

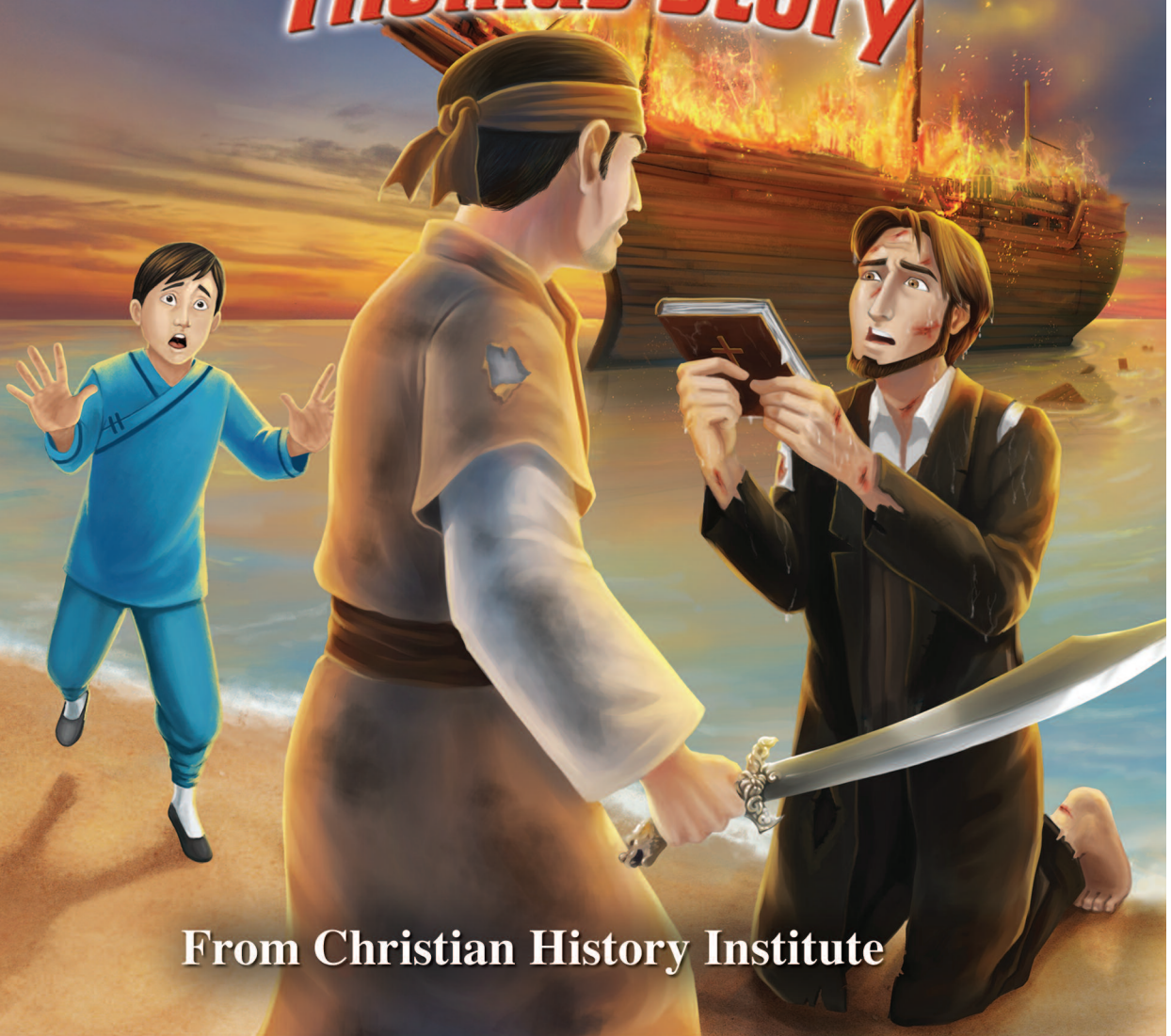


THE TORCHLIGHTERS

HEROES OF THE FAITH

Leader's Guide for the DVD

The *Robert Jermain Thomas Story*



From Christian History Institute

L E A D E R



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Introduction to the *Torchlighters* Series

Torchlighter: *One who commits to serving God
and passing on the light of the Gospel,
even if the going gets tough.*

Kids today have no shortage of heroes. From Hollywood celebrities, to music artists and sports figures, it would seem that there are plenty of heroes to go around. However, the heroes offered by popular culture are teaching children that physical perfection, financial success, and fame are the most important goals in life. The morals and values presented are often in direct opposition to the standards parents want to pass on to their children. So, while there is no shortage of heroes, there is a dreadful shortage of heroes worth emulating.

The *Torchlighters* video series offers children real heroes that they can depend on. These heroes have lived truly great lives marked by moral depth, strength of character, and an unwavering commitment to Christ. By sharing in their struggles and small steps of obedience, we are all challenged to live lives of faith. It is our sincere desire that as children get to know these “torchlighters,” they will be challenged to follow in the footsteps of the greatest torchlighter of them all, Jesus Christ. Learn more about the mission behind this series and find more free resources at:

www.torchlighters.org



Synopsis of *The Torchlighters: The Robert Jermain Thomas Story*

Young Robert Jermain Thomas has given up his dream of bringing the Gospel to the Far East. He and his wife Carrie had set out for China with great faith and vision, but Carrie's sudden illness and death have left Robert consumed with grief. Disillusioned, he gives up his dream of sharing the Gospel and settles into a job in the U.S. customs office, where he continues to develop his uncanny gift for new languages.



Robert Jermain Thomas and his friend, the Korean fisherman, distribute Bibles secretly in Korea.

Meanwhile, the nearby kingdom of Korea is earning the name “the Hermit Kingdom.” Korea wants nothing to do with foreigners or their ideas and goods. Christians (even those who were born in Korea) are especially in danger. Yet a flicker of faith remains as a few believers bravely follow the Lord.

Finally Robert's passion for sharing the Gospel reignites when he meets a few Christian fishermen from Korea. With their help Robert is able to smuggle some Bibles into the Hermit Kingdom. His dream brought back to life, Robert eagerly looks for a way to get even more Bibles into Korea.

The commercial ship the *General Sherman* seems like an answer to prayer. The ship intends to break through Korea's shell to bring in material goods for profit. When the captain invites Robert along as a translator and allows him to bring crates of Bibles to distribute, Robert seizes the opportunity despite the great risk.

When the *General Sherman* fires on the Koreans, Robert knows the end is near. In his last moments, Robert frantically gives away all the Bibles he can. It would be years before the world would come to know the great impact of Robert's brave act. Today the Word of God shines brightly in South Korea, a nation once steeped in darkness.



Teaching Plan for *The Robert Jermain Thomas Story*

In the Hermit Kingdom of 19th century Korea, all doors to the West are closed, and claiming Christ means certain death. Robert Jermain Thomas is willing to do anything to bring the light of Jesus into this dark land. As they follow his dangerous mission, children will learn the true nature of Christ's sacrificial love and how it is found in the hearts of His people. Our overall theme of light shining in darkness will carry throughout the four lessons with select New Testament stories and verses. Follow these easy steps to get the most out of this episode of *The Torchlighters*!

1. PREVIEW *The Robert Jermain Thomas Story* before showing it to your students. This will help you to recognize the major themes and teachable moments that occur throughout the video, while equipping you to answer student questions. Our theme for this series is *Light Shines in Darkness*. Four sub-themes will be explored:

- **Lesson 1: A People Living in Darkness** — Without Jesus, all of mankind lives in darkness.
- **Lesson 2: A Light Shines** — God's Word reveals the truth and good news about Jesus.
- **Lesson 3: Jesus Is the Light** — Only Jesus is the true Light that saves us from darkness and gives us the light of life.
- **Lesson 4: Shine Your Light** — Our lives must be lights that reflect the one true Light.

2. REVIEW the Supplementary Information. Become more informed on this true story by reading through *Key People* on p. 16, *The Hermit Kingdom* on p. 17, and the *Timeline* on p. 18. On your DVD you will also find *Servant of Christ*, an informative documentary giving important and interesting background information.

3. SELECT and PREPARE Teaching Material. Our four lesson plans are designed to lead children on a faith journey with Robert Thomas. Along the way, they will learn how the Light of Christ breaks in on our spiritual darkness. Feel free to mix and match the material to best suit your group and the time available. All material is reproducible and designed to help children apply the teaching themes.

NOTE: Special supplies are needed for activities in each session. To help your group understand how all Christians can be shining lights for Christ, we encourage you to assign the "Lights of the World Interview" found on p. 10 of the Student Pages after completing session 2. You can also invite a guest speaker to present to your group. You will have time for your guest speaker or for students to share their interview experiences in session 3.

4. VISIT www.torchlighters.org. The materials in this guide and the Student Pages are just the beginning. Visit our website for other free resources, such as unique ministry ideas, publicity posters, interactive Kids Zone, and the "Carry the Torch" theme song, craft, and relay! If you are planning a teaching series based on *The Torchlighters*, consider using the theme song, craft, and relay as part of an introductory session focused on the question, "What is a Torchlighter?"

Are you planning a *Torchlighters* showing or event? Publicity is easy when you download free posters at www.torchlighters.org.



Session 1 – A People Living in Darkness

FOCUS: Without Jesus, all mankind lives in spiritual darkness.

THEME VERSE: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Ephesians 5:8

- **PREPARE:** Use the information on p. 17 of the Leader's Guide to give students a feel for Korea as the “Hermit Kingdom.” Also find “Julie's Story” on pp. 4-5 of the Student Pages. Display a map or globe with Korea marked. You can also enhance this or any lesson with one or more of the Korean dishes found on pp. 25-27 of the Student Pages.

Gather a flashlight, paper with the theme verse written on it, and tape or a pin to hang it somewhere in the room. Print enough invitations on p. 8 of the Leader's Guide for each one of your students. Purchase 11" latex balloons, one per person. Also purchase smaller party size balloons and have two laundry baskets for **BALLOON POP RELAY**.

- **GAME—ROBOT SIMON SAYS:** Tell your group that you are going to play “Simon Says” but with a twist: they have to do and say everything like a robot. If anyone fails to do exactly what Simon says or does not do it as a robot, send them to “jail.” Give silly commands in your best robot voice. For example: “Walk to the window; Jump on one foot; Say ‘I am a robot’ three times fast.” Continue until most students have been sent to “jail.”

SAY: What would you do if you had to act like a robot every day or be punished? That's what life is like in North Korea today. Let's talk about the kingdom of Korea.

- **TEACH—A LAND OF DARKNESS, KOREA:** Allow your group to explore the Korean items, resources, or food dishes you have brought and prepared. Give a brief overview of Korea during Robert's lifetime (p. 17 of Leader's Guide) and then read “Julie's Story” on pp. 4-5 of the Student Pages.

SAY: About a century ago, Korea was called “The Hermit Kingdom” because they shut their borders to the entire world. They wanted to keep the influence of other nations away from their people. The Korean leaders thought outside ideas were dangerous and would ruin their way of life. And do you know who they wanted to keep out more than anyone in the world? Christians. The leaders of Korea did not want the message about Jesus to spread. So they sent all the outsiders away to keep Christians out, and even killed many of their own people who believed in Jesus! Because of this, the people of Korea were a people kept in spiritual darkness, and families like Julie's are punished for seeking God's Light. Today, we're going to talk about what that means.

- **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME:** Ask for a volunteer from your group to hold the flashlight. When you have chosen a volunteer, ask the entire group to close their eyes. While their eyes are closed, hang Ephesians 5:8 somewhere in the room and then turn off the lights and close the shades to make the room as dark as possible. Instruct the group to open their eyes.



SAY: Somewhere in this dark room there is something very important you need to find. The only way to find it is to shine the light on it!

When the volunteer shines the flashlight on the theme verse, read it aloud and invite the class into your Bible area for discussion. Turn on the lights! Look at the verse in Ephesians in context (vs. 1-13, shorten to 3b-13 for younger students.)

ASK: What does it mean to be in darkness? Who is in darkness? What is the good news of verse 8? What must we first do to become children of Light?

SAY: Verse 13 says, "everything exposed by the light becomes visible." Can you see anything if it is dark? What does a light do to the darkness?

- **PREVIEW THE ROBERT JERMAIN THOMAS STORY:** *SAY: Romans 10:14b says, "How are they [people in darkness] to hear [the Gospel] without someone preaching?" There are many people who haven't heard the good news about Jesus because they need someone to tell them. Next week, we will watch a 30-minute video about the missionary Robert J. Thomas, who wanted to bring the light of the Gospel to a people trapped in darkness. Here is a short clip of the video we will see next week. Can you guess what country Robert went to?*

Play short preview clip at beginning of DVD.

- **PROJECT—INVITATION BALLOONS:** Give each person in your group a deflated balloon and an invitation strip, cut from p. 8. Allow them to color and decorate the invitation as they please.

SAY: There are still parts of the world that are trapped in darkness. But, when Christians cannot get into those places, they have thought of some creative ways to share the Gospel. Did you know that missionaries sometimes use balloons to get the good news into a closed country? They use helium balloons to float scripture through the air and to the people who need them! Today, we're going to hide our invitations in a balloon.

Instruct your students to carefully roll up their invitations into a narrow tube shape that can fit into a deflated balloon. After they insert the invitation into the balloon, guide them in blowing them up and tying off the end. Encourage students to give the balloon to a friend they would like to invite to the next session. The friend will retrieve their invitation by popping the balloon!

- **GAME—BALLOON POP RELAY:** Separate your group into two teams and organize each team into a line. Place the laundry baskets about 10 yards in front of each team. On your signal, each team will send one member to retrieve a balloon from the baskets, bring back to the group and pop by sitting on the balloon. Once the balloon is popped the team send their next member. The team who pops all their balloons first wins.
- **CLOSING PRAYER:** *Dear Jesus, thank You for saving us from living in darkness. We know that there are still many people in the world who are in darkness and do not know You. We pray that You would use us to reach them with the good news about You. Amen.*

Balloon Pop Invitations

(Copy and cut into strips for the balloon invitation project.)

Congratulations on popping this secret message balloon!

You are invited to a see the **Torchlighters Robert Jermain Thomas Story**
on _____ at _____ .

Congratulations on popping this secret message balloon!

You are invited to a see the **Torchlighters Robert Jermain Thomas Story**
on _____ at _____ .

Congratulations on popping this secret message balloon!

You are invited to a see the **Torchlighters Robert Jermain Thomas Story**
on _____ at _____ .

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on _____ at _____ .

Congratulations on popping this secret message balloon!

You are invited to a see the **Torchlighters Robert Jermain Thomas Story**
on _____ at _____ .

Congratulations on popping this secret message balloon!

You are invited to a see the **Torchlighters Robert Jermain Thomas Story**
on _____ at _____ .



Session 2 – A Light Shines

FOCUS: View *The Robert Jermain Thomas Story* and consider how God's Word reveals the truth and good news about Jesus.

THEME VERSE: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path." Psalm 119:105

- **PREPARE:** Be sure to have all the equipment necessary to show *Torchlighters: The Robert Jermain Thomas Story*.
- **REVIEW:** Re-introduce concepts about the Hermit Kingdom of Korea learned last session and what it means to be in darkness.
- **ACTIVITY—BREAK IN!:** Ask for a volunteer and have him/her stand to one side. Tell the group to make a circle, forming a chain by linking each arm into the arm of a student on either side and clasping his/her own hands in front of him. The group can then move around in a circle or stay in one place while the volunteer tries to break the chain and get into the circle. Once the volunteer breaks the chain, he/she can pick anyone to take his/her place.
- **INTRODUCE THE VIDEO:** SAY: *Imagine our circle was an entire country, trying to keep everyone else out. How hard would it be to break in? Our faith hero Robert Thomas was one person who tried to "break in" to the Hermit Kingdom of Korea and share a very special treasure with them. As we watch the video, look for the "treasure" that Robert and other Christians before him bring to Korea, and think about this question: How much is this treasure worth?*
- **SHOW** the 30-minute program *The Torchlighters: The Robert Jermain Thomas Story*.
- **STUDENT QUESTIONS:** Allow students time to process the video and ask questions about flow and content.
- **FURTHER DISCUSSION:** Lead discussion using appropriate questions from the "Dig into the Story" on p. 6 in the Student Pages. For further questions, direct your students to p. 7 to "Dig Deeper."
- **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME:** Invite your students to play the flashlight game as in the first session, using this week's theme verse Psalm 119:105. Make sure you hang up the theme verse after the students close their eyes. Head to your Bible area and read Psalm 119:105-112.

ASK: *What does it mean for God's Word to be lamp for someone's feet? Why is that important? (It means that God's Word is like a light that helps us see the right way to go so that we do not stumble.)*

SAY: *This Psalm was written by King David. During this time Saul was trying to kill David for being chosen as King instead of him. How is David feeling at this time? How does God's Word—His commands, laws, and promises—encourage David?*



Even though there are a lot of bad things happening to David, his “heart is set on keeping [God’s] decrees to the very end. Why? What do we gain from relying on the light of God’s Word?”

ASK: Are these promises and encouragements still true for people who lose their lives for the Gospel, like Robert? How? What hope do Christians have because of God’s Word?

- **ACTIVITY:** “Hidden Bibles,” found on p. 8 of the Student Pages.
- **PARENT LETTER:** Distribute this letter to help parents understand the lessons you are sharing in class (p. 15 in Leader’s Guide).
- **CLOSING PRAYER:** *Dear Jesus, We thank You that Your word shines in even the darkest places. Thank You that we can trust the Bible to show us the truth always. Please help us to keep Your word close to our hearts. Amen.*
- **PLANNING AHEAD:** Gather needed supplies for the “Bible Braid” Keepsake Craft on pp. 13-14. Prepare for the “Lights of the World Interview” by inviting a Korean Christian to share about his/her experiences. If you decide not to invite a guest, ask your group to complete this activity on their own by interviewing any Christian that they know. Direct your group to the questions provided on p. 10 of the Student Pages to complete the interview, and ask them to be ready to share during session 3.

NOTE: Refer to the answer key on p. 20 for answers to selected Student Pages.



Session 3 – Jesus Is the Light

FOCUS: Only Jesus is the true Light that saves us from darkness and gives us the light of life.

THEME VERSE: “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” John 8:12

- **PREPARE:** For the “Bible Braid Keepsake Craft,” gather yarn or thick string, copies of the template on p. 14 of the Student Pages, and clips or rings for each of your students. Prepare the Scripture verse John 8:12 for **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME**.

Ask your guest to come prepared to share his or her testimony and discuss the current state of the Korean church and what life is like in both North and South Korea for the “Lights of the World Interview.”

- **REVIEW:** Use p. 9 in the Student Pages (“Story Mix Up”) to review the story of Robert Jermain Thomas. Encourage the class to share the important details of the story, focusing on what they know about Robert’s life and legacy. Encourage your guest to ask questions of the students as they review the story.
- **LIGHTS OF THE WORLD INTERVIEW:** Invite your guest to share what he or she has prepared for the class. Allow plenty of time for questions and encourage your students to use the interview on p. 10 of the Student Pages for more discussion questions. Alternatively, have each student share what he/she learned from personal interviews conducted before the session. For either choice, be sure to leave plenty of time for sharing.
- **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME:** Invite the class into the Bible center for Bible time. Ask them to review what was discussed the last two sessions. Play the flashlight game with John 8:12 and then read the verse.

SAY: Our interview time gave us a good look into what it means to shine light into darkness. Christians everywhere can be a witness to the one true Light. Let’s read our theme verse again.

READ: John 8:12.

ASK: What does Jesus say about himself in this verse? What does it mean that Jesus is the Light of the world? (Look at John 1:4-5, 9 for further reference)

SAY: In this book of the Bible, John writes about several important statements that Jesus makes about himself that all begin with the words “I am.” This may sound unimportant to you or me, but to the Jewish people whom Jesus was speaking with, saying “I am” like Jesus did was a big deal. It all goes back to Exodus 3:13-14, when Moses speaks to God out of the burning bush. God is telling Moses to be the voice for His people and to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But Moses says, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to



you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I tell them?” (13). So God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM.** This is what you are to say to the Israelites: **I AM** has sent me to you.” This phrase, “**I AM**”, is where we get God’s name, Yahweh, from.

ASK: When Jesus says **I AM** the Light, what do you think He is telling the Jews? (That He is the great **I AM**; He is **YAHWEH**!) Look at John 1:1-3. How does that confirm what he says in John 8:12? Why is it so important that Jesus is also God? How is Jesus the Light of the world? How does He give us the light of life?

SAY: One way we see that Jesus is the Light of the world is just how much the good news about Him changed Korea. Many Koreans who read the Bible pages left from Robert’s sacrifice believed that only Jesus could give us the light of life. Today, one third of South Koreans say they are Christians, and the nation of South Korea sends more missionaries to the world than any other country except the United States! What a change from the Hermit Kingdom! Can you think of other examples of how the Gospel changes lives?

- **KEEPSAKE CRAFT:** Braid a Bible Rope—refer students to pp. 13-14 in their Student Pages for templates and instructions. Make sure each student has two pieces of yarn/string for their ropes and clip or ring.
- **WHO IS THE LIGHT?** Lead students to complete the “Who Is the Light?” worksheet on p. 11 of the Student Pages.
- **CLOSING PRAYER:** *Jesus, You are the great I AM and one true Light in the world. Thank You for coming to earth to pay for our sins with Your perfect life. Help us to live in Your light and not walk in darkness. Amen.*
- **PLANNING AHEAD:** Look ahead to next week’s “Shining Light” craft and the skit “Never Alone” for materials you will need beforehand.

NOTE: Refer to the answer key on p. 20 for answers to selected Student Pages.



Session 4 – Shine Your Light

FOCUS: Our lives must be lights that reflect the one true Light.

THEME VERSE: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

- **PREPARE:** For the **SHINING LIGHT CANDLE CRAFT**, gather enough votive candles for each student (battery operated candles are recommended), construction paper or card stock, tape or glue, and toothpicks. Also prepare Matthew 5:16 as the theme verse for **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME**. For the **NEWS BROADCAST SKIT**, refer to p. 16 in the Student Pages for necessary props and for **NEVER ALONE** activity, review the information on p. 20 of the Student Pages. Bring a camera, colored pencils, or anything else that will help personalize the letters.
- **CRAFT—SHINING LIGHT CANDLE CRAFT:** Use the instructions on p. 15 of the Student Pages to complete this project. If time is short, cut out the paper before class so that it wraps perfectly around the votive cylinder. NOTE: Paper should not stick up above the glass rim, as this is a fire hazard. Battery operated candles are recommended. Students will lightly trace the word JESUS on the paper and will then poke pinholes on the lines for the letters. When the students are finished, the candle light should shine through the word JESUS.
- **SHINE THE LIGHT BIBLE TIME:** Play the flashlight game before inviting your group to your Bible area.

READ: Matthew 5:14-16.

DISCUSS: *Often Jesus will speak in parables. What is a parable? Why does Jesus use parables in his teaching? What parable does Jesus tell in this passage?*

SAY: *Jesus tells his disciples in this parable that they are the light of the world. Being a light means that you will be seen, especially in the darkness. Imagine a town on a hill at night—because it is lifted up and lit up, people for miles around would be able to see the city. In Jesus' time, a town on a hill was usually a place of great protection and safety. Being able to see the town would bring hope to those outside trying to get to it, much like lighthouses on the shore help guide ships to safety in a bad storm. In the same way, it doesn't make sense to put a lit lamp under a basket.*

ASK: *What is Jesus really talking about here? (How believers should live as light in a dark world, and how that light should be easy to see.)*

SAY: *Jesus is talking about spiritual light and spiritual darkness. If you remember from our last lesson, Jesus says that He is the Light of the world. As the Light of the world, only He has the power to give the light of life and to save people from spiritual darkness. But when we know Jesus and follow Him, we also reflect His light—and He uses us to shine for Him.*



DISCUSS: What does this mean for you personally? How can we shine our lights and show the world that Jesus is the Light of life?

- **SKIT—NEWS BROADCAST “NEVER ALONE”:** Choose several of your students to perform this skit found on pp. 16-19 of the Student Pages.
- **ACTIVITY—NEVER ALONE: LETTERS TO PRISONERS PROJECT:** See instructions on p. 20 of the Student Pages.
- **PRAYER:** *Lord Jesus, we thank You for being the Light of the world and saving us from our sins. Now help us shine as lights in this world and bring the Good News to everyone we meet. Amen.*

NOTE: Refer to the answer key on p. 20 for answers to selected Student Pages.

Dear Parents,

Today in Sunday school your child viewed a *Torchlighters* DVD depicting the life of Robert Jermain Thomas, the first Protestant missionary to “The Hermit Kingdom” of Korea. Robert Jermain Thomas was a promising Welsh minister with a gift for learning new languages and a desire to bring the Gospel to the Far East in 1863.

But when tragedy struck in China, Robert lost all hope and direction. That is, until two fishermen from the isolated Kingdom of Korea came into his life. With renewed purpose, Robert set out to bring God’s Word to the lost people of Korea, but he soon learned that the cost would be great. With his last breath, Robert gave a Bible to his Korean executioners, praying it would bring light into this dark land.

In our class time we will focus on the theme “Light Shines in Darkness” and explore how Korea was changed through Robert’s sacrifice. We hope this experience is meaningful for your child. If you have any questions or comments, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,



Key People in the R. J. Thomas Story

ROBERT JERMAIN THOMAS (1839-1866) A gifted young minister with a talent for mastering foreign languages, born in Wales. At 24 and newly ordained, he and his new wife, Carrie, set out for China as missionaries. When Carrie died unexpectedly, Robert eventually refocused his energy on Korea's need for Bibles. Robert is known today for his bold act of faith in delivering Bibles to Korea amid great danger. He is considered the first martyred Protestant missionary to Korea.

CAROLINE "CARRIE" THOMAS Married Robert J. Thomas in 1863 and eagerly set sail to Shanghai, China as a missionary soon after. Within five months of their arrival, Carrie died of a miscarriage. At the time of her death, Robert was in a different town seeking new accommodations for her and their expected child. Her death, along with a disagreement with the missionary agency, led Robert to abandon missionary work for a time.

THE "HERMIT KINGDOM" At the time of our story, Korea was known as the "Hermit Kingdom" for its refusal to trade with outsiders. It was opposed to any western influence and murdered both foreign and native-born Christians.

FISHERMEN Two Korean merchants that were secret Christians. Robert met these men at the home of Alexander Williamson of the National Bible Society of Scotland in Peking, China. The two helped Robert see the great need for Bibles in Korea.

CAPTAIN PAGE The North American captain of the Sherman who offered Robert the invitation to journey to Korea on his ship in exchange for his translation services.

GOVERNOR PARK The governor of the province. The character in our animation is representative of two different historical figures. Governor Park ordered the attack on the Sherman and also ordered Robert J. Thomas to be executed. He unwittingly preserved the Scriptures by hanging them on his trophy wall.

LEE, THE CHIEF OF POLICE During the standoff, the chief boarded the Sherman and tried to convince the Captain to leave the shores of Korea. Captain Page took him as prisoner, prompting the attack on the Sherman.

CHOI (PRONOUNCED CHE) CHU RYAN As a child, Choi saw the murder of Catholic Jesuit priests and Korean-born Christians. Choi secretly received a Bible from Robert J. Thomas during his missionary journey. Since possession of a Bible was against the law, it was confiscated to Choi's great dismay. When the government power shifted, Choi purchased the Governor's old home. There he found the Scripture pages on the walls and by their words, was converted to faith in Christ.

SAMUEL A. MOFFETT Nearly 24 years after the General Sherman disaster, Samuel Moffett arrived in Korea as a missionary. There he met eye-witnesses to the battle, who described a man on the burning boat, throwing Bibles overboard and shouting, "Jesus!" One of those Bibles was used as a wallpaper trophy, and many Koreans who later read these pages became believers themselves.



The Hermit Kingdom

Government

The “Hermit Kingdom” as it is remembered today refers to pre-modern Korea, or the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) in the 19th century. During Robert Jermain Thomas’s lifetime, the dynasty was waning in power and already wary of foreigners due to earlier invasions from Japan and Manchuria, as well as European imperialistic conquests occurring on Chinese lands.

It was during this time that King Gojong took the throne (1863), and his father, Regent Heungseon Daewongun, ruled for him until he reached adulthood. A strong leader in a time of crisis, Regent Daewongun increasingly imposed isolationist policies in an effort to keep the West from taking advantage of Korea and seizing power. Consequently, all things Western were seen as an assault on the nation’s identity. Both foreign and native-born Christians were persecuted and annihilated. This was seen most dramatically in the beheading of Catholic Jesuit priests.

Politics

The Hermit Kingdom was a monarchy. The king ruled with absolute authority, but with advice from the State Council. On a local level, Korea was divided into eight provinces, each ruled by a governor. It is Governor Park who ordered Robert’s execution and then unintentionally preserved the scripture in Korea by hanging its pages on his wall as a trophy.

Religion

The philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, which emphasizes morality, righteousness, and practical ethics, was the predominant religion.

Culture

As with many cultures of the time, the Hermit Kingdom consisted of a class system. However, increasing social mobility and new emerging commercial groups led to a weakening of the old hierarchy of the early/middle Joseon dynasty. Confucian principles governed social etiquette.

Korea Today

Presently, Korea is divided into two nations: the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). North Korea is a Communist dictator-led state that keeps most of its citizens isolated from the rest of the world. Believed to have the worst human rights record in the world, North Korea systematically and brutally oppresses anyone deemed hostile to the regime through public executions and prison camps. Christianity in North Korea exists secretly, except for four “show churches” operated by the state for propaganda purposes when tourists visit. Of the estimated 100,000 underground believers, more than one third are imprisoned.

By way of contrast, South Korea is a democratic republic whose citizens enjoy religious and personal freedom. One third of South Koreans are Christians, and the country is the second largest missionary-sending nation in the world.

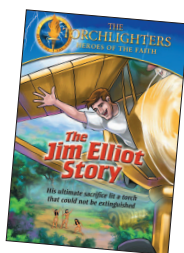


Robert Jermain Thomas's Timeline

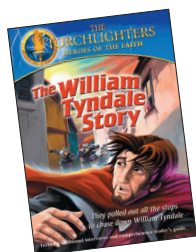
1839	Robert Jermain Thomas is born in Rhayadar, South Wales (UK).
1863, June 4	Robert is ordained at Hanover Chapel to become a missionary with the London Missionary Society (LMS).
July 21	Robert and his new wife Caroline (Carrie) head to Shanghai on the <i>Polmaise</i> .
1864, Mar 24	Carrie Thomas dies five months after arriving in Shanghai from complications of a miscarriage.
1864	Frustrated with LMS, Robert quits and begins work as a customs officer. His ability to speak several languages and the ease with which he learns new ones makes this an ideal job for him.
1865	Robert meets two Korean fishermen, who are secretly Christians. They agree to ferry him to Korea to distribute Chinese Bibles. Robert begins to study the Korean language.
1865, Sept 13	Robert lands on Paik Yon Island and distributes Bibles for several months.
1866, Aug 9	Robert takes a job on the <i>General Sherman</i> , an American trade ship, as an interpreter. Though his primary responsibility is as a translator, Robert hopes for opportunities to bring the Gospel to the Korean people.
1866, Aug 15	<i>General Sherman</i> arrives at the mouth of the Taedong River and sails up the coast of Korea with goods. Robert tosses gospels onto the river bank. Over the coming days the ship is warned repeatedly to turn back.
1866, Aug 25	The ship's crew kidnaps a Korean official and takes two others as hostages.
1866, Aug 31	<i>General Sherman</i> fires cannons and guns at Korean civilians; Governor Gyu-Su Park declares war with the vessel.
1866, Sept 3-5	<i>General Sherman</i> runs aground near Pyongyang; Koreans attack with a burning boat. The entire crew is killed; Robert escapes from the ship but is captured and executed.
Unknown date	Convicted that he had killed a good man, Robert's executioner keeps one of the Bibles brought ashore by Robert. The governor uses it as wallpaper in his house. The home is later sold and becomes the first house church near the Eastern Gate in Pyongyang.
1890	Samuel Austin Moffett arrives in Korea and learns the story and impact of Robert Jermain Thomas through eyewitnesses.
1907	Revival breaks out in Pyongyang and the church grows in Korea.



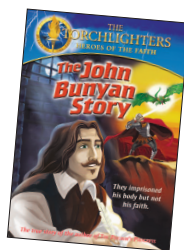
The Torchlighters: Heroes of the Faith Series



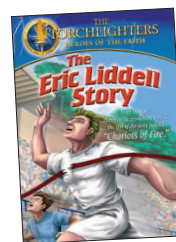
JIM ELLIOT
Missionary
to Ecuador



**WILLIAM
TYNDALE**
Bible Translator



JOHN BUNYAN
Author of *The
Pilgrim's Progress*



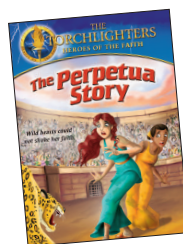
ERIC LIDDELL
Olympian
and Missionary



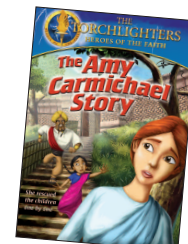
GLADYS AYLWARD
Missionary
to China



**RICHARD
WURMBRAND**
Founder of The
Voice of the Martyrs



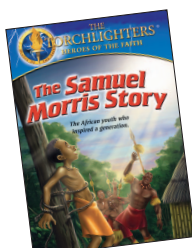
PERPETUA
Early Church
Martyr



AMY CARMICHAEL
Missionary to India



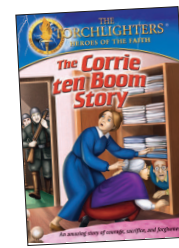
WILLIAM BOOTH
Founder of
The Salvation Army



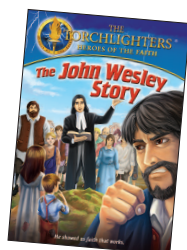
SAMUEL MORRIS
Prince Turned
Missionary



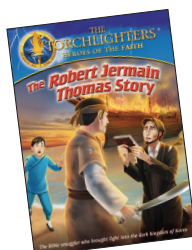
AUGUSTINE
Early Church
Theologian



CORRIE TEN BOOM
Rescuer During
World War II



JOHN WESLEY
Founder of the
Methodist Movement



ROBERT JERMAIN THOMAS
Bible Smuggler
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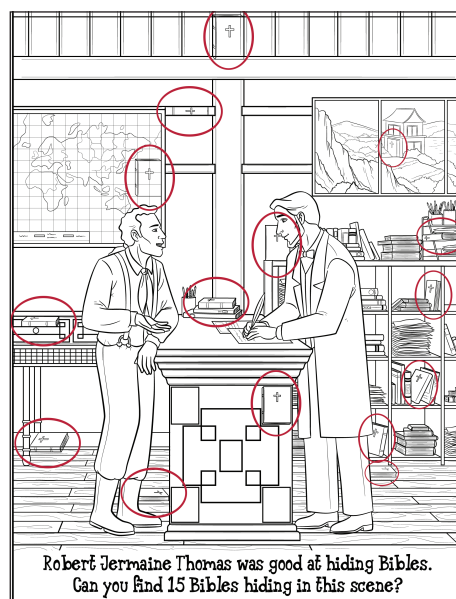


Answer Key for Select Student Pages

Wisdom from Ephesians, p. 3

For you were once darkness,
but now you are light
in the Lord.
Live as children of light.

Hidden Bible Activity Page, p. 8



Story Mix-Up, p. 9

Story Mix-Up
These pictures of Robert Jermain Thomas's story are all mixed up.
Number the pictures in the correct order.

2 After Carrie's unexpected death, Robert works in the customs office.	7 Robert gives away his last Bible just before losing his life.
8 Years later the torn pages of the Bible are read on the wall.	4 Robert gives Bibles to Koreans.
5 The Korean government decrees that foreigners are not allowed.	3 Christian Korean fishermen help Robert sneak Bibles into Korea.
1 Robert J. Thomas and his wife Carrie are eager to share the Gospel in China.	6 Robert brings more Bibles to Korea, but the ship is attacked.

Who Is The Light? p. 11

I am who I am
YAHWEH
Jesus