

SOUTH KOREA



THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA IS KNOWN FOR ITS PRECARIOUS PROXIMITY TO CHINA AND NORTH KOREA, ITS EVANGELICAL CHURCH, AND ITS MISSIONARY-SENDING HEART. THE CHURCH NEEDS FIRM GROUNDING IN THE BIBLE AMID A MATERIALISTIC CULTURE.

population

- Population: 48.8 million
- Density: 497 per sq km

South Korea is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the world. The country has no racial or linguistic minorities other than 20,000 Chinese people. The capital, Seoul, is densely populated with around 12 million people.

Religions

- Non-religious 35%
- Christian 31.7%
- Buddhist 23.9%
- Indigenous religions 8%
- Other 0.8%
- Chinese 0.5%
- Baha'i 0.08%
- Muslim 0.07%

There is complete religious freedom. The government has been favorable to Christianity, seeing it as an ideological bulwark against communism.

Confucianism [more a moral philosophy than a religion] and Shamanism have a powerful effect on all Korean life and religion, although very few people follow these exclusively.

language

Korean, with some regional dialects. Korean is similar to Japanese in grammar and contains many borrowed Chinese words. It is very difficult for Westerners to master. Most educated Koreans can read English, which is taught in all secondary schools.

geography

Korea is a mountainous peninsula jutting south-eastward from the border of Manchuria, China. It also borders the Sea of Japan (East Sea) and the Yellow Sea. Steep scrub-covered mountains and narrow terraced valleys dominate the scene throughout the peninsula.

climate

South Korea has a temperate climate, with cold, dry winters and hot, rainy summers. In Seoul the average January temperature range is -5 to -2.5°C [23-28°F] and the average July temperature range is 21-29°C [70-84°F]. The wet season occurs in July. At other times there is moderate rainfall and generally long, clear sunny days in autumn and winter.

history

The Republic of Korea was proclaimed on August 15, 1948 following the post-war partitioning of the peninsula between the occupying forces of the U.S. in the south and the USSR in the north.

The main business of the new government was the suppression of leftist groups, which led to the North Koreans beginning the Korean War in 1950. North Korea was supported by the Chinese; South Korea by the U.S. and UN forces. An armistice was signed in 1953.

The country's recovery from the war was slow, and the political scene

chaotic. But from the mid-1960s came a change of economic fortunes as capital flowed in and the country burgeoned. South Korea is one of the "Four Dragons" of East Asia and it pushed its labor force to a work effort seldom matched elsewhere, even during wartime. However, with a much higher standard of living and an easing of authoritarian controls, the workplace softened and growth rates have slowed.

Emerging from a previously authoritarian regime, democratic reforms from the late 1980s have not been smooth. The political scene is dominated by the rivalry between Communist North Korea and strongly anti-Communist South Korea. Relationships began to improve in the mid-1980s, and the border was opened to allow family visits. In 1994 relationships were severely strained as North Korea began sabre-rattling about nuclear-weapons development. As part of the pact resolving this, North Korea agreed to resume high-level talks with South Korea.

In August 2000 the South and North Korean governments arranged a reunion of 100 elderly relatives from each side. Similar reunions have happened regularly since, and it is hoped that this is part of a wider move towards reunification.

In 2000 there was a serious strike by medical staff against pharmaceutical laws. Economic difficulties resulted in higher unemployment and an emphasis



10 W, Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120-4413
Tel.: 303.730.4160 E-mail: info@omf.org
Website: www.us.omf.org

on the need for austerity. In 2000 the share market dropped by 50 percent and the won depreciated.

There were further problems with medical strikes, a farming crisis and a number of corruption scandals affecting the government. Economic growth was moderate in 2003 and the National Assembly approved legislation reducing the six-day work week to five days.

President Roh Moo-hyun was elected in 2002. In March 2004, after a breach of election rules, parliament voted to impeach him but the Constitutional Court overturned the move and he was reinstated. He was also involved in a scandal concerning illegal election funds. Mr. Roh is a liberal reformer from the governing Millennium Democratic Party.

Today there is a resurgence of nationalism, a desire for reunification, and a re-evaluating of political ties with

the North. All this is occurring amidst a process of democratization and globalization.

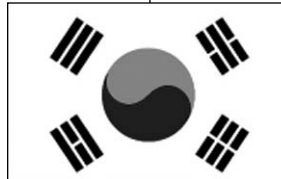
christianity

South Korea is unique in East Asia in that it has a very strong church.

Although the gospel only came to Korea in 1866 and the first

Protestant church was planted in 1884, by 1984 there were nearly 30,000 churches.

When OMF workers first visited South Korea in the early 1950s, they felt that the strength of the existing missionary force was such that OMF input was not needed. However, in 1966 OMF was invited to send workers, and a small team of OMFers came to Korea to assist the church in youth ministry and publishing.



South Korea's church has boasted many superlatives: the world's greatest congregations, the largest evangelistic events, the biggest theological seminaries.

But in the 1990s church growth in South Korea reached a plateau and membership, particularly among young people, is now declining at up to five

percent per year.

South Korea is now the second largest missionary-sending country in the world and is blessed with impressive missionary training and sending structures. Koreans are strategically placed to reach the rest of Asia, and many have gone out with OMF and other agencies.

Bible teaching and an emphasis on devotional life remain at the heart of OMF's ministries in South Korea. These have included student work, leadership and discipleship training and expository Bible teaching. OMFers work in partnership with local churches. Encouraging these churches to be mission-oriented and to train missionary candidates has always been a high priority. There are now openings for Christians to assist the church in teaching English to Koreans as a means of outreach.

OMF's strategic priorities

- To glorify God by strengthening the movement for biblical reform and its expression in daily life
- Leadership training and missions mobilization in partnership with the church

opportunities

- English teaching
- Lecturing and training posts in Bible and theological colleges, including training for missions

how to pray

- Pray that growing materialism would not dampen the spiritual energies of Christians.
- Many young people go on short-term missions trips. Pray that this would be translated into life-long commitment.
- Pray for the effective preparation of Korean missionary trainees, and for many more workers to help in training Korean missionaries.
- There are Korean diaspora communities around the world. Most have churches and some are sending high numbers of missionaries.
- Social concern is growing in the evangelical churches. Pray for a thorough approach to evangelism among the marginalised.
- Pray for unity between the Christian denominations. There has been a history of divisions over doctrine and because of personality clashes among leaders.
- New Christians are often from Buddhist and Confucian backgrounds; pray for good teaching and helpful discipleship.
- Pray for biblical servant leadership to develop. Korea has a culture of authoritarian leadership, with pastors enjoying a high social status.
- It is widely believed that success and prosperity are indications of God's blessing. Pride has been taken in statistical growth, impressive organization and buildings. Some leaders may be tempted to seek success more than lifting up the cross.
- As North Korea begins to open up, pray for wisdom for the South Korean church in outreach and support to escapees and Christians in the North.