact with the Apostolic Faith Church in Shanghai in 1909. At the time, he was an elder of the Presbyterian Church in Shandong Province. When his son Boquan Chang received the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Faith Church in Shanghai, Chang went to Shanghai in order to receive the laying of hands and pray for the Holy Spirit. After praying for two weeks, he returned to Shandong where he prayed for the Holy Spirit fervently for another two months. On Dec. 21, 1909, he received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. This prompted him to be baptized into the Apostolic Faith Church in Sujou. The next year, he went to Beijing and was ordained as an Apostolic Faith elder by Elder Peterson and Elder Kuei.

Paul Wei (originally Wei Enpo) joined the Apostolic Faith Church in Beijing during the 1910's. Wei was originally was a textile merchant and a member of the London Mission. One time, he contacted a grave illness that could not be cured. When Apostolic Faith Elder Xin Shengmin healed him through prayer and the laying of hands, he joined the Apostolic Faith Church. Although Paul Wei became an Apostolic Faith member, he did not receive the Holy Spirit with the help of Apostolic Faith ministers. Instead, he received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues during a family service above his fabric store in Beijing.

Barnabas Chang, a farmer and antique dealer, also came in touch with the Apostolic Faith in 1912, when Lingsheng Chang came to preach in his village in Wei County, Shandong Province. After believing and repenting, Barnabas Chang received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues on March 16. In 1915, Barnabas Chang began receiving theological training from Lingsheng Chang.

## **B. THE BIRTH OF OUR CHURCH**

In 1917, the True Jesus Church was established in Beijing. That year, Paul Wei received revelation from the Lord about the truth to leave the Apostolic Faith Church. He sold his fabric store and began preaching in the name of the Correctional Church of All Nations, True Jesus Church.

The final shortened name of the True Jesus Church came about by the guidance of God. At first, the church was referred to as the Jesus Church. Then, it was changed to the Correctional Church True Jesus Church, the Jesus New Church, and the Jesus True Church. It was not until Bro. Peter Wang accidentally wrote the word True on the church banner that Paul Wei felt that it was the will of God to name the church True Jesus Church."

The name of our church truly has spiritual significance (see Lesson #11, J1 textbook Year 2 Book 1). "True" refers to God, because God is true. The word Jesus refers to Christ, the Son of God, the physical manifestation of God. It is the only name of God, given for the sake of man's salvation. The word Church refers to a congregation of people chosen by God. At its most simplistic level, the True Jesus Church is a reflection of the role that Christ serves as mediator between God and man. On a deeper spiritual level, Jesus is the head of the church and the congregation is His body. As God is true, Jesus and His Church are also true.

In 1918, Lingsheng Chang traveled to Tienjin, where Paul Wei laid hands on him. The two became co-workers and published the "Correctional Church of All Nations (True Jesus Church) Newsletter." By 1919, Barnabas Chang had also completed his theological training from Lingsheng Chang. Lingsheng was ordained as an elder and joined in the work of preaching.

It is important to note that early workers such as Lingsheng Chang, Paul Wei and Barnabas Chang were not the founders of the True Jesus Church. The real creator and cornerstone of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. The early workers were merely vessels used by the Lord to establish the groundwork for the True Jesus Church (1 Cor 3:6-7).

## **C. THE EARLY CHILDHOOD OF THE CHURCH**

The church grew rapidly after its establishment. After the death of Paul Wei in 1919, Ye Kexin (otherwise known as Liang Babilun) and Isaac Wei (son of Paul Wei) continued preaching and establishing churches in northern China. Meanwhile, Lingsheng Chang and Barnabas Chang preached in southern China.

Lingsheng Chang preached in Nanjing and Changsha before retiring to his home town to preserve the church. Barnabas Chang traveled extensively in the south, establishing churches and preaching to people he met on the way. As a result, Seventh Day Adventists Thomas Kuo and Silas Lin believed and began preaching and establishing churches. Together, Kuo, Lin and Chang preached in Xiamen and Zhangzhou, where they converted some Taiwanese Presbyterians in 1925. This opened the door to Taiwan, where they visited in 1926 to establish churches.

Also in 1926, the church began to grow in organization. In April, the church held its first three-month theological training in Nanjing. By the third congregational meeting in July, the official organization of the True Jesus Church took form. First, the forty by-laws of the True Jesus Church were passed. Second, the decision was made to establish Church Headquarters in Nanjing in order to centralize all churches within and outside of China (In the early days, the main governing body of the church was called headquarters, in military fashion. In 1945, the term Church Headquarters was changed to General Assembly when it was moved to Chongqing during the Chinese civil war). Third, the "Holy Spirit Times" was created as the official newsletter of the Church Headquarters. The Church Headquarters was divided into five departments with a seven member church board. Local church affairs were organized into three branches with three member church boards. In 1918, Lingsheng Chang traveled to Tienjin, where Paul Wei laid hands on him. The two became co-workers and published the "Correctional Church of All Nations (True Jesus Church) Newsletter." By 1919, Barnabas Chang had also completed his theological training from Lingsheng Chang. Lingsheng was ordained as an elder and joined in the work of preaching. It is important to note that early workers such as Lingsheng Chang, Paul Wei and Barnabas Chang were not the founders of the True Jesus Church. The real creator and cornerstone of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. The early workers were merely vessels used by the Lord to establish the groundwork for the True Jesus Church (1 Cor 3:6-7).

Congregational Meetings were set to be held once every three years, while branch meetings were to be held annually. After the Church Headquarters was established, all doctrines were passed only after much deliberation.

Unfortunately, the growth of the church became hindered by the fall of one of its most fervent workers – Barnabas Chang. After the Church Headquarters was moved to Shanghai in September 1927, Barnabas Chang was assigned to assist overseas holy work in Southeast Asia. Since there was no official documentation of the origin of the True Jesus Church, Chang began claiming himself as the founder of the church. Hence, the Church Headquarters decided to evaluate the origin of the True Jesus Church at the fifth congregational meeting. Unhappy with this decision, Barnabas Chang set up his own private Church Headquarters in Hong Kong during a trip to Southeast Asia. He called it the Chinese True Jesus Church, and ordained himself General Bishop. He also created the "Horn Call Newsletter" (Jiaosheng Bao), and began disrupting the work of the True Jesus Church. Despite several warnings from Church Headquarters, Chang would not turn back and was excommunicated during the sixth congregational meeting in 1930. Seeing the importance of clarifying church origin, two church historians were sent north to verify the history of the True Jesus Church. From their investigation, it was confirmed that Barnabas Chang was not the first worker of the True Jesus Church.

Confusion over church origin prompted members at the sixth congregational meeting to unify the northern and southern churches in order to prevent disorganization. As a result, the churches were officially joined during a meeting in Shanghai in April 1931 (Gal 3; 1 Cor 10:17; Eph 4:4). It was also decided that Correctional Church of All Nations, would be omitted from the church name. Instead, the church would be called True Jesus Church, as determined by the Church Headquarters in Shanghai.

As the Bible prophesized, the True Jesus Church appeared from the east and spread to the west. It emerged as a revival of the apostolic church, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the mission of preaching the truth to all nations (Jn 4:35- 38; Rev 7:2, 14:14-16; Jer 51:6, 45). However, the history of the origin of our church teaches us that even those who receive the truth may fall. Only when we are alert and humble can we fight the good fight and endure to the end.

## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. When and where did the True Jesus Church originate? Who were the early workers?
2. Where did Paul Wei and Lingsheng Chang receive the Holy Spirit? Why is it important that they did not receive the Holy Spirit at the Apostolic Faith Mission?
3. What is the spiritual significance of the name True Jesus Church?

## LIFE APPLICATION



### The Early Workers

*Goal: To help students understand both the beneficial traditions and warnings from the early history of the True Jesus Church.*

As a class, read through the testimonies of the three early workers and discuss the following questions:

1. Positive examples from their lives – what would you like to emulate?
2. Negative examples from their lives – what would you like to avoid?
3. What is the most important thing we can learn from their service?
4. What can we learn about the origin of our church?

### LINGSHENG CHANG

Lingsheng Chang, originally named Bin, was from Shandong Province. In 1900, Bin was converted to the Presbyterian Church. He had been a deacon for the Presbyterian Church for three years when his eldest son received the baptism of the spirit in 1909. The event moved Bin to travel to Shanghai on November 12, 1909 to pursue the Holy Spirit at the Apostolic Faith Church. Although he prayed for twenty days and the Apostolic Faith ministers laid hands on him, he did not receive the Holy Spirit.

On January 30, 1910, Bin received the Holy Spirit in his own house. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he changed his name to Lingsheng, which means “born of the spirit.” The same year, he went to Sujou and was baptized in a lake by the Apostolic Faith Church. By 1914, Lingsheng Chang was ordained as an elder of the Apostolic Faith Church.

In 1918, Lingsheng went to the True Jesus Church in Tienjin, where he met Paul Wei and received the power to correct. Lingsheng Chang then went back to his hometown and preached to Barnabas Chang. Together, in February 1919, Lingsheng and Barnabas baptized thirty-some people in the Tang village about 100 miles from Wei County in Shandong. Before the baptism, Lingsheng Chang and Barnabas Chang baptized each other facing downward. A month later, Paul Wei visited Wei County and co-published the second issue of the Correctional Church of All Nations Newsletter with Lingsheng.

In September 1919, Lingsheng Chang went to Beijing for the third time and joined the True Jesus Church. He changed his name to Ye Peter Lingsheng and began to preach for the Correctional Church of All Nations True Jesus Church. He bore testimony on behalf of Paul Wei.

In late October, Lingsheng joined the editorial work for the newsletter in Beijing. On October 29, shortly before the death of Paul Wei, Lingsheng was ordained as the guardian of the Correctional Church. When Paul Wei was about to pass away, Lingsheng Chang was at his side. Both he and Ye Kexin received blessings from Paul Wei and accepted the responsibility as overseers of the Correctional Church. Afterwards, Lingsheng Chang returned to Shandong to preserve the church.

## **BARNABAS CHANG**

Barnabas Chang, originally named Dienju, was from Wei County, Shandong Province. He was a farmer and antique dealer. In 1911, his clan member Lingsheng Chang came to preach the gospel in his village. Dienju's wife immediately believed, repented and prayed for spiritual blessing. However, Dienju did not receive the gospel immediately. On April 14, 1911, Dienju was in the wilderness when he heard a voice from heaven, saying, "The salvation during the end times will come from the east and spread to the west." Immediately, he knelt down to pray and received the Holy Spirit.

After this experience, he received a sprinkling baptism by the Presbyterian Church. Then, he received three to four years of biblical training from Lingsheng Chang, who had been converted to the True Jesus Church. Lingsheng Chang told him that Paul Wei in Beijing had seen God and that there were very wondrous newsletters. Hearing this, Dienju believed and was touched. He started preaching for the Correctional Church of All Nations -True Jesus Church, advocated a communal lifestyle and made up his mind to assist Paul Wei. In the spring of 1919, when Paul Wei held a two-day spiritual convocation in Dienju's village (Xizhuangtou), he was ordained as an elder and given the name Barnabas. Barnabas became determined to dedicate his life to preaching the gospel. He created four-sided banners for the Correctional Church of All Nations True Jesus Church, changed his name to Ye Barnabas Shensheng ("born of God") and preached that Jesus would come again to judge the world in two years. After Paul Wei passed away, Barnabas preached in Nanjing with co-workers Ye Babylon and Ye Stephen.

In August 1919, Barnabas saw a vision of Paul Wei being lifted to heaven. In October 1920, Chang went to assist the church in Changsha. In 1923 and 1925, he worked in southern China and established churches in Fuzhou and Wenzhou. Then, in 1926, he traveled to Taiwan to help the churches. He was also chosen to head the General Affairs when the Church Headquarters was established in Nanjing. Later, the Church Headquarters sent him to various churches in Southeast Asia. Returning for the Fourth Congregational Meeting, he was again chosen to head General Affairs. Afterwards, he was sent to assist churches in Guangzhou. In September 1929, he was chosen as a board member in the Fifth Congregational Meeting. However, in October, he defied church regulations by establishing a General Assembly in Hong Kong.

## PAUL WEI

Paul Wei, originally named Enpo, was a textile merchant from Hebei Province. In 1902, Paul's family of four moved to Beijing and opened a fabric store. There, the family joined the London Mission in 1904.

In May of 1916, Enpo became severely ill. For three months, he was treated by doctors with no sign of improvement. He was brought to the Apostolic Faith Church on August 18, 1916. After several days of prayer and laying of hands, he was cured. This caused Enpo to join the Apostolic Faith Mission and study the Bible under the guidance of Elder Peterson. Shortly after, Enpo received the Holy Spirit while praying in a Bible study at home.

Enpo received many spiritual gifts from the Lord. In March of 1917, he once again experienced the healing power of prayer through interceding for his critically ill daughter. One day, he saw Satan leading many demons. The demons retreated when Enpo cast them away in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. From then on, Enpo received the gift to heal and cast out demons.

On April 3, 1917, God spoke to Enpo, telling him, "You will fast for 39 days but you will not die of starvation." So he fasted for 39 days, during which he prayed, wrote and preached, but slept only three hours a day. While he was praying on April 8, a voice from heaven said to him, "You must receive the baptism of Jesus!" Therefore, Enpo was led by the Holy Spirit to go to the Red Door River outside of the Yongding Gate of Beijing. He was led to kneel in the water and pray. A voice then said to him, "You must face downward to receive baptism." Enpo obeyed and felt cleansed in body and spirit. When he lifted his head from the water, he saw the Lord appear to him. When he came up to the shore and into the woods, the Lord appeared to him once more. By the guidance of the Lord, his name was changed to Paul and began correcting the unbiblical teachings of other Christian denominations.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul both the name, True Jesus Church and the incorrect teachings. Paul Wei saw many visions, performed miracles, and preached diligently. Later, he changed his family name to Ye (the first syllable of Jesus, which sounds like 'ye-fu' in Chinese), and became overseer Ye Paul Lingsheng. His wife, Ye Maria Love, was also an overseer. Paul Wei preached that the Lord Jesus would return in five years to judge the nations and destroy the world through fire. In 1919, he preached in Shandong Province and worked with Lingsheng Chang. He then returned to Beijing, where he passed away in laughter on September 6, 1919. Before he passed away, he saw a vision of angels coming for him.

## REFLECTION & PRAYER

1 John 2:16 tells us, "For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world." May the Lord help us to resist the temptations of the world and clothe ourselves with humility, especially when we do great works for Him.