

Jonathan vs the status quo

by Mark Bradley

Hand over hand, the intrepid servant of God climbed the rocky cliff, soon coming face to face with the enemy. Instead of panic, Jonathan and his partner boldly advanced, confident of God's provision of victory. What began as a skirmish at an outpost of the Philistine army soon turned into a rout of the Philistines.

What makes Jonathan's encounter so significant to missions today was not his climbing prowess or swordsmanship. Rather, it was his refusal to be satisfied with the status quo of God not being glorified. In 1 Samuel 14 we find the newly crowned Saul and his military and spiritual advisors contemplating their predicament: the Philistines

were amassing for a retaliatory attack because of Jonathan's killing of a local governor. The big issue for Jonathan was not the imminent attack, but that the Philistines were opposed to God's purposes for his people and his glory among the nations. The Philistines stood in the way.

While Saul and his advisors were immobilized by fear and indecision, Jonathan dared to believe that God didn't need a lot of people to accomplish his purposes—"nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or few." (1 Sam. 14:6) All God needed was someone who would look at what needed to be done, and then step out in faith and God's strength to do it.

Today as much as ever, we need "Jonathan's" (and their "armor-bearers") who will not be satisfied with the status quo, won't cringe at the obstacles and challenges ahead, nor be immobilized by indecision and the fear of others. Whether it's China, East Asia, or anywhere God's glory is not revealed, God is looking for men and women who will see what needs to be done—and then step out in faith and God's strength to do it. ■



Generations blessed

God's faithfulness to a
Chinese family over
three generations

Not long ago, in a city on the prosperous east coast of China, Ann, a promising young graduate, landed a good new job with a Western company. Ann's boss took her under his wing and invited her home to meet his wife. They faithfully shared Jesus with Ann, until the day when she realized that God was calling her by name. Ann was very excited about Jesus and poured all her energy into serving him and getting to know him better.

At Chinese New year, Ann went to visit some relatives in central China. They immediately noticed a dramatic change in their somewhat selfish city cousin. Two of her relatives listened intently as she explained what had happened to her. It was as if they had been waiting all their lives to hear this! It all made sense to them, and they quickly believed for themselves. When Ann went home, she left behind two new Christians.

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C H I N A

JESUS IN THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

by Charlotte Hails

Although figures vary, a realistic estimate for the total number of Protestant Christians in China would be 50 million.

Zhong guo, or "Middle Kingdom," is the Chinese name for the country—a reference to the Chinese belief that their country was the geographical center of the earth and the only true civilization.

China covers 6 million square miles, only a little of which is suitable for agriculture.

It gave birth to one of the world's earliest civilizations and has a recorded history that dates from 3,500 years ago. But by the 19th century China had become a politically and economically weak nation, dominated by foreign powers.

China underwent many changes in the first half of the 20th century. The imperial government was overthrown and in the chaotic years that followed, two groups—the Nationalists and Communists—struggled for control of the country.

In 1949 the Communists won control of China. The Nationalists fled to the island of Taiwan and there set up a government, which they called the Republic of China.

The accession of the Communist government in 1949 stands as one of the most important events in Chinese history. In a remarkably short period of time radical changes were effected in the Chinese economy and

society. The Cultural Revolution, a time of political and social turmoil lasting from 1966 to 1976, impoverished the country significantly, with everyone pulled down to the same standard in economics, intellect and social standing.

Since the late 1970s China has cast off its self-imposed isolation from the international community and modernized its industrial and economic structures. Deng Xiaoping, paramount leader between 1978 and his death in 1997, successfully transformed the country into a major player in world affairs. Annual economic growth has now been running at eight percent or more for over a decade. However, the gulf between rich and poor is widening.

In 1997 Britain handed back the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China and in 1999 Macau was returned to China by the Portuguese. Taiwan and the Mainland continue sensitive negotiations about reunification.

Christianity in China

Nestorian Christians first entered China in 635AD along the Silk Route via northwest China. The church they established was largely among foreign groups, rather than the Chinese.

Thereafter Christian influence waxed and waned, often absent for centuries before fresh initiatives were taken. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit priest, obtained permission to live in China in 1583. However, despite planting a church, he still did not make Christianity a Chinese religion. The dominant religions in China remained Confucianism (more a moral philosophy than a religion), Taoism and Buddhism.

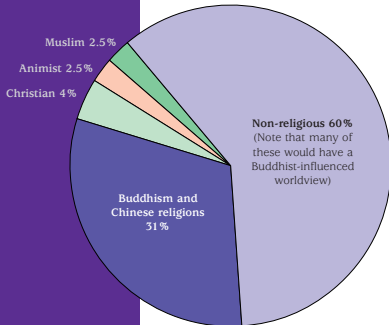
Protestant missions were latecomers to China, traveling on the same boats that brought Western trade and imperialism. Missions established themselves along the east coast in the mid-19th century.

In 1865 James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (now OMF International), saw the needs of the inland provinces and he and others moved away from the coast, establishing churches and hospitals. At this time, work among minority peoples, like the Lisu in western China, also began.

By 1949 there were about 6,000 missionaries in China and 20,000 Protestant churches with over a million members. Christianity was established, though not accepted, as an indigenous faith.

The Communist party in the 1950s attempted to eliminate organized religion. The

Religion in China



Chinese church was isolated and forced underground as the missionaries left. Church buildings were closed and pastors and congregations were imprisoned and persecuted. To the outside world it was difficult to imagine how the church would survive this oppression.

However, as China emerged after Mao's death, evidence of a thriving church was revealed, sustained by God's grace through the faithfulness of Chinese believers, the prayer of Christians abroad and radio broadcasts.

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping allowed churches to re-open under the control of the TSPM (Three Self Patriotic Movement). The church then had about 1 million members.

The TSPM has seen a growth in membership across China over the last 20 years. Official reports admit to over 10 million Christians in China. However, many Chinese Christians refuse to align themselves with the official church, seeing it as too much under the authority of the Communist government, serving the Party first and God second. Instead they meet in house churches, some isolated, others part of well-organized groups numbering hundreds of thousands.

Although figures vary, a realistic estimate for the total number of Protestant Christians in China would be 50 million. Thirty million copies of the Bible have been printed there.

The house-church movement is at present under great pressure to register with government authorities. Reports over the last five years reveal that incidents of persecution are common. Pastors are imprisoned, materials are confiscated and meetings closed down.

While Muslim minority peoples such as the

Uyghur, Kazaks and Kirgiz (around 20 million in number) now practice their religion openly, it is illegal to spread the gospel to anyone under 18 years old (about 400 million people).

The struggle to establish Christianity in China is by no means over. Support and prayer for the church is as important as ever. ■

Pray for China and China's church:

- for peaceful, stable and honest government
- for an end to persecution of the house churches
- for the witness of Christians in prison
- for Christian professionals to work and witness in urban and rural areas
- for good Bible-based teaching in both the TSPM and house churches
- for the training of godly pastors
- for more young people to respond to the gospel rather than the attractiveness of a secular work and lifestyle as China develops
- for Hong Kong Christians to have a sensitive and significant influence in churches in southern China
- for witness among Christian minority peoples; most have no viable church or no known Christians
- for radio broadcasts into China



Seminary students in Zhejiang province worship God through the singing of indigenous hymns. More than 20 TSPM seminaries are now open in China.

G O D A T W O R K I N C H I N A

The fear factor in China

China seemed to change overnight. A tiny virus called SARS that nobody could see or touch had broken down resistance and infected the vulnerable with fear. Faith in the modern saviors of science, development, self and the authorities was at last exposed as inadequate. With more time on their hands and nowhere to go, three women asked if they could come to my apartment to learn about my faith. They did so and were captivated by the gospel message and by my description of a Savior who cared for them and their families. When I had to return to my home country, they found someone else to study with, invited more friends and committed their lives to Christ.

Christmas harvest in China

Christmas is "harvest time" in China. We partnered with several local groups to host a Christmas party full of songs and skits and a Christmas message. Praise the Lord! We saw 25+ respond, including one of my classmates. That week, a Chinese leader hosted the same event at nine separate locations throughout the city. A total of 3,000 heard and 300 responded to the good news of Jesus Christ!

A Chinese student finds Jesus

After hours of discussion over a period of weeks, the most gifted of all my English graduate students finally came to embrace Jesus as her Maker, Savior and Lord. She is now hoping to pursue a PhD in English so that she can share the love and hope of Christ with other university students in China, most of whom she knows to be leading "empty and purposeless lives." She is actively sharing her faith with family, friends and classmates.

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Ann and her boss prayed for these two cousins, and eventually found a woman to teach them. Under her care, God strengthened and built this little church, adding new believers from their family and friends. The teacher taught faithfully until the group grew too large for her home. By this time there were couples in the church ready to host meetings in their homes, and so a new church group was established.

Next, the Lord provided the little group with an experienced pastor to oversee them. With the pastor's help, they appointed leaders and the group multiplied several times. Today there is a network of groups, hungry for God and eager to move forward.

The gospel has spread from Ann's family to their friends and neighbors, and an increasing number of people now believe. As the older family members have been saved, an amazing story has begun to emerge...

Early in the 20th century, foreigners working in this part of China had established a Christian school staffed by local Christians. After the Communists took power, the life of one of the Chinese believers who taught at the school became gradually more difficult, and his

children were persecuted because of his "undesirable" background. They learned not to talk about their father and weren't interested in what he had to say.

Their father prayed for them and worried about what the future held for them. It must have been hard for him not to be able to tell them about Jesus before he died.

That teacher was Ann's grandfather. His wife is still alive and she has now seen her entire family gradually turning to Jesus and receiving the promised blessing—even to the third and fourth generation. ■



PUBLISHED BY OMF INTERNATIONAL
10 W. Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120
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Design/Layout: Patrice Nelson
Photography: Kevin Morris, Patrice Nelson



Founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865
as the China Inland Mission
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