

CHAPTER V

A PRINCE HAS FALLEN

R. C. Howard, layman and insurance-man-turned-preacher had a favorite Bible verse, Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." The first sermon that he preached at Kelham was titled "First Things First." He not only preached stewardship of time, talents, and tithes; he believed it; and he lived it. When Howard assumed the leadership of the group that became Kelham, they had no preacher, no name, no money and were meeting in what had become another church's building. Under his guiding hand the group grew almost overnight.

It was really not quite that simple, because there was a lot of hard work by many dedicated people. There were many devout prayers. Much like the hand of the captain of a ship, the direction of R. C. Howard helped guide the fledgling group past the rocks and shoals that would have shipwrecked Kelham.

Summaries of the Oklahoma Baptist Association¹ reports from 1924–1946 reflect the continued growth of the Church under the leadership of R.C. Howard:²

<u>Year</u>	<u>Baptisms</u>	<u>Letters</u>	<u>Statements</u>	<u>Members</u>
1924	31	9	5	63
1925	26	17	3	84

¹Now the Capital Baptist Association.

²*The Informer* (The Kelham Avenue Baptist Church Bulletin), June 8, 1947. Numbers reported in the associational annual report differ, largely due to the difference between the January-December church year and the associational reporting year.

1926	46	46	3	150
1927	82	54	3	240
1928	49	46	6	313
1929	69	80	0	530
1930	70	70	0	642
1931	120	80	5	777
1932	142	66	11	891
1933	81	61	8	967
1934	394	89	14	1310
1935	370	214	27	1778
1936	238	218	12	2059
1937	284	165	8	2424
1938	273	183	8	2751
1939	346	299	41	3255
1940	175	201	17	2946
1941	131	128	7	3026
1942	176	197	17	3269
1943	84	166	6	3187
1944	78	116	6	2488
1945	277	237	11	2817
1946	128	139	10	-----
1947*	162	160	7	

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TOTALS	3670	3041	235	3277
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* Partial year.

Summary

Received by Letter or Statement: 3276

Baptized in 22 years: 3832

Total Additions 7108

In 1926 Kelham had its first assistant pastor, Grady Wilkinson. Within two years of Howard's coming, the church had grown from a church without a pastor to a membership that required two pastors. By 1927 Kelham had outgrown the original building, plus the addition, and was forced to use Bath Grade School as a meeting place. It was easy to

see that if Kelham was to continue as a church plans must be made to provide a place to worship. The buildings were literally overflowing with bodies and no place to put them. At this time the church had 421 enrolled in Sunday School.

Plans were drawn and the contract was let to build a new auditorium. Two lots were purchased on Fourteenth, just west of Kelham. Sarah Bath donated the corner lot. The building was fifty feet by one hundred and twenty feet and was completed and dedicated November 18, 1928. It consisted of an auditorium for eight hundred persons, a full basement, with sixteen classrooms, a nursery, and a kitchen. The next year a grand piano was purchased for the auditorium, and in 1930 a parking lot was paved for the use of the church. The church also held a Vacation Bible school, and Edna Taylor was called as Educational Director.

Kelham Avenue Baptist Church, New Auditorium, 1929

Right through the heart of the Great Depression—perhaps because of it—Kelham continued to grow. Human nature seems to dictate that when things are going well and we need no help from anybody or anything, we can handle it. When there seems to be no other hope, perhaps it is easier to admit our human frailties and reach for help—the kind of help that is the only real help a lost human



Kelham Avenue Baptist Church, New Auditorium, 1929

can ever have. Christ never promised a trouble-free life. He did promise an eternal life to those who would believe. He did promise to those who believed the strength to weather the storms of life. Many of God's chosen ones have suffered every form of trial or tribulation. Even Christ and His disciples suffered ignominious deaths. We would recall again R. C. Howard's favorite scripture: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."

During this period there were literally millions of men who were unemployed. There was no employment of any kind, at any wages, available. The social welfare system, as we know it, did not exist. Without any sort of income thousands were on the verge of starvation. As a result the federal government developed countless "make-work" projects. The unemployed worked on various community betterment projects and were paid a small stipend for their labor. The amphitheater at Lincoln Park was built by Works Progress Administration (WPA) labor. Many of the picnic shelters in Will Rogers Park were built by the same type of labor. Many who could not qualify for this kind of help were forced to resort to the soup-lines that operated in every city across the country.

Even during the Depression, Kelham never lost sight of the fact that it was a *missionary* Baptist church. In 1931 the church supported a mission in Brazil, South America, with E. G. Wilcox as missionary.³ This same year Lina B. Hoppel came to Kelham as a church missionary. Several missions were started, and they all required financial help during their formative years.

³See Chapter IV, page 73, note 87 for other foreign "missions" Kelham supported during this period.

The E. G. Wilcox Family, 1931

In 1933 G. E. Kennedy came to Kelham to direct the visitation program. This was also the first year that Kelham led the Southern Baptist Convention in baptisms. This record was maintained for ten years⁴

In 1935, a member, affectionately known by all as "Mother" Hurst,⁵ donated the ground to build Kelham Kabin at Falls Creek. The first cabin was built that year at a cost of \$1,200—a princely sum in those times. It was also in 1935 that J. Lamar Collins came to Kelham as Education and Music Director.⁶

In 1936, the lowest point of the Depression, Kelham started three more missions, Barnes and Irving (local missions) and a mission in Egypt. Seddik W. Girgis was the missionary in Egypt. He ministered in a field of some

⁴The record that stood for ten years was the total number of baptisms in a year.

⁵The cornerstone on the present Falls Creek cabin reflects the history of this retreat. The member known as "Mother" Hurst was Mrs. F.H. (Flora) Hurst.

⁶J. Lamar Collins came from Exchange Avenue Church. He served eight years at Kelham then more than eight years at South Memorial Baptist and for some time at a church in Frederick, Oklahoma. Born at Hubbard, Texas, he was active in the church for more than thirty years. For eighteen years prior to his death in 1957 he had been in Oklahoma City. At the time of his death he was a member of Mayfair Baptist church. He is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery.



The E. G. Wilcox Family, 1931

fourteen million people.

Irving Mission was first established as a commuting mission.⁷ Irving was later established in a building at 308 Northeast Seventh. Ironically this location was only a short block away from the 1909 location of the original Immanuel Mission, which became Immanuel Church, the "mother" church of Kelham Avenue.

Irving Mission, which got its name from Irving School, was located in a poverty-stricken area of the city and had little chance of survival. In spite of dire predictions that the mission would fail within three months, it managed to prosper. Apparently God did not hear these predictions of doom. If He did hear, He must have smiled and thought, "Oh, ye of little faith." Irving continued in this locale for some time, but finally due to an improved economy, a deteriorating church structure, and a shift in the population, it moved to the northwest side of the city, on Utah Street, where it became Utah Avenue Church. Later Utah Avenue merged with Kelham when Kelham relocated. For about two years the sole building of worship used by Kelham was the building of Utah Baptist Church.⁸

During the early 1930s, it became increasingly apparent that more room for Kelham's growth would have to be secured. R. C. Howard said that Kelham was literally bursting at the seams. In spite of the economy, plans were made for a new educational building just south of the auditorium. A contract was let for the erection of the building, work progressed swiftly, and in 1937 the building was dedicated. It was two-storied, made of brick, and

⁷See page 52 for more information. Note 21 details the genesis of this work.

⁸For more information on this phase, see Chapter VII, "The Westward Move."

contained classrooms and offices. In that year 238 were baptized.

In 1938 and 1939 Washington Avenue Mission and Friendship Mission were sponsored.⁹ Washington Avenue had been a church but found itself in difficulty; so Kelham "mothered" the group for a time.

In 1939–1940 Kelham again lost members—about six hundred of them—because the following missions became churches: Foster, Capitol, Dickson, and Washington Avenue. All of the members of the missions were technically members of Kelham. When a mission was organized into a church, the members of that congregation were "lettered out" to the newly formed church.¹⁰

In 1942 J. L. Collins resigned as Music and Educational Director and went to East Grand Avenue Church, Dallas.

During World War II many of Kelham's members were serving in the armed forces around the world. Kelham kept in close contact with these servicemen and women. Every one regularly received the church paper, a Sunday school quarterly, *Open Windows for Daily Devotions*,¹¹ and a pastoral letter every quarter. Estimates at the time suggest that at least ninety-percent of the resident church membership were tithers and that more than fifty-percent of those in the service sent their tithes back to the home church.¹²

Many members of Kelham who served in the armed

⁹For details on the beginnings of these two missions, see Chapter IV, "Mission Accomplished," pages 59–64.

¹⁰Minutes for July 10, 1946, lists thirty "members who joined at the following Mission Stations of Kelham Avenue Baptist Church and who, to date, July 10, 1946, have not requested their letters, although the missions are no longer in existence. [sic]" The missions included "Singleton Mission," "Sunnyside School," "Crooked Oak Mission," "Soldier Creek Mission," "North Mission," "Capitol," and "Irving."

¹¹Now published simply as *Open Windows*.

¹²*The Informer*, June 4, 1944.

forces paid the supreme price. They paid with their lives to protect the freedoms we hold so dear.¹³ One of these, a former member of Kelham, was Chaplain Arvil E. Teem, who was born at Rock Springs, Georgia, October 9, 1902. Teem came to Oklahoma in 1925 as pastor at Muskogee Avenue Church. He was pastor at Roosevelt, Rocky, and Nicoma Park. He came to Kelham as Assistant Pastor and was Mission Evangelist from 1934 to 1937. In 1937 he became Associational Missionary for the Muskogee Baptist Association.

In 1940 Teem returned to Oklahoma City as pastor of Lawrence Avenue. He attended Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Seminary. He entered service in the United States Army, January 17, 1942 and was fatally wounded on February 12, 1944, while serving in the South Pacific. His requested epitaph was: "He had an Abundant Entrance."¹⁴ The minutes for the Oklahoma County Baptist Association for 1944 record this tribute to a faithful servant, "One of his friends in service testifies that the last thing he did was to lead one of his Officer Buddies to the Saviour."

Nineteen and forty-five was a big year for Southern Baptists. It was their centennial year. Kelham set a goal of five hundred additions. The Jordans held a revival at Kelham that lasted ninety days. There were four hundred and ten professions of faith. During this year Linn Avenue and

¹³After the conclusion of World War II a plaque "Dedicated in Grateful Recognition of Our Members Who Lost Their Lives in World War II" was unveiled at Kelham. Those listed were: Jack Saugee, LeRoy Redford, Karl Dement, John T. Ellis, Eugene Hansard, J. C. Bishop, Earl Brown, Francis K. Hobbs, Roger Barnett, George L. McCully, Jack Wiley, Austin McClatch, Thomas Upton, Johnnie Peebeck, and Joe Flynt, Jr., son of Franklin Mission pastor, Joe Flynt, a career military man (Howard Memorial Library).

¹⁴Minutes of the Oklahoma County Baptist Association, 1944.

Crutcho Missions were established.¹⁵ Mrs. T. H. Boggess was the church visitor. In 1946 Irving Mission became a church.

Nineteen hundred and forty-seven was a fateful year in the history of Kelham Avenue Baptist Church. Robert Clinton Howard was elected President of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. To show their love for their long-time pastor, the membership of Kelham donated enough money to allow Brother Howard and his wife, Hettie, to take a trip to Egypt and the Holy Land. Hidden away in the archives this writer found a song someone had written to commemorate this event. It was sung to the tune of "Casey Jones":¹⁶

Come all ye Kelham if you want to hear-
 A story about a brave preacher dear-
 R. C. Howard was the pastor's name-
 At Kelham Avenue where he won his fame.
 The congregation liked the preacher's smile
 Said we'll keep him for we like his style-
 Mounted to the rostrum with his Bible in his hand
 And he preached good old doctrine 'bout the Promised Land.

Bro. Howard mounted to the rostrum
 Bro. Howard with his Bible in his hand.
 Bro. Howard, here's the cash to take you
 and your wife to Egypt and the Holy Land.

This was a dream that was never to be fulfilled. The Lord called on Robert Clinton Howard on May 6, 1947, and he journeyed to that place about which he had for so long

¹⁵The early Crutcho Mission (see page 72 for R. C. Howard's account of this work) was apparently a Sunday School and preaching service arrangement in the Crutcho School. On January 7, 1952, the church minutes record that "Mr. T. E. Drannon brought the Report of the Missions Committee recommending that the Church establish a chapel in the Crutcho Park Addition and begin Sunday, January 13, with services in the Crutcho School until a building can be constructed."

¹⁶The original and several mimeographed copies are in the Westbrook Collection, Howard Memorial Library.

and so devoutly preached.

A few days before Brother Howard's death, while speaking to a gathering of 111 members of the Brotherhood at a steak-fry in Buffalo, Oklahoma, he suffered a heart attack from which he never recovered. He was survived by his wife, one daughter, three sons, two brothers, four sisters, and eight grandchildren. His wife, Hettie Viola Howard—a lifelong member of the Christian Church—followed him in death January 20, 1980.¹⁷

Shock, dismay, and disbelief were the companions of every member of Kelham and Baptists across the state when the news of Brother Howard's death was learned. The body lay in state in the church building he had supervised building. The active pallbearers were the oldest deacons, in term of service, of the church—George Tiefel, George Leach, R. J. McRell, R. H. Henderson, M. J. Jones, and Albert Perry. The subsequent issue of *The Baptist Messenger* stated it best. The lead headline was: "A Prince Has Fallen." Among those who knew R. C. Howard best, all would agree that no truer words were ever written. In some ways he may have seemed like a hard taskmaster as he tended and ministered to his flock. Even when chastised, however, none of his members ever doubted his deep and sincere love for them and for God.

During R. C. Howard's leadership, strict discipline was exercised in the church. Card-playing, dancing, drinking, and questionable things were forbidden.¹⁸ If a church member failed to attend church for a year, his name was dropped

¹⁷"Age Not Her Favorite Topic" in the Westbrook Collection cites a plaque Mrs. Howard was given: "To Our Hettie—for three score years of Christlike service—Teacher, Steward and Counselor—Women of Kelly Avenue Christian Church."

¹⁸*The Informer*, June 4, 1944. This also noted, "Divorces without Scriptural grounds leave one outside automatically."

from the church roll.¹⁹

During Brother R. C. Howard's years with Kelham, almost fifty pastors were ordained to maintain the missions. Many are still in active ministry. Few can match the record and the legacy left by R. C. Howard. Across the city are sprinkled churches whose existence can be attributed to the far-sightedness and vision of Brother Howard. What better epitaph can be written for this great leader than the one chosen by *The Messenger*, "A Prince Has Fallen."

Upon the death of R. C. Howard, leadership fell upon the shoulders of Harold Lassiter and his assistants. Brother Lassiter was blessed with a good staff, dedicated deacons, and faithful church members. Though the waters were troubled, Kelham continued to stay the course.

¹⁹Katharin Tiefel Taylor, whose father, George Tiefel, was one of the first deacons of Kelham said that the process was one of loving concern. A Fellowship Committee would visit the individual and counsel with him concerning his failure to obey Hebrews 10:24-25. At times there would be repentance and real revival as a result of these sessions. At other times, Mrs. Taylor said, her father would return home in tears at the response they had received.