

Chains in **China**

Imprisoned for his faith, Pastor Chen suffered incredible trials for God in communist China.

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Chapter 1

The warm, yellow sun was just coming up over the eastern horizon as Chen stepped out into the back streets of old Shanghai. Little finches chattered in the Chinese lantern bushes along the sidewalk, pausing only long enough to watch him as he passed. He bent his head to smell the blossoms of the hydrangea flowers climbing on the little trellis over the front gate. *What a gift from God*, he thought as he drank in the sweet fragrance of the snow-white blossoms.

But that was only the reality of the moment in Chen's eyes from the front door of his uncle's small bungalow. The real world outside this peaceful place he called home was one of war—world war.

Hitler's German machine had joined forces with Italy and Japan to conquer the world, and for a time, it looked like they were unstoppable. The Germans had invaded almost all of Europe, and even parts of Africa and the Soviet Union. Italy fought side by side with Germany in the Mediterranean, forcing the Allied armies to focus on North Africa instead of on Europe where the real war was raging.

The Japanese were a different story altogether, and they had one goal in mind—to dominate Asia and the Pacific completely. In the early thirties, they invaded Manchuria and went to war with China. Next, they got a stranglehold on the islands of the Pacific and much of Southeast Asia, including Burma, Thailand, and Hong Kong. Then, in 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war. Fortunately, the Allied armies led by the British and the Americans slowed the Japanese down enough to gain an edge in Burma, southern China, and the Pacific Islands.

And when the Germans were finally beaten and called a truce on May 7, 1945, Japan was the only Axis nation left fighting to reach its war goals. They were badly crippled now, pushed back into the upper Pacific, and the small island of Japan was a mere shadow of the military monster that had raised its ugly head some ten years before. But the Japanese were fighting on, and it appeared they were determined to fight to the last man. World newspapers were

all saying that if the Allied nations could not stop them, millions more might have to die in the continuing struggle.

What a mess this world war has become, Chen thought. Power-hungry men had started it for the sake of gaining territory by force, and they were willing to sacrifice countless lives in the process. Only God could fully know the devastation and horror these cruel despots had brought upon our world.

Chen continued down the dusty streets of Shanghai on his way to the business section of town. Until now, he had been working at a shoe factory making boots for soldiers in the army. That had been his job for three years running, since the day he had dropped out of school for good. He had not been old enough to be drafted into the military as a soldier to join the war against Japan—until now. Today he turned eighteen, the magic number that required him to enlist.

Not that he wanted to enlist. He hated the idea of war. War was so violent, cruel, and pathetically senseless! But that didn't mean he wouldn't have to go to war. Young men were more easily trained—a premium in wartime. He might never see action on a battlefield, but then again, he might. Having to carry a gun, master guerilla warfare, or man a tank was not his idea of fun.

But how could he escape his duty? He could just fail to show up at the enlistment stations, or falsify the papers that identified his age, or simply run away where no one could find him. But he knew those weren't real options. Sooner or later, someone would come looking for him, and when they did, it wouldn't be a pretty picture. He had to think long and hard about that one.

Besides, Chen was a Seventh-day Adventist and had been one all his life. Adventists were supposed to be loyal to their country and their God. The principles of the Bible did not allow Christians to become cowards, to run away and hide. Of course, there were always the issues of carrying a gun with intent to kill and Sabbath observance. In the military, he wouldn't have a choice about either one. When a soldier was enlisted, he was supposed to obey his commanding officer. Was Chen willing to carry a gun and use it to kill? That was an easy question for a non-Christian to answer, but for a Seventh-day Adventist, it was different. Chen knew he had been put on this earth to save lives, not take them.

And Sabbath observance? He knew he would never violate the holy Sabbath hours no matter what they did to him—even if they beat him, even if they put him in prison, even if they shot him with a firing squad. Chen didn't want to think about that option.

He just needed to sign up. And that's where he was headed right now—army headquarters. They probably wouldn't call him in for service anyway. There were millions of young men Chen's age. What were the chances he would be selected?

Chen made a beeline to the town's business district. His boss at the shoe

factory had given him the morning off to find the enlistment office, fill out the proper papers, and get his identification.

Eighteen years of age. In Chen's mind, he was still just a boy. His father had told him stories about the Great War, or World War I, as everyone was calling it now. There had been so much senseless bloodshed in that war, and no one had really considered themselves winners. Not even the victors. Nearly two hundred billion dollars had been spent to reshape the countries of Europe and Asia, and as many as thirty-five million people had lost their lives. *What a waste of human life,* Chen thought. That was a lot of money in anyone's book, particularly in the 1940s when everyone was just coming out of a worldwide depression.

The men at the enlistment office were polite enough, though Chen had heard stories about what the army was really like once a soldier got drafted. "We'll send a letter notifying you when and where you must go to serve," the man behind the desk told Chen.

That night, when he got home, Chen's uncle Renshu handed him a letter. Chen's heart skipped a beat. The enlistment officer couldn't possibly be calling him this quickly, could he? He had just signed up today! There was no office address on the outside of the envelope, so he didn't know whom it was from. However, when he tore open the letter, he got the surprise of his life.

"Dear Chen," the letter began. "We would like to invite you to become a Bible worker for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Shanghai. The job will require you to work long hours going door-to-door selling Bibles and other religious books. It will also require you to have a good knowledge of the Bible and be willing to give Bible studies to those who are interested. If this is something you would like to discuss, please contact Pastor Lin David at the Shanghai Seventh-day Adventist Church."

Chen didn't know what to say. He had often wondered what it would be like to work as a Bible worker but never thought he would be chosen for such a task. "Thank you so much for your kind offer," he wrote in a letter in response to Pastor Lin that very night. "I would very much like to become a Bible worker and am willing to begin when you need me. I think I must let you know, however, that I just turned eighteen and could be drafted into the army at any time. I am praying God will let me serve His church rather than the army but am willing to let God lead."

"Don't get your hopes up," his uncle told him as he watched Chen put his return letter into an envelope and address it. "If and when the army calls you, that is a summons you will have to obey. Remember, it is God's will that you obey the laws of our land too, unless, of course, these laws require you to break the commandments of our God."

"Yes, sir," was all Chen could say, but he was very worried now. What if he

was called to serve in the army after all, as his uncle had said? What if he had to go away to war? He would much rather fight in the Lord's army against the forces of darkness than fight in an army against the Japanese.

"Please, Lord," Chen prayed by his bedside that night. "This is a dream come true! Let me serve You as a Bible worker. There are lots of young men my age who would make good soldiers for China, but not many who would be willing to fight the kinds of battles I will be fighting for You with my Bible in hand."

The days ticked by. July came and went, and the sultry days of August soon arrived. Chen quit his job at the shoe factory making boots for soldiers and went to work as a Bible worker for the church in Shanghai. However, any day now he expected to hear from the army enlistment office.

And he watched the papers. News about the war was splashed all over the newspapers every night, and as he read the news articles, he had to wonder what would come next. However, the news he got on the evening of August 6 was not what he was expecting at all.

He was just walking down the steps to the Seventh-day Adventist Church when he saw people running and shouting in the streets. Many were waving newspapers in their hands, and he ran down among them to see what the commotion was all about. "Listen to this!" someone was shouting as he read the lead story, and the noise in the street died away as everyone stopped to listen.

"On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 A.M., the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, totally destroying the city. It is not known how many casualties resulted from the explosion, but the most recent census of Hiroshima lists the population at over eighty thousand. All reports tell us there were no survivors."

Chen leaned against a street lamp to steady himself. What an alarming, surprising turn of events! The Japanese had been dealt a terrible blow, and who could say what would happen now? Would they surrender? Did the Americans have more bombs like this one, and if so, would they drop them on Japan?

No one knew the answers, but three days later, on August 9, the Japanese city of Nagasaki was also bombed, sealing the fate of Japan. World War II would be over now, it was said. China was safe, and that meant Chen was safe. He wouldn't have to serve in the Chinese army to fight battles with guns and grenades. He could serve in the Lord's army instead, fighting the battles of the great controversy between good and evil. That was a war Chen knew he could win. God's church might lose a few battles in the process, but the war was already over the day Jesus died on the cross.

Thank You, Lord, was all he could say as he rode his bicycle home that evening. *God works in mysterious ways to answer our prayers,* Chen thought, but never in his wildest dreams had he expected God to do it in this way.