CHAPTER 1

MALAYSIA

According to the historical records, Malaysia meant “The Golden Country”. Thus, the ancient West named the Malay Peninsula as the “Golden Peninsula”. However, Malaysia did not possess much gold, although it became famous for producing tin and rubber, and was once called the “tin and rubber country of the world”.

About Malaysia

Located in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society. The capital city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur while Putrajaya is the seat of the federal administration. The country consists of two main parts, which are separated by the South China Sea. West Malaysia, also known as the Malay Peninsula, borders Thailand in the north and Singapore in the south. With the Straits of Johor between them, the island nation is connected to the peninsula via the Johor-Singapore Causeway and the Second Link. East Malaysia is situated in the northwestern part of the Borneo Island, with Kalimantan as her southeastern neighbour while Brunei is sandwiched between the two East Malaysian states, Sabah and Sarawak. Since Malaysia is right next to the equator, its climate is tropical in nature. The coastal region is flat for the most part, while the middle portions are mainly mountain ranges covered with dense tropical rain forests.
History

In the Malay Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak, archeological artifacts dating back 40,000 years have been unearthed. The findings suggest that hunters from the Stone Age could be the earliest settlers of the peninsula, very possibly the ancestors of the Semang people. The Semang are the short black aboriginals belonging to the Negrito tribe. Furthermore, in the mid-1950s, archaeologists found a human skull dating back 40,000 years in the Niah Cave, Sarawak. All these discoveries are evidence of human settlement in pre-historic Malaysia.

Since ancient times, ships from China, India and other faraway places have been plying the Straits of Malacca. The Malay Peninsula is thus a major trade centre in Southeast Asia. Many ancient kingdoms were founded along the coast of the peninsula, including Lembah Bujang in the state of Kedah, and Beruas in the state of Perak.

The history of pre-independence Malaysia can be divided into four periods based on external impact. The first period marked the influence of Indian civilization. From the 7th to the 14th century, when Srivijaya was at her peak, her influence expanded to Sumatra, Java, the Malay Peninsula and a large part of Borneo. The second phase saw the rise of Islamic civilisation which coincided with the decline of Srivijaya. Islam began to take root in the Malay Peninsula after the collapse of Srivijaya. Subsequently, many Islamic sultanates were established,
among which the Malacca Sultanate was the most prominent. While Islamic culture has had a profound and lasting influence on the Malays, it has also been shaped by Malay culture. European colonial powers made their presence felt in the third phase, beginning with the Portuguese who occupied Malacca in 1511 and established their colonial influence, followed by the Dutch and then the British. In the fourth phase, new migrants started to arrive. In order to meet the demands of economic development, the colonists brought in many migrant laborers from China and India to clear and cultivate the land.

Prior to the 14th century, the Malay Peninsula was deeply influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. In the 15th century, Parameswara established the Kingdom of Malacca. In 1641, Malacca was seized by the Dutch who ruled the kingdom for 154 years. In 1786, with the support of the British East India Company, Penang was founded and developed into a military and commercial centre. However, Penang was soon superseded by Singapore which was founded in 1819. The British signed a treaty with the Dutch in 1824, and took over Malacca from the latter. In 1826, the British formed the Straits Settlements and began to expand their influence in the Malay Peninsula.

The Straits Settlements included Penang, Singapore and Malacca, which came under the direct rule of the Colonial Office in London in 1867. At that time, many Malay state rulers began to seek
British help to resolve their internal conflicts. Beginning from 1867, some Malay states in the Malay Peninsula came under British protection. The traders in the Straits Settlements actually called for British intervention in the internal affairs of the tin-rich Malay states. This, coupled with the complications created by the factional struggles of Chinese secret societies, led to the signing of the Pangkor Engagement in 1874. British influence in the Malay Peninsula was thus strengthened.

During the Second World War, the Japanese occupied the Malay Peninsula. The aftermath of the Japanese Occupation and the post-war Communist Insurgency prompted more and more people to call for the independence of Malaya. In 1946, the British government set up the Malayan Union in an attempt to protect its interests. More than a decade later, the three main ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese and Indian – formed an alliance to demand for independence from the British. Finally, the Federation of Malaya was established on 31 August 1957 as an independent nation.

According to legends, the Yuan Dynasty of China set up the District of Kinabatangan in the North Borneo State (modern day Sabah) in the 12th century. The word “kina” means China. This apparently gave rise to the legend concerning Mount Kinabalu (also known as the Chinese Widow Mountain). Brunei, the Sulu Kingdom of southern Philippines and Britain occupied the North
Borneo State at different times during the 17th century. It became a British colony from 1882 onward.

Actually, before the 18th century, the entire Borneo state belonged to the Kingdom of Brunei. In 1841, circumstances enabled a British to become the ruler (Rajah) of Sarawak and his family ruled the state for 105 years. Later on, Sarawak was briefly occupied by the Japanese. In 1946, Britain took over Sarawak as a colony. On 16 September 1963, Sarawak, Sabah, Singapore and the Federation of Malaya came together to form a new nation: Malaysia. However, Singapore left the federation to assume independence on 9 August 1965.

Malaysia consists of 13 states and 3 federal territories. The states are Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Sarawak and Sabah. The three federal territories are Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya. Under the New Economic Policy, from 1971 to 2000, Malaysia gradually evolved from a primary producer into a developing country with diverse industries.
Missions In Malaysia

The growth of Christianity in Malaya could be traced back to 1511. With the expansion of Portuguese influence in Malacca, Catholicism entered Malaya. The British East India Company arrived on the scene in 1786 and began to develop Penang. In 1816, the British built the oldest Anglican church in the whole of Southeast Asia, St. George the Martyr. It is still there today.

More than 200 years ago, Rev. Robert Morrison and Rev. William Milne came to Malacca. Not only did they complete the tasks of translating and printing the Bible in Chinese, they also published the first ever Chinese magazine, called the *Chinese Monthly Magazine*. They distributed Chinese Bibles and publications to the overseas Chinese as well. Later, they established the Anglo-Chinese College as a training base for the Chinese people and compiled the first Chinese-English dictionary.

From 1818 onwards, John and Joanna Ince, Thomas Beighton and Samuel and Maria Dyer (Rev. Hudson Taylor’s father-in-law) came from England to serve as missionaries in Penang. They set up schools and learnt the Chinese language in order to reach out to the Chinese. In 1860, Brethren missionaries Mr. and Mrs. John Chapman began to lead meetings in Penang; their congregations were mostly the Straits-born Chinese, known as the Babas. In 1885, the London Missionary
Society sent a Methodist pastor, Rev. A. Lemont, to Singapore. He founded the first Chinese Presbyterian Church in Johor Bahru in the following year. Two more Methodist pastors, Rev. James M. Thoburn and Rev. William F. Oldham, came to Singapore to do pioneering work in 1885 as well. They started schools and began to reach out to different ethnic groups. Their ministry in Penang commenced in 1891. Subsequently, other denominations entered Malaya. The Assembly of God started a church in Kuala Lumpur in 1933 while the Baptists planted their first church in Alor Setar in 1938. After the Communist takeover of China in 1949, groups such as the China Inland Mission, the Lutheran Church and other independent churches also came to plant churches in Malaya.

As for East Malaysia, the Anglican Church and the Catholics started their ministry there in 1847 and 1853 respectively. The Basel Church was active among the Hakka speaking community in North Borneo and built the Kudat Lausan Church in 1886. In 1901, Wong Nai Siong led the first batch of Episcopalian believers (known as the Methodists today) from Foochow, China to do pioneering work in the Rajang River basin in central Sarawak. They used Sibu as a base and built churches there. In 1928, the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM, known as SIB today) from Australia arrived in Sarawak. They focused on outreach work among the indigenous people. Although Christianity had a late start in East Malaysia, its growth rate was
faster than in West Malaysia. According to a 2001 estimate, Christians make up 31% of Sabah’s total population and 42% of Sarawak’s total population. These estimates are far higher than that of West Malaysia, where the number of Christians is estimated at 5%.

In the 1930s, the Lord used Dr. John Sung to work together with churches of different denomination to lead revival meetings in many parts of Malaya. The revival swept through places such as Sitiawan, Seremban, Sibu and Penang. Today, churches of all denominations are continuing with the work of sowing, planting and harvesting which His faithful servants started long ago. May we persevere as light and salt in our country as we cover our land with constant prayer.
Prayer for Malaysia

1. Ask God to give our leaders and government wisdom to help them walk justly and love mercy, that they may have the people’s well-being at heart as they make policies concerning the nation’s politics, economy, education and legal systems.

2. Pray that all races will show respect and consideration to one another, that together they may build a peaceful and harmonious society.

3. Pray that the church will seriously examine the commandments and commissions given by God while we watch and pray for our country. May we seize the opportunity to be good witnesses for Him now.

Profile of Malaysia

Area: around 329,847 square kilometers  
Capital: Kuala Lumpur  
Total population: over 27 million people.  
50.5% Malays, 23.5% Chinese, 7% Indians, 12% indigenous groups (1.2% in West Malaysia and 11% in East Malaysia) and about 6.8% other ethnicities.

Religions: According to the Malaysian Constitution, all the Malays are Muslims and they make up 60% of the total population, 19% are either Buddhists or Taoists, 9% are Christians and Catholics, and 6% are Hindus. The other religious beliefs are folk religions, Sikhism and traditional tribal religions.