

Concise church biographies

Bakht Singh

Bakht Singh was one of the most powerful Christian church leaders and evangelists in modern history and certainly the foremost Indian evangelist and apostle (church planter); and yet is largely unknown in the West today. In India he was known as 'Elijah of the 20st century' or 'Brother Bakht Singh'.

Bakht Singh Chabra came from a Sikh family and was born in 1903 in the Punjab (now part of Pakistan). Despite despising Christians and tearing up a Bible, he was educated in a missionary school but was very involved in the Sikh temple doing social work. He graduated from university and went to agricultural college in England in 1926.

He was influenced by the louche English society and became hedonistic – drinking, smoking and partying round Europe. He even cut his long hair, which is a strict requirement of the Sikh religion. In 1929 he went to the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg studying agricultural engineering. Here he lived with a Christian couple (John and Edith Hayward) who gave him a Bible and read portions and prayed at every evening meal. Bakht Singh began to read the Bible and went to church. Eventually he heard the voice of the Lord, was convicted of his sin, became a Christian and was baptised in Vancouver in 1932.

In 1933 he returned to India. His parents knew of his conversion by letter and reluctantly accepted his conversion, but asked him to keep it a secret. Bakht Singh refused to do this and so they left him homeless in Mumbai. He immediately began to preach the Gospel in the streets and gained huge crowds. His style was a fiery, powerful speaker spreading the message throughout India in preaching tours. Initially he was associated with the Anglican Church, working as an evangelist, but later became an independent.

In 1937 there was a revival that deeply affected the Martinbur United Presbyterian Church which spread into one of the most powerful awakenings in Indian church history. Singh had a very important role in this. He initiated new local church assemblies based upon NT principles, after spending a night in prayer on a mountain in 1941. This eventually led to a worldwide NT church movement and planting more than 10,000 new churches in India.

He also held a convocation based upon Lev 23, in Chennai, which turned into annual conventions in Madras and Hyderabad in the south and Ahmedabad and Kalimpong in the North. 25,000 people would gather in Hyderabad where teaching meetings began at dawn and ended at night. Praise and prayer would last many hours. Volunteers provided food and care while costs were met by freewill offerings without any appeals. Singh also preached in other parts of SE Asia.

Singh not only was a powerful, knowledgeable teacher, but many sick people were genuinely healed when he prayed for them, including deaf and dumb victims.

Singh died in his sleep on 17 September in 2000 at Hydreabad and was buried in Narayanguda. Nearly 250,000 people attended his funeral.

'Brother Bakht Singh is an Indian equivalent of the greater Western evangelists, as skilful as Finney and as direct as Dwight L. Moody. He is a first-class Bible teacher of the order of G. Campbell Morgan or Graham Scroggie'. J. Edwin Orr (revival evangelist and scholar).