

10 Bizarre Facts About North Korea

Last month, I wrote a column about North Korea in which I predicted that, sooner or later, the repressive “hermit kingdom” will fling open its doors to Christianity and join the 21st century. Many readers pushed back with strong criticism, either because they don’t trust Kim Jong Un or because they don’t trust President Trump’s negotiating skills.

But I’m sticking to my prediction. I personally believe North Korea’s future is not in the hands of Kim, Trump or any other human. I believe the sovereign Lord of the nations is engineering this miracle because He wants to reach the millions of people who have been starved, oppressed and brainwashed by North Korea’s leaders for too long.

Regardless of what you think of the agreement that was signed by Kim and Trump on June 12 in Singapore, I believe there is cause for genuine celebration. Yes, the details were fuzzy. Yes, there were a lot of what ifs and maybes. But if we step back and study how strange North Korea is—and how backward and barbaric—we would realize that we are witnessing a historic breakthrough.

Consider these bizarre facts about this nation of 25 million:

1. Christians in North Korea have been crushed by steamrollers and roasted over fires. North Korea has the world’s worst record of religious persecution. Christian Solidarity International has reported that believers in Jesus are routinely taken to prison camps where they are tortured, subjected to forced labor or herded off bridges. One source has reported that women and children were forced to watch other Christians being shot by machine guns. Possession of a Bible is considered a crime punishable by death.

(Thankfully, President Trump raised the issue of North Korea's abysmal record on religious freedom when he met with Kim Jong Un this week.)

2. As many as 3 million North Koreans starved in the 1990s. The economy is so poor that more than 6 million people are malnourished today, and one-third of all North Korean children are stunted because of starvation. The average person earns an average of \$1,800 per year, making North Korea one of the poorest countries on earth. Yet it has an army of 1.2 million soldiers—twice the size of South Korea's military.

3. Officially, North Korea is a necrocracy—a government led by a dead man. Even though Kim Il Sung has been dead for 18 years, the government says he assumed “the office of the eternal presidency” on the day of his death, July 8, 1994. His current successor, Kim Jong Un, reportedly had plastic surgery to make him look more like his grandfather.

4. There are 34,000 statues of the late Kim Il Sung in the country. That's one statue for every 750 North Koreans. The dead leader's embalmed body is on display in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, and it is the most popular tourist site in the country. All citizens of North Korea are required to wear a badge that features Kim Il Sung's face.

5. In North Korea, it is not 2018. It is the year 107. The nation uses what is called the “Juche” calendar, which marks time according to the birth of Kim Il Sung in 1912. Any North Koreans who were born on July 8 or December 17 are not allowed to celebrate their birthdays—because Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il, died on those days.

6. The country is called a “democratic republic,” but there is nothing democratic about it. Elections are held every five years, but only one name appears on the ballot. If a voter wishes to choose someone else, he or she can cross the name out, but the ballot is not secret. There is no court system in

North Korea, and no private property.

7. Kim Jong Un's loyal subjects believe he can control the weather. The government's propaganda machine has convinced the population that a new star appeared in the sky when the 34-year-old leader was born. An official biography published by the government also says Kim learned to walk and talk before the age of six months and that he can control the weather with his moods.

8. North Korea is often in a state of blackout. The electric grid is so poor that most people have no light, especially at night. Satellite images taken from space show the entire country in darkness (and tourists say North Koreans love the dark because it gives them privacy). To make matters worse, only three percent of roads are paved—but the roads are rarely used since there are so few vehicles. A very small, elite number of North Koreans have access to the Internet, but all online content is filtered by the government.

9. Children are taught a song in school titled, "We Have Nothing to Envy in the World." Schools are used to brainwash North Koreans from the earliest grades. Yet the kids are expected to bring their own desks and chairs to school, and often students are required to do government work during school hours. Parents sometimes bribe teachers to keep their children from doing hard labor.

10. Citizens of North Korea must produce a certain quantity of human waste. The government requires this because farmers have little or no access to chemical fertilizer. Many citizens have had to place locks on their outdoor toilets to keep neighbors from stealing waste to meet quotas.

Christians are often ridiculed because we believe demons are real and that those devilish powers are working behind the scenes to affect world events. Why is that so hard to believe? I can't understand how anyone can look at the bleak situation

in North Korea and not believe the devil exists.

Thankfully, the Bible also says Christ overcame Satan's power through His death and resurrection—and that God's kingdom will expand wherever the gospel is preached. Because of Christ's victory, swords will be beaten into plowshares, and freedom will replace tyranny. That is what I expect to see in North Korea.