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Volume 50/7, August 2023

# Judges

Lessons  
for today's  
Church



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*And much more ...*

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## Editorial

If you had asked me some 30 years ago or so, about the content of the book of the Judges, I may have responded with a comment something to the effect "it's about the slippery slope from belief to unbelief!". And, I would have to confess, that over the years that I have read through my Bible, the message of the book of the Judges has not been entirely clear to me.

However, there is definitely a lot of very bad stuff going on in that book, and what is so striking is that it is about the children of Israel. There is quite a contrast between Joshua and the Judges. Joshua finishes on a high note with the covenant at Shechem and comes to a close with the death and burial of Joshua and Israel serving "the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel".

Chapter 1 seems to start swimmingly well until one gets to verse 27. Then it begins with the account that Manasseh didn't drive out the inhabitants of the land. Nor did Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher or Naphtali. The conquest was incomplete and they allowed the inhabitants of the land to remain and put them under tribute or servitude.

In Chapter 2 the Angel of the Lord reproves Israel for not obeying His voice. "Why have you done this?" Then the Lord says, "I will not drive them (Canaanites etc.) out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you."

We again see a restating of the death of Joshua and his faithfulness and then comes a statement which is monumentally bad! *10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel....* And on, and on it goes.

It doesn't get better, but it gets worse as you read through the book. There is generational unfaithfulness because somewhere along the line, not only did they not know the Lord, but they forsook Him and became a mixed people, marrying the sons and daughters of the enemy! (ch 3:6) As time goes on, the Lord becomes an adversary to His people, because they descended into idolatry of the worst kind.

Judges come and go throughout this historical narrative. They seem to start with the perfect judge, Othniel. But not a lot is written about him and as the judges progress things pretty quickly deteriorate. The sad reality is that although there was peace after each of the judges, it was not long lasting and Israel would again do evil in the sight of the Lord. What is the message for us in this book?

Rather than steal the thunder of my contributors, I will finish off and allow them to inform us about the Judges and lessons that can be learnt by us. *S.D.G.*

Mr David Waldron writes on lessons for today's church

Mr David Stares considers what is required to be judged faithful.

Starting on p14 we continue with articles celebrating God's faithfulness to the RCNZ for 70 years and beyond.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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# The book of Judges — lessons for today's church

DAVID WALDRON

Shocking, violent, depraved, disgusting, tragic, lawless, wicked. These are words which accurately describe much of the content of the book of Judges.

Think, for example, of Ehud thrusting his sword up to the hilt into the obese belly of Eglon as this Moabite king got up from his toilet seat (3:21). Or the ornate ephod that Gideon made which was then idolised and worshipped by Israel (8:22). Or the foolish vow of Jephthah that likely resulted in the sacrifice of his daughter (11:39). Then there was the capture of Samson when scheming Delilah cut his hair and he lost his extraordinary strength and the Lord left him (16:19-20). The rampant idolatry of the nation is exemplified by the Ephraimite Micah who made a carved image and ordained a Levite to be his priest so that he could gain the Lord's favour (17). As the book moves to a crescendo of evil within the covenant community there is the grotesque violation of the Levite's concubine resulting in her death. This wickedness is followed by the cutting up of her body into twelve parts to be sent throughout the territory of Israel (19:22-30).

Even writing this brief summary of some of the highlights (perhaps that should be 'lowlights') of this portion of Holy Scripture makes my stomach turn. If the book of Judges were made into a movie or the narrative into a novel, the story would be 'R' rated with viewer/reader caution strongly advised as 'content may offend'.

The book of Judges covers a period of history just after the initial decisive conquest of the Canaanites through the leadership of Joshua. It was to this faithful man that the Lord had said *"Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* (Josh 1:9b). How then did Israel, the chosen, blessed and delivered covenant people of God, descend so far and so fast into such chaos and lawlessness?

We find the answer near the start of the

book of Judges as the writer makes this chilling comment after recording the death and burial of Joshua *"And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel"* (2:10).

The Lord had clearly instructed His people to declare His wonderful works to the next generation (Deut 4:9; 6:1-6). Instead of this, either the leaders (heads of families, priests and judges) had failed to teach the next generation and/or that generation was persistently unwilling to listen and learn. The result was catastrophic for Israel; both collectively as a covenant

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*Samson and Delilah, painting by:  
José Echenagusia Errazquin  
(1844–1912), oil on canvas,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org>*





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community and individually for members of that nation. One of the key themes of the book of Judges reflects this as the writer summarises the self-centered faithlessness of God's people with the phrase *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (17:6), repeated at the very end of the book (21:25)

This article will focus on the meaning of this thematic phrase for Old Testament Israel in the time of the Judges and will also

put forward some lessons for the church today.

## God's people then

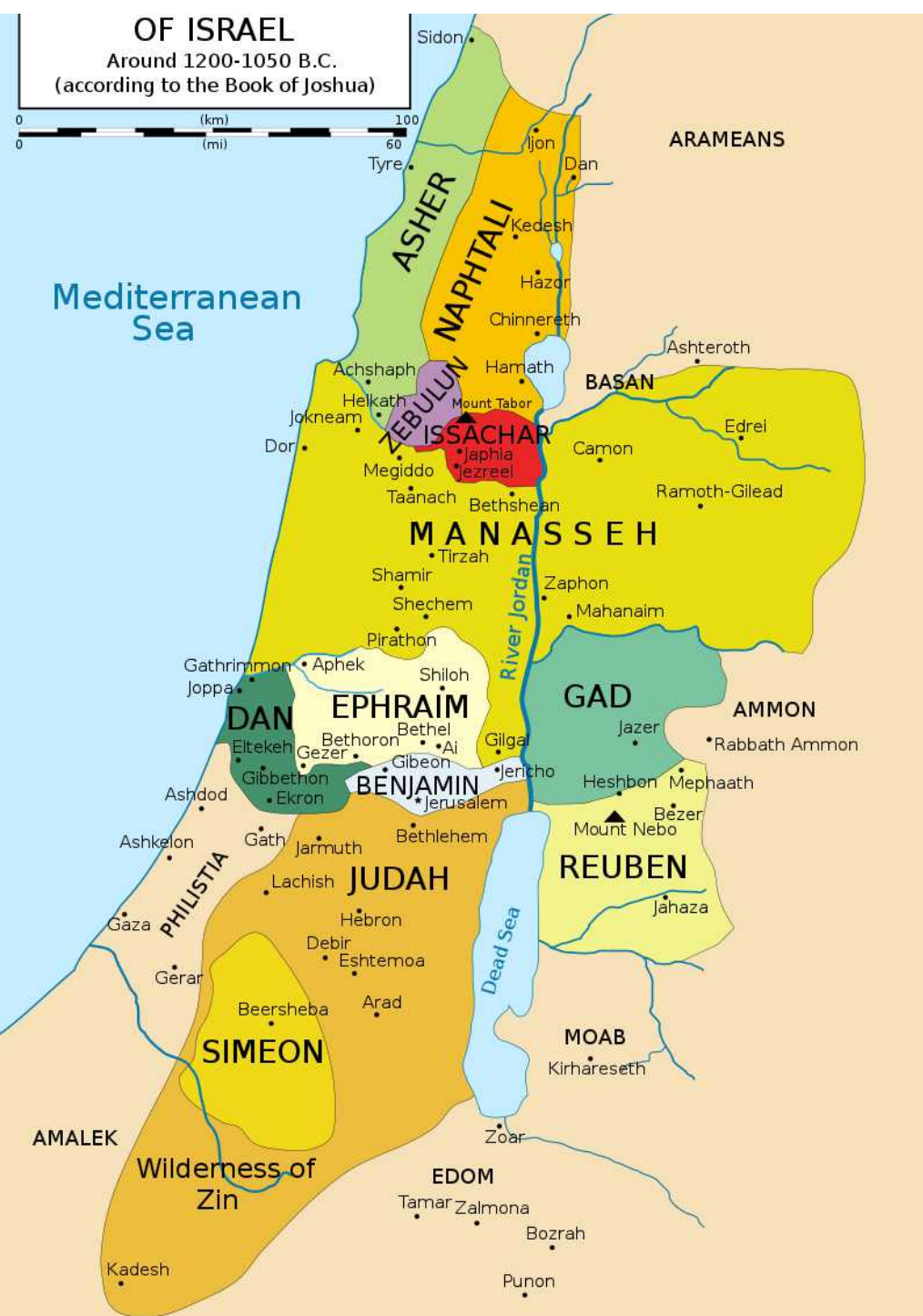
During the time of the Judges 'there was no king in Israel', no human monarch ruling the nation and therefore no centralised governing authority. Israel's territory had been divided into tribal areas (Josh 13-21); nine and a half tribes occupying the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Coast and two and a half tribes to the east of the Jordan. Whilst the tribes shared a common ethnic origin as physical descendants of Abraham, more importantly they had a common history as the nation delivered from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land by God's mighty works of deliverance. The Law of God defined their covenant relationship with their Lord who was their single supreme Ruler and Judge (11:27). The human judges during this period should not be visualised as elderly men wearing wigs in a court room, but rather primarily as military leaders, raised up by the Lord to deliver Israel from her enemies.

During the early occupation of the land, the tribes gathered at least annually for a festival at which they were reminded of their shared covenant relationship with their God which defined their identity as His people. These gatherings were likely held at Shiloh (21:19). However, the day-to-day governing of the people (administration, justice and oversight of community life) was de-centralised to the elders of local settlements, clans and tribes (11:4-11; Ruth 4:1-12).

As long as the people did what was right in God's eyes (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 6:18; 12:25, 28; 13:18; 21:9) they would receive covenant blessings. In contrast, because they did what was right in their own eyes (the implication being that this was not what was right in God's eyes), they received curses not blessings. That is why the book of Judges is so tragic and shocking.

Had they kept their eyes on their divine King, seeking to obey His good laws, and also faithfully training successive generations to do so, then the tribes of Israel would have remained united and strong. They would indeed have collectively been 'a light to the nations' (Isa 42:6). Instead there was widespread anarchy as the people became 'a law unto themselves'.

Would the situation have been better if there had been a human king ruling Israel? That is a hypothetical question. You may be aware that there is a difference of opinion amongst Bible commentators about



whether the book of Judges (especially the repeated phrase ‘*in those days there was no king in Israel*’) argues in favour of a human monarch or against one.

Certainly the subsequent line of kings from Saul, to David, to Solomon and following shows, at times, some physical and spiritual blessings when there was a centralized government but also, at times, physical and spiritual curses. Even David, a man after God’s heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22) was guilty of sin when he did what was right in his own eyes with Bathsheba and her husband. The overall message of the Old Testament is that no human king of Israel was able to consistently and sustainably lead the people to do what is right in God’s eyes and thereby ensure ongoing covenant blessings for the people.

### God’s people now

It scarcely needs saying that the New Testament church is not the same as the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. However there is much continuity between these two covenant communities. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His moral law remains unchanged. The church today is described, like Old Testament Israel (Exo 19:6), as ‘*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*’ (1 Pet 2:9).

Somewhat like the Israelites, physically dwelling in small settlements, spread over the land during the period of the Judges, we live and worship in small communities – local churches. Like them, we are governed by local elders who administer the life of the church, exercising formal church discipline where necessary and providing oversight as under-shepherds (1 Pet 5:1-4).

In the land of Canaan, the Israelites were detrimentally influenced by the pagan nations around them and very much by those they had allowed to remain in the land by disobeying the clear command of the Lord (e.g. 1:27-36). For entirely different reasons, we live as New Zealand Christians amongst many people who do not know the Lord. We are surrounded (over the oceans) by many nations where the majority of people do not believe in Christ.

Given our similarities to Israel in the time of the Judges, and also our differences, what lessons can we learn from this confronting and at times disturbing portion of God’s Word?

### Lessons for the church today

**It is vitally important that churches equip (Eph 4:12) parents, elders and others to teach covenant children by their faith-driven godly example and by careful, engaging, loving, consistent Biblical instruction.**

The overarching and timeless lesson from the book of Judges is that despite the faithlessness of His people down through history, God remains perfectly faithful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Ps 86:15). It is a miracle that Israel still existed after their progressive slide into ever greater wickedness by the end of the period of the Judges. Similarly, it is a testimony to the gracious faithfulness of the Lord over the past 2,000 years that the New Testament church still survives and thrives in many places today. Just as the covenant community during the period of the Judges was depraved, lawless and wicked, so in various ways, and at various times the church today can be distressingly messy. This does not mean that Christ has ceased to love His church, but it is sad evidence of a spotty and blemished bride (Eph 5:27).

It is worth noting that Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah are named as commendable men of faith; being amongst the ‘cloud of witnesses’ listed in Hebrews chapter 11. All their actions were by no means exemplary, yet they did exercise faith in the Lord. This is an encouragement, not only for church leaders today but for all of us. A reminder, not to be ungodly!, but to know that God is pleased to use flawed human beings like all of us, to do good works that He has prepared beforehand.

Just as Old Testament Israel needed to do what is right in God’s eyes, and not in their own unsanctified eyes, so this is just as true for us today.

Just as it was critical for the wellbeing of national Israel that covenant children were taught to know the Lord and the work He has done for His people (2:10) so this is likewise critical for the church today. It is vitally important that churches equip (Eph 4:12) parents, elders and others to teach covenant children by their faith-driven godly example and by careful, engaging, loving, consistent Biblical instruction.

Just as it was important for Old

Testament Israel to gather together to be reminded of the mighty works of their Lord and of His call to live according to His good will as revealed in His law, so corporate worship together with faithful preaching and teaching from the pulpit is vital for the church today.

Just as Old Testament Israel was severely and devastatingly affected by pagan influences, so the church today exists in a largely godless culture which tempts God’s people to adopt lifestyles that are highly damaging to our relationship with the Lord and to our own wellbeing.

Whilst there is still debate over whether the repeated phrase ‘there was no king in Israel’ was intended by the author of Judges to argue for or against a human king, we know that all human kings, judges and civil governments, apart from Christ, are unable to perfectly rule and protect God’s people. The ultimate lesson for the church today from the book of Judges may then be expressed as follows:

There is, and will remain, a King over the covenant community of God’s people; Christ the risen Son of God. Follow this Jesus in repentance and faith and earnestly seek to do what is right in God’s eyes, rather than in your own unsanctified eyes. This is the pathway of blessing for us all.

*Mr David Waldron is the minister in the Christchurch Reformed Church (Cornwall Street).*

DAVID STARES

# To be judged faithful

*When they turn the pages of history,  
when these days have passed long ago,  
Will they read of us with sadness for the seeds  
that we let grow?  
We turned our gaze from the castles in  
the distance,  
Eyes cast down on the path of least resistance.  
Rush, A Farewell to Kings*

What is our hope for the church of the future?

Many of us have had the experience of visiting churches while on holiday. Sometimes, what we experience is a vibrant community of believers who love Jesus and love you.

Sometimes, however, we gather with a community that seems to be fading away, the youth are long gone, the membership is dwindling, and the church is a remnant of what it used to be. Now, those faithful believers are no less precious in the sight of God, and yet the vibrancy of the church has disappeared, and humanly speaking, may never return.

I think that we can agree that this is not the future we pray for. So, what do we do so that our churches will remain faithful and vibrant communities of faith for the generations to come?

We are going to think about this question, looking at the book of Judges.

This might be a bit of a surprise to you, given the sorts of things that go on in this book: wars, murders, and many other things that we might think of as part of a history

text, but not something that we experience in our own lives. What could 21st century New Zealanders possibly have to glean from these accounts?

Well, what we find is that the history of Israel offers us unique case studies into the struggles that the church has always faced. In general, the book of Judges follows what I call an **A-B-C-D pattern**. The people fall into **Apostasy**, God places them in **Bondage**, they **Cry Out**, and God **Delivers** them.

Even though it looked very different in the Old Testament, this was the church, and the New Testament church would be foolish not to look back and learn from them. As Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10:6, "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved."

So then, let us delve into the source of their **apostasy** so that we can learn from their example!

## **Apostasy in Israel**

If we want to get to the root problem in Israel, it is that they **failed to listen to God's word**. In chapter 1, the people are entering the land to take possession of it, and the first mission is to drive out all of the nations that are already living there.

But they don't. Whether that was because they didn't trust in the power of God, or because they thought they had better ideas of how to handle the situation, they did not drive out the nations of the land.

Because of this disobedience to God, God told Israel that "they will become as **thorns** in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you." (Judges 2:3) Because they failed to hear God's word and do what he commanded, God leaves the nations as thorns in the side of Israel.



Secondly, we find a massive **failure in discipleship** in Judges. You can't read the Old Testament without seeing the emphasis God places on teaching the next generation.

How at the establishing of the Passover God said, "And **when your children** say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" (Exodus 12:26-27)

How after giving his law anew to the generation about to enter the land, God said, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall **teach them diligently to your sons...**" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

How as the people entered the land, God had them set up a memorial, "so that **when your children ask later**, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' Then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever." (Joshua 4:6-7)

Do you see the theme?

God wanted the children to be taught what he had done. And yet right from the start in Judges "there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10)

How is this possible?

It must be that the people had failed to pass on what they had heard, what they had seen, and what they knew.

Because they failed to hear God's word and teach God's works, the nation as a whole **failed to worship God**. This happens very early in the book. As the next generation rises up, we are told "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them." (Judges 2:11-12)

This failure of worship becomes a theme throughout the book of Judges. Over and over again the nation will worship the false gods of the nations around, and this brings God's displeasure and judgement. This gets so bad, that in one of the final scenes of the book, a Levite was hired to serve with unapproved priests in a private shrine to household idols! (Judges 17) Was there ever more idolatrous worship in Israel?

Because Israel had ignored God's

commands, and forgotten his deeds, they worshiped whomever and however they saw fit.

## Faithfulness in the Church

Now, if the struggles of Israel are there for our instruction, then what can we learn from Israel in the book of Judges?

### 1) Know the Bible

The source of spiritual vitality in the church is God himself. But how does he give us this spiritual life? By the work of his Spirit through his word, the Bible. If we want our churches to have spiritual power, we must go to the source, God's inspired word.

In the Bible we find our deepest problems expressed. In the Bible we find the grand story of our salvation in Jesus. In the Bible we find directions for how to live in obedience to God. With God's word comes spiritual power and new life.

Now, there isn't only one way to be in the word. You should especially hear the word in church as you hear it read and preached. But we all know there are a variety of other ways we can be in the word. You can chew it over in Bible Study. You can read it or listen to it for yourself in your spare time. We can only avoid the apostasy we see in Israel if we all keep seeking God in the Bible.

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*Gideon the reluctant warrior*  
www.learnreligions.com





*Jael took a tent peg and drove the tent peg into Sisara's temple, until it went down into the ground and he died.*  
thinkandletthink.com

## 2) Teach our children

I remember a while ago I was on a panel at a local conference, and one of the questions asked 'What can the church do to keep our young people?' This is a good and common question.

It is a good question because there is a lot that the church can and should do for our children. We should make them feel welcome and valued in worship. We should accommodate their unique needs and struggles. We should provide for their teaching. We should take responsibility for their care and protection. Most importantly we must all keep them in our prayers.

However, if we are depending on the structures of the church to keep our children in the faith, we are on the wrong track. Indeed, the passing on of faith to the next generation is most powerfully done in our homes and among our families. Children spend far more time at home than they do at church, and they ask many more questions about the meaning of life to their parents than they will to their pastor.

If a faithful generation is to come up after us, it will be because faith was passed on from adults to children, and because the rest of the church nurtured, fed, supported and prayed for that faith in whatever way it could.

## 3) Worship God together

Have we learned about God? We will find the answer in our worship.

If we see him in all of his holiness, power and grace, we will be drawn to give God the glory he deserves. Gathering with other believers to sing God's praise, to pray to him, to offer our gifts, and to submit ourselves to his word. Wanting God alone to receive praise from our lips, knowing that nothing in heaven or on earth deserve it as he does.

If we know God as he shows himself to be in the Bible, and if we pass this knowledge on, then we should never worry that our worship will fade.

So, what about the future of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand?

I have to admit that I do have some reservations writing this article, and the reason is that we all know how Judges ends – badly. The nation is torn and shattered and the only hope is in the king that God will send.

And yet, as we look forward to the church of the future, our young people **have** their good king – Jesus! And in the light of his gracious rule I believe that we have every reason to hope for the next generation. Speaking from experience as someone who has spent some time among the youth: By God's grace we do have a generation of godly young people who love Jesus and want to serve him.

So let us remain faithful to our callings, not out of fear, but out of hope and expectation that God will maintain his church through his word and Spirit.

*Mr David Stares is the minister of the Masterton Reformed Church.*



### LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON



## Did you ever see my picture?

Did you ever see my picture? It has been drawn by a masterly hand. And though another person, and one whom I am far from resembling, sat for it – it is as like me as one new penny is like another! The original was drawn at *Corinth*, and sent to the Christians at *Rome*. Many copies have been produced, and it has a place in most public and private libraries, and I would hope in most families. I had seen it a great many times, before I could discover one of my own features in it – but then my eyes were very bad.

What is most remarkable, is that it was drawn long before I was born! And now, having been favoured with some excellent eye-salve, I quickly knew it to be my own. I am drawn in a posture which would be strange and peculiar, if it was not so common with me – looking two different and opposite ways at once, so that you would be puzzled to tell whether my eyes are fixed upon *Heaven*, or upon the *earth*! I am aiming at two things inconsistent with each other at the same time, so that I can accomplish neither.

According to the *different light* in which you view the picture, I appear . . .

to rejoice, or to mourn;  
to have nothing, or possessing everything;  
to be a conqueror, or a captive.

In a word, *I am a double person! I am a riddle!* So it is no wonder if you know not what to make of me, for I cannot tell what to make of myself!

I would, and I would not.

I do, and I do not.

I can, and I cannot.

I find the hardest things easy, and the easiest things impossible.

I am both rich, and poor.

I can do nothing, yet I can do all things.

I am opposed beyond my strength, yet I am not overpowered.

I gain when I lose, and I often am a loser by my gains.

But while I am in this *perplexity*, you will observe in the same picture – a *hand* stretched forth for my relief, and may see a label proceeding out of my mouth with these words, “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!” The more I study this picture, the more I discover some new and striking resemblance, which convinces me that *the Painter* knew me better than I knew myself!

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do – I do not do; but what I hate – I do. I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do – is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing!” *Romans 7*

In a word, I am a *sinner*, a vile one – but a sinner believing in Jesus!

I am a *silly sheep* – but I have a gracious, watchful Shepherd!

I am a *dull scholar* – but I have a Master who can make the dullest learn.

**John Newton**

*Wellington Ladies Presbyterial*

Fri 25th – Sat 26th August 2023

Guest Speaker: Heather Moot on 1 Peter  
Hosted by Wainuiomata

**JOY & HOPE IN A  
HOSTILE WORLD**

# Fighting Hopelessness

JAMES COFFIELD

Somewhere south of anchorage, Alaska, on the Seward Highway, my friend was lost and needed directions to Hope, Alaska, a remote fishing village on the Kenai Peninsula. He asked the old man at the gas station, "How do you get to Hope?" "Go to church and pray," the old man answered with a smile, delivering the well-practiced line as if he were an Oscar-winning actor.

We would all do well to follow his advice. So many have lost their way to hope. Hopelessness and cynicism have become epidemic in our culture and in the church. Hopelessness is a sense of despair and dread. Hopelessness is correlated with suicide, depression, self-harm, and belief of being socially undesirable. Hopelessness has been an unrelenting teacher.

The lesson of these past few years is that government, the economy, politics, and social awareness will not secure our future. So, how do we get to hope? What does the road to hope look like? Like every journey, the road to hope begins with knowing where we are. If you are reading this and feeling so hopeless that you are pondering harming yourself, then call your pastor, friend, or family member. As hopelessness gets its voice, you will want to isolate and pull away from God and others. Suicide, isolation, and selfharm are never God's desire for you. An honest look at your condition may sound risky in our culture of "be positive" and "just try harder."

Hopelessness comes when our hope is in something unreliable or incapable of meeting the deepest longings of our lives. The unexpected road to hope begins with the realization that our schemes do not work and are not capable of taking the sorrow of this fallen world away. Ironically, hopelessness is the first step to finding real hope. God never intended us to be fully satisfied by the things of this life. God does not want lesser gods to preoccupy His

children. We were created for relationship with God; therefore, we long for that restored relationship with God, as well as with others and ourselves. Once we take the pressure off our spouses, our kids, our jobs, or our governments to meet our deepest longings, then we can begin to enjoy them for what they can provide. We will never get to hope if we believe that merely changing circumstances is the answer.

The Bible speaks often about how present circumstances do not determine our hope. Living faithfully in exile is an invitation to see the bigger picture beyond the small hopes of temporary happiness. The road to hope begins with coming to the end of ourselves and our efforts to make our lives perfect. Despite obstacles and disappointments, we can live for a greater purpose and have ultimate hope. In the Bible, God's people lived in exile, yet God promised them hope. Paul wrote about hope and encouragement from prison. The church grew in the midst of persecution, because its hope was not in circumstances but in God alone. The journey to hope begins when we come to the end of ourselves and focus on our identities in Christ as God's image bearers instead of on mere circumstances.

We will never get to true hope by trying to fool ourselves into being satisfied with small, attainable goals. Hope is not found in small, selfish thinking. Moving toward hope requires that we embrace truth. That truth is that we are designed by God to live a story of His glory. The hopeless person does not think too big – he thinks too small. So, as the road to hope widens before you, realize that you have a purpose in your life. In Christ, you are a chosen child of God and therefore a part of the family of God.

Once we move beyond our circumstances and understand the grand purpose God has given us, a look in the rearview mirror is helpful. Remember how God has been faithful in the past. Read and study Bible passages that demonstrate His faithfulness. Look around – you will see you are not alone. Life is not meant to be lived alone. We must realize that others are with us, others also struggle, and others will need our help and encouragement along the way. Look closer still and we will see our true companion. Christ is in us and His

Spirit is empowering us.

Along with a new focus, a grand purpose, companions on each side, and Christ as your strength, the road to hope requires gratitude and prayer. It is impossible to have gratitude and hopelessness simultaneously. To continue on the road to hope, we will need to thank God frequently in our prayers.

At this point in the journey to hope, we will notice some resistance. Hopelessness is a con man that keeps us from loving, trying, and dreaming – in an odd way, hopelessness can become comfortable for us. We want hope, but we want to be in charge. We want hope, but we want to justify not loving others and God. In the book of Isaiah, God invites His children to participate in His plan, to trust and live in His covenants, and to anticipate His provision:

*"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." (Isa. 55:2)*

As we travel toward hope, let us remember to keep perspective and focus on Him. Let us not squander our lives with goals that will not satisfy. The old man was right: "Pray and go to church." There we will be reminded once more where real, eternal hope lies.

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### Indian pastor: “We feel like strangers in our own land.”

The U.K.’s Special Envoy for *Freedom of Religion or Belief* has shared a report on Christian persecution in India.

The report looks at recent violence in India’s Manipur State. The violence had “a clear religious dimension” as radical Hindus destroyed hundreds of churches and Christian villages. 66,000 people have been displaced, many of whom are Christians.

A local pastor shared, “Our churches are being burned down, and we have not been able to gather together for worship or prayer since May 3rd, 2023. We feel like strangers in our own land, and we are, in effect, being required to choose between our faith or our land.”

Global Christian Relief has opened two emergency relief centers in a nearby Indian state, offering food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

### German pro-life victory

A top court in Germany delivered a victory for pro-lifers last week.

The Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig ruled that banning peaceful prayer vigils outside abortion mills violates constitutional rights to freedom of assembly.

*Alliance Defending Freedom* represented a German-based *40 Days for Life* chapter in the case. Germany’s Federal Minister for Family Affairs has been pushing for censorship zones around abortion mills.

Pavica Vojnović with *40 Days for Life* said, “I am grateful that we can continue our prayer vigils. Every human life is precious and deserves protection.”

### Turkey’s crackdown on foreign missionaries

The nation of Turkey is cracking down on foreign missionaries.

The *International Society for Human Rights* has identified a disproportionate

number of foreign expulsions.

In a recent report, the group revealed, “There is no common ground among these expelled persons, except that they are all Protestant Christians, who are active in church life and/or active in evangelism.”

### British street preacher arrested for 26<sup>th</sup> time

Street preacher Ryan Schiavo was arrested again for preaching in Canterbury, England on June 10th of this year — this time preaching out of Romans 1:18-32. He is no stranger to this sort of treatment however.

The English police are especially problematic for street preachers these days, marking their police cars with the moniker “Police with Pride.”

Schiavo told *The Christian Post* that the police have stopped him from preaching 25 times in the last two years in public places in England. No charges are ever filed. According to the evangelist, the purpose is only to stop the preaching. And the situation has worsened over the last few years.

### Abortions up 14% in England and Wales

In other United Kingdom news, regrettably, abortion numbers are on the increase in England and Wales.

Official numbers reveal that abortions in 2022 increased by 14% over the previous year. The U.K. Department of Health and Social Care records an average of 20,000 abortions per month.

### Scientists surprised by intelligent cave writings post-flood

Scientists were amazed to discover writings carved into cave walls, presumably contributed by the Neanderthals, reports *ABC News*.

These writings, found on the La Roche-Cotard cave in France, are described as “deliberate, organized, and intentional.” They are an indication that these primitive human beings, existing sometime after the worldwide flood, were intelligent and thoughtful.

### One-Year Anniversary of the Overturning of *Roe v. Wade*

Last Saturday (24 June) marked the one-year anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Since the decision, over a dozen states passed new anti-abortion legislation.

*FiveThirtyEight* estimates over 24,000 fewer babies have been murdered in the womb over the last year.

Pro-abortion states saw an increase of nearly 70,000 abortions, while anti-abortion states saw a decrease of over 90,000.

### Presbyterian Church in America Stands Against Transgenderism

The Presbyterian Church in America took a stand against transgenderism during its General Assembly last week (19-23 June).

The denomination passed an overture entitled, “Petition Government to End Sex-change Procedures for Minors.”

The petition to government leaders states, “The Bible is the supreme revelation of God’s will and teaches that God made man in his own image, male and female ... We who love our nation ... call upon you to renounce the sin of all medical and surgical sex change procedures in minors by the American healthcare system.” [www.TheWorldView.com](http://www.TheWorldView.com).

CELEBRATING  
**God's**  
FAITHFULNESS  
70 years  
and  
beyond





# Lessons and challenges from our story

D J VAN GARDEREN

One of the special privileges extended to me as a retired pastor at Bishopdale is leading the 'Pastor's Class.' Up to 27 folks attend the fortnightly meeting on a Tuesday morning. The special feature of this group is that nearly everyone of us is a 'golden oldie' with Gold Cards to prove it. We come from all kinds of church and ethnic backgrounds. We are long-term participants and observers of the life of our churches. One of our members signed the protocol when the Reformed Church of Christchurch was founded in March, 1953!

It is when we begin to speak about our children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren that I see pain in the eyes of many if not all of us. Why? Because we all lament the loss of many of them from our churches and even the Lord. The question that inevitably wells up from just below the surface is 'What did *I* do wrong?' But that needs to be countered by another, equally important question. 'Where did *we* [our churches and their leadership] go wrong? Why have so many left?

There are sound theological and biblical reasons. Christ, not us, is building and maintaining his body, the Church. But there is another side too – our responsibility as members and leaders of Christ's church.

When Paul speaks on the subject of divisions in the church at Corinth he highlights that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. He goes on, '*He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labour. ... You are God's field, God's building.*' (see Corinthians 3:5-9). Building and maintaining the church is God's work. Ultimately only the triune God is able to keep the flock safe. Yet there is another side as well. Paul planted and Apollos watered! That, in reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, was *their* respective responsibility for which they will receive their wages. We as parents, leaders, members of our local congregations, also function as planters and/or waterers. Failure

do so dries up and starves to death members. Hence the question: Will we, as a denomination and its members/leaders be in line to receive wages for our labours?

The grim reality is that those of us who have been members for many years have seen the departure of many brothers and sisters, including our own children and grandchildren, for a host of different reasons. I have often heard comments along the lines, '*If we had only retained even half of the folks who have left us, our denomination would easily be twice its present size!*' Others point out, '*We have really served many other churches in New Zealand by 'gifting' them many of our strongest families.*' Or again, '*When it comes to membership, we have experienced major leaks [loss of members] through the years.*'

I believe that part and parcel of remembering and reflecting on 70 years of our existence as a separate denomination in New Zealand includes a close look at how we, as planters and waterers, have fared. What has happened in the last 30 years? While giving thanks for many good things, the challenge we must face is how we can and must, for the glory of God, do better.

## **We HAVE grown in numbers**

We must give thanks for the fact that our membership has remained steady and even increased somewhat since the 40th anniversary celebrations back in 1993. Our churches have remained diligent in stressing the importance of membership of Christ's church.

We take statistics seriously. Just check the denominational yearbooks to see the detailed facts and figures. I was interested in seeing how much growth our churches have experienced since 1993. At that point our membership was 1,653 communicant and 1,317 baptised members, a total of 2,970. We consisted of 18 congregations. A considerable growth burst was experienced in the next two years as the first wave of South African brothers and sisters, initially



At the baptism of our covenant children we promised to receive (embrace!) these children in love, pray and help care for them. We promised to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers.

at least, joined us. That soon settled down and numbers plateaued once more. We have inched forward for the past 15 years. 2022 records a total of 2198 communicant members and 1,263 baptised, 3461 in total. We now have a total of 23 congregations (including preaching posts). Over a period of 30 years our membership have increased by 491 – on average by about 18 members per annum or about one member per congregation. That bucks the trend when comparing ourselves with many other churches in New Zealand and many of our sister churches overseas. The Lord has indeed been gracious.

### Causes for numerical growth

The question is: What has brought about this marginal growth? Positively, I note an increasing number of adult folks (some with children) who have joined our churches. Some came through evangelism. Most of them transferred to us from mainstream and, increasingly from charismatic churches. They rejoice in the teaching and especially the preaching in our churches. New migrants, including South Africans, but even more recently, Asian folks (Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese) have joined us. In at least three of our churches that I know of, the influx of these newly arrived brothers and sisters has been a reason for thanksgiving. The majority of our growth has been from people transferring from another church fellowship to ours. That's good news!

### We are losing many of our baptised and communicant members

There is another, negative side. What about the covenant children born and baptised into our churches? How many go on to profess their faith and grow into mature, contributing members of in our churches? In the last 30 years, the number of our baptised members, peaked at about 1,450 in the early 2000s. What has happened to them as they became teenagers and young adults?

I don't have or know how to calculate these statistics.<sup>1</sup> However, having been in leadership in our churches for 45 years, I am aware of many instances of those who have left us. Just ask any grandparent who has been in our churches how many of their children and their families have walked away from the Lord or our denomination. True, we can blame those who have departed for a lack of faithfulness, for leaving us for the wrong reasons, for being stubborn and a host of other shortcomings. There

will, no doubt, be a fair degree of truth in these charges. But is there not another side to the story of their departure? We must ask such people why they left. What is their story? In Solomon's proverbs we read, *'The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.'* (Proverbs 18.17) Those who have left us may well have a case which we need to consider and deal with. That too is part of remembering and learning from our history in New Zealand.

### Children and Teenagers

So, how well do we nurture the children and teenagers in our churches? Admittedly, the primary covenantal responsibility for training them up belongs to their family – parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. (Proverbs 22.6). At the same time there is also a vital task that belongs to and has been accepted by our churches as churches. At the baptism of our covenant children we promised to receive (embrace!) these children in love, pray and help care for them. We promised to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers.

Does that happen? How deliberately and effectively? We strongly advocate that our children should be present at worship services, and, in addition, receive instruction from the church via its Sunday School, Cadets and Gems, and most pointedly, proper and sustained catechetical programmes.

### Instruction

Through the years I note that we have kept a discerning eye on the content of the material used. So we should. But do we measure the impact and effectiveness of this material in shaping the lives of our children? All too often I hear from young adults that they remember little if any of what they have been taught. Worse still, they don't know how to read and make sense of their bibles. If they do not know how to use the basic building blocks of our Christian faith, how can we expect them to apply and make sense of this from a Reformed perspective? If you think I overstate the case, chat with your teens. Surely the challenge for the years ahead is to look seriously at where we must do much better than we have in the past.

### Worship services

Even more challenging is how we involve or, negatively, fail to involve our children and teenagers during our corporate worship services. They are trained to sit still,

challenged to listen, and in some of our churches, there may even be a brief (3-4 minute) children's talk. But look around and interact with many of these young ones. By the time they reach their teens many of them are (to use a forbidden word) *bored*, fidgety and clearly wishing they could be somewhere else on a Sunday morning. The sermon doesn't address them. Lots of words and points, but they appear to be like water off a duck's back. The singing doesn't seem to engage them. During prayers their eyes (and presumably their thoughts) wander all over the place. They fidget. Yes, we can and must exhort them to change their attitude, to open their ears and eyes and pray for Holy Spiritual illumination. But what about our way of conducting our worship services? Shouldn't we be open to making seeing what we could and should do to engage them without falling into the entertainment trap?

### The sermon

In 1986, Edward Heerema published a biography of his late father-in-law R.B. Kuiper.<sup>2</sup> As a preacher Kuiper was hailed as the best the Christian Reformed Church has produced. He taught homiletics at both Westminster Seminary (PA) and Calvin College. I re-read it recently and was struck by a lengthy quotation from his work, *'To Be or Not to be Reformed'*. He writes,

*'As preachers let us have a heart. Let us stop wearying our audiences. Let us make our preaching so absorbingly interesting that even the children will rather listen to us than draw pictures and will thus put to shame their paper-and-pencil supplying parents. But we may as well make up our minds that an absolute prerequisite of such preaching is the most painstaking preparation.'*<sup>3</sup>

The challenge to our preachers (and I am one of them!) is not to 'dumb down' but to make what we are saying real and relevant to children and even more so to young teens. Far too much preaching may be intellectually and spiritually satisfying to the preacher and the mature, but leaves the young ones hearing lots of difficult words and abstract ideas which they cannot understand and therefore makes them tune out. Once they start doing this, it quickly turns into a bad habit that is difficult to change. At the very least, let our leadership consider Kuiper's words and



evaluate the preaching in the light of his challenge.

### **The liturgy: confession and assurance, singing, prayer**

But there's more. Think liturgy – the content and structure of the service as a whole. I mention just three things that we as churches should consider doing better.

Students do not learn by merely listening. They interact, question, try out what they are learning. This is wonderfully demonstrated in the way Jesus instructed his disciples. Merely listening to absorb, understand and learn is a very poor educational strategy. Corporate worship is all about God speaking to us and our interaction with him. 'Our' here should include our children and teenagers. Therefore, how are they encouraged and enabled to interact with the Lord in worship?

Think that essential part of the service known as '**confession** [of sin] **and assurance** [of pardon]. Whether saints or unsaved sinners, children or golden oldies, we all need to face ourselves through God's eyes, his will as summarised in the Law. We continually need to be reminded of how small and undeserving we are before our holy God. Has enough thought been given to how we must engage and call our children to repentance too? The Lord Jesus examines the hearts of our children and teenagers as well. Engaging them in this part of the liturgy matters! That is all too often lacking.

Then there is the congregational **singing**. I personally love [a lot of] the Psalms and traditional hymns. Do most of our children? I know that children and teenagers love to sing. Just watch them as they listen to and happily sing along with songs on the radio while travelling in the car with you. Watch them also during a worship service. Many only mumble or keep their mouths closed altogether. One way to address this is to describe beforehand what we are about to sing and at the same time encourage *everyone* including the children and teens to join in. Furthermore, make sure that some of the songs address the young ones more than others. Select and encourage the children to sing along. A strategy to engage and involve our children and teens in singing is needed.

**Prayers.** Here we respond to God in adoration and thanksgiving. We also call on him for mercy and healing. We intercede for one another and for this fallen, broken and often ugly world. Let's do all of that. The challenge is to engage the whole congregation, including our children and

teenagers. It is so easy to switch off during prayer. Yes, we can call our children to fold their hands and close their eyes, pay attention and focus. Teach them to pray. But there is also a call for us who lead in prayer and select what to pray for. Rather than just pray *for* the children, how can we pray *with* them in worship? Make it a practice to include petitions and issues that matter in the lives of our covenant children and teens.

### **Staying, growing and glowing**

In closing, we give thanks that we have maintained numbers these past 30 years. But at the same time 'leakage', the loss of members, must be a reason for genuine concern. To ignore what has been happening dishonours our call to love the Lord and our neighbour, especially those who are part of the household of faith. The challenge is to act where and as we can. How?

To pastors, elders and all of us as members, the challenge is to sit down and listen to the concerns of those who leave us to find fellowship in another local church. Do what it takes to listen with a loving Christ-like heart to what they are saying. They too love the Lord and want to serve him and do everything possible for their children and families. Ask yourself whether what you are saying or defending is your own personal preferences in worship. Ask, 'what are we willing to learn to embrace those we so easily brand as 'stirrers' or weaker

brothers and sisters? If we focus only on the 99, who stay within the fold, we dishonour Christ's instruction.

May I make a plea to anyone who is thinking of giving up and moving yourself and your family to another church fellowship? I have seen all too often how the short-term solution easily overlooks the long-term consequences, especially for your children. At the same time, if you stay you have a voice as a member of Christ's body. If you don't it's not only you that misses out. Tragically, so do the rest of us who stay.

Keep in mind that the status quo [the way we always did things in the past] is not part of what it means to be 'reformed and always reforming'.<sup>4</sup> The challenge is to open eyes, ears and hearts to giving serious attention to this matter of the loss of members.

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> I checked with our denominational Stated Clerk (John van Dyk) to see if there are statistics available. He pointed out that there were not, but agreed with the thoughts expressed in this paragraph..
- <sup>2</sup> Heerema, Edward, R.B., *A Prophet in the Land*, [Paideia Press Ltd, Jordan Station, Ont. Canada, 1986].
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p 204
- <sup>4</sup> *Reformata semper reformanda* est

*Mr Dirk J van Garderen is an emeritus minister and a member of the Bishopdale Reformed Church.*

*A notice for men seeking to equip themselves for leadership in the Wellington area.*

## **The Reformed Church of Wainuiomata**

warmly invites men in the wider Wellington to join us for a leadership seminar on the **16th of September**, between **9am and 12pm**. **Reverend John Haverland** will deliver two lectures on godly leadership from the book of Nehemiah, with time for discussion and fellowship.

We will provide morningtea and lunch, so please let us know if you intend to attend so we can cater appropriately.

Please contact Seth de Reus via email ([sethdereus@gmail.com](mailto:sethdereus@gmail.com)) if you are going to come along.

# Celebrating 70 years – an immigrant's journey to find a spiritual home in Wellington, NZ



Pieter and Elisabeth Wierenga were brought up in the Reformed Churches of two small towns in Groningen, close to the German border. Their partially subsidised migration to New Zealand took them by passenger ship, the Sibajak (used by the Dutch government to transport Dutch emigrants to the US, Canada, Australia and NZ between 1950-1957),

and they arrived in Wellington in November 1952. When they arrived in Wellington they had no idea which church they should attend. For the first month they didn't attend church at all.

Other young migrants were in the same position and desirous of finding a spiritual home in obedience to the Word of God. Among them were the sons of Dominee



Dykstra. These Dykstra boys, along with a committed core of around thirty, arranged a meeting to discuss the situation. At this first meeting they decided they should call a Minister to 'come over and help them'. The Dykstra boys suggested they call their father Rev Dykstra to come to NZ. The next day two telegrams were despatched, one to Rev Dykstra and the other to the Deputies for Emigration for assistance to ensure a speedy passage of the Dykstra family to NZ. The next big task was to find a Manse. This was important as the Dept of Labour had made this a requirement for issuing an entry permit for families.

Another major item on the Agenda was the allocation of a 'territory'. It was agreed that the Wellington group would be responsible for the Wellington, Taranaki, Napier and Nelson districts. So, the purchase of a car was a top priority to enable the new Minister to cover the bottom half of the North Island.

This was a completely new venture, established in faith and confidence that the Lord would bless this ministry, by a group of young, mostly single men and women who had only just arrived in a new country with very few assets to their names. It took courage and conviction and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

They had services in Dutch in the beginning, as most had only rudimentary English, however they soon decided that if they wanted to have an impact in their new homeland then they would need to worship in English.

Sixty people arrived for the first Dutch service in the Central Baptist Church on 7 Dec 1951. Services were held in the Baptist Church in Boulcott Street for six months but after that relations with the Baptists became strained. They did not approve of smoking but many of the Reformed congregation were smokers who lit up as soon as they went outside after the service. So services shifted to the brick Congregational Church in Cambridge Terrace, where they continued to be held until 1970 when the congregation bought the old Calvin Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn.

The Reformed Church of Wellington was instituted on Saturday 2 May 1953 at a meeting at the YMCA building in Willis Street. This group of young migrants set their signature to a document which declared that there was now a Reformed Church of Wellington. One of those signatories, Bep Wierenga, is still able to worship in the Reformed Church of

Wellington 70 years later. Almost all the other signatories have now passed on to glory. In total 50 communicant members and 11 baptised members, in addition to 3 families in Nelson, all signed the Protocol. Including the children, the church commenced with well over 100 members.

The following day, Sunday 3 May 1953, a new Session was ordained in the first service of the Reformed Church of Wellington held in the Congregational Church building on Cambridge Terrace. With the institution of the church behind them, the congregation settled down to a normal church life. Rev Dykstra moved in to 13 Eagle Street, Karori, with his family. Babies who had been born before the institution of the church were baptised and Piet and Bep's first child, Gerda, was the first name to be entered into the new church's baptism registry. The session was young, average age in the mid-20s, and many session meetings went late into the night with early starts in the morning for the elders who often worked two jobs.

The church became a magnet for the wave of young single Dutch immigrants. It became a place where they could meet, compare their experiences and above all exercise their native tongue. It also provided a valuable support network for both men and women, all of whom were struggling to make their way in a new country, learning a new language, and coping with home sickness.

Piet and Bep were the only married couple in that group of immigrants and their home became very popular. Young single men and women would regularly meet in their very small flat and many birthday celebrations and wedding receptions were held in their home. There was even a double wedding celebrated (Arie and Jeanette de Vries and Ben and Willy Meinders) and the taxi to the church was shared with two brides and one groom in the backseat, and the other groom in the front next to the driver.

Piet and Bep provided the venue for the first mini-synod in Wellington. There were 10 delegates and the meeting lasted 4 days. Their bedroom was the largest room in the flat, so it was quickly promoted to Synod Meeting Room. Everyone smoked cigarettes in those days and after the meeting windows needed to be flung open to clear the air a bit before Piet and Bep were able to go to bed.

Initially the Wierenga family travelled by tram to church services each Sunday. Their first vehicle was a little green 1950's

Austin A40 pick up truck (it was later painted red with a 4 inch brush). This was big enough for the Wierenga family (5 children) and the van den Engel family (4 children) to get to and from church with all children (except the babies) sitting in the back tray of the truck.

The Wellington Reformed Church grew in numbers and in 1971 the members decided to divide into 3 congregations – The Wellington, Silverstream and Wainuiomata Reformed Churches. Also, in 1971 the Wellington Reformed Church purchased its own building in Brooklyn with the minister's residence next door.

With biological families left behind in the Netherlands, the church fellowship became family. Many joyful and some sorrowful occasions were shared. But most importantly, the church became the central focus point for worship and fellowship where the Lord is given the honour and glory He so richly deserves. We thank the Lord for these courageous pioneers who travelled a long distance to start a new life in a strange land and where one of their main priorities was to secure a spiritual home in obedience to the Word of God.

Our family has been blessed by our parents' faithfulness and obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading and we are privileged to have four generations of the Wierenga family still worshipping together in the Wellington Reformed Church on Sundays.

*Wierenga children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.*





## Congregational Church Building Wellington 1955

- 1 Andries Meima
- 2 Folkerdina Titia Roelfina Meima
- 3 **Paul van Oosten?**
- 4 Henk de Ruiter
- 5 Nick den Harder
- 6 Fred van Heusden
- 7 Jos Verbokkem
- 8 Ben van der Brink
- 9 Jesse van der Brink
- 10 Wim van der Zwaag
- 11 Joop Braam
- 12 Anton Vooy
- 13 Geertje Schröder
- 14 Alie den Harder
- 15 Minnie Meima
- 16 **Jaap van Selm?**
- 17 Wim Meima (Fiancé Hiltje Dijkstra)
- 18 Tineke Ossevoort (m: Willem Boom)
- 19 Engeltje Schuitema

- 20 Willy Verbokkem
- 21 Corrie Vooy
- 22 Brian de Goede
- 23 Eelke de Goede
- 24 Daan Ossevoort
- 25 **Hiltje Dijkstra?**
- 26 Harmen Dijkstra
- 27 Iris van Vliet
- 28 Jacob Heeringa
- 29 Sjoerdje Heeringa
- 30 Peter Heeringa
- 31 Harold Ossevoort
- 32 Corrie de Goede
- 33 Marie van Heusden
- 34 Hilje Dijkstra
- 35 Mrs. van Berkel
- 36 Atie Oosterbaan
- 37 Nick Oosterbaan
- 38 Arend Lukas Schröder
- 39 Joop Huizinga
- 40 Freda Ceelen
- 41 Warner Ceelen

- 42 **Unknown?**
- 43 Reverend Eeuwe Dijkstra
- 44 Maarten Schuitema
- 45 **Brother of Martin Copier?**
- 46 Arie de Vries
- 47 Jeen de Vries
- 48 **Ingrid Oosterbaan?**
- 49 Mrs. Dijkstra Snr.
- 50 Bep Wierenga
- 51 Gerda Wierenga
- 52 Peter Wierenga
- 53 John Wierenga
- 54 Peter van Dam (Later Pastor)
- 55 Wilhelmina Cornelia van Dam
- 56 Albert Reitsma
- 57 Tineke (Catharina) Koppier
- 58 Grietje Huizinga
- 59 Tinie van Dam

- 60 **Froukje?**
- 61 John de Vries
- 62 Walter de Vries
- 63 Jeanette de Vries
- 64 Maarten Koppier
- 65 Johanna van Dam
- 66 Adrie (Aagje Maria) Koppier
- 67 Jan Dijkstra
- 68 Abraham Martin van Berkel
- 69 **Baby Huizinga?**

# Ministers' who have served in the RCNZ

In alphabetical order (excluding currently serving ministers)

Adams, R G	2000-2008	Nelson	Hoyt, B E	1978-1980	Sharon, USA
Archbald, P N	1995-2001	Masterton		1980-1981	Atoka, USA
	2001-2022	Silverstream		1982-1987	Silverstream
Bass, R R	1992-1994	North Shore		1987-1994	Masterton
Bayne, D J	1986-1990	Home Missionary in Oamaru		1994-2010	Hastings
				2010-2014	Oamaru
Benfell, N M	1987-1990	Wellington	Hoving, H L	1958-1960	Hamilton
Berends, W	1975-1989	Associate Minister Bucklands Beach		1965-1967	Wellington
				1967-1971	Silverstream
Berghouse, P J	1969-1975	Dunedin		1971-1975	Invercargill
Boelens, B	1954-1960	Christchurch	James, B S	1990-1998	Silverstream
Brenton, R M	1993-1998	Wellington	Kavanagh, C J	1996-2005	Palmerston North
Campbell, K J	1972-1976	Hamilton	Ketchen, N W	2011-2014	Palmerston North
	1976-1979	Bucklands Beach	Klazinga, J	2002-2008	Christchurch
Capill, G J	1988-1990	Dunedin		2008-2010	Timaru
Capill, M A	1991-2001	Bucklands Beach	Kleinjan, G H	1986-1992	Kerepehi/Tokoroa
Cooper, S	1960-1963	Christchurch	Kossen, P	1991-1997	Mangere
	1964-1965	Avondale	Kroon, B	1981-1984	Mangere
	1985-1987	Palmerston North		1985-1991	Christchurch
Channing, F	1965-1969	Nelson	Kroon, G H W	1966-1970	Kerepehi/Tokoroa
Davies, W A	1971-1976	Bucklands Beach		1970-1981	Wellington
Deenick, J W	1951-1962	Avondale/ Mangere	Kuipers, B	1978-1983	Palmerston North
			Larsen, C A R	1972-1977	Kerepehi/Tokoroa
De Graaf, A I	1959-1965	Wellington		1977-1987	Dunedin
	1965-1968	Avondale	Lion-Cachet, J	2002-2006	Wellington
Dijkstra, E	1953-1958	Wellington	Milne, G H	1995-2001	Wainuiomata
Douma, A P	1989-1994	Foxton		2001-2006	Wanganui/ Palmerston North
	1994-2001	Christchurch			
	2008-2019	Hastings (Missionary in PNG)	Moelker, P J A	2010-2016	Avondale
Flinn, P R	1980-1987	North Shore	Nilson, V R	1965-1967	Hastings
Flinn, M A	1988-1989	North Shore		1967-1970	Palmerston North
	1989-1998	Pukekohe	Nugteren, A	2007-2013	Wellington
	1998-2001	Bishopdale	Oppelaar, C W	1963-1968	Missionary in Taiwan
	2001-2007	Dovedale			
	2007-2014	Palmerston North		1977-1985	Missionary in Taiwan
Gillard, B	1975-1979	Wainuiomata/ Nelson	Palmer, A W	1969-1980	Mangere
			Pellicaan, P H	1960-1968	Dunedin
Goris, J	1974-1985	Avondale	Phillips, H P	1980-1987	Hastings
	1985-1989	Mangere	Piers, D	2002-2002	Pukekohe
	1989-1998	Nelson	Pieters, W A	1991-1996	Dunedin
	1998-2006	Wellington	Rademaker, E	1989-1995	Wainuiomata
Hart, N	1968-1973	Avondale		1995-2000	Foxton
				2002-2003	Masterton



Reitsma, C J	1966-1970	Wellington
Reurich, L	1971-1979	Hastings
	1979-1984	Kerepehi/Tokoroa
Rietveld, K	1982-1986	Wellington
Rogers, J H	1988-1995	Palmerston North
	1996-2017	North Shore
Rott, T D	2011-2014	Christchurch
Sawyer, J W	1984-1988	Silverstream
	1989-1994	Hastings
Scarrow, J A	1953-1959	Bucklands Beach
Scheepers, A S	2010-2011	Hukanui
Schwarz, M	1977-1985	Hamilton
Sparks, R C	2016-2019	Bucklands Beach
Stadt, P D	1980-1984	Christchurch
Steenhof, J G	1980-1986	Wainuiomata/ Nelson
	1987-1988	North Shore
Ter Horst, J	2003-2006	Avondale
Tyson, T E	1964-1967	Bucklands Beach
	1967-1971	Hamilton
Vaatstra, H	1997-2007	Dunedin
	2010-2016	Whanganui- Palmerston North
	2016-2021	Whanganui
van Huyssteenn, P J J	2007-2014	Foxton
	2014-2021	Wainuiomata
Van Dam, P G	1966-1970	Invercargill
Van der Pol, A	1986-1989	Nelson
Van der Schaaf, P	1963-1968	Christchurch
Van der Vecht, D J	1983-1989	Avondale
Van Garderen, D J	1972-1977	Seacombe Gardens, Australia
	1978-1982	Christchurch
	1982-1990	Bishopdale
	1990-2002	Avondale
	2002-2014	Bucklands Beach
Van Wageningen, J J	1984-1985	Nelson
Van Wichen, R J	2006-2017	Bishopdale
Venema, R J	1958-1960	Dunedin
	1960-1962	Bucklands Beach
	1995	North Shore
Werkema, C G	1983-1984	Nelson
Wiersma, W	1969-1979	Christchurch
	1987-2004	Hamilton
Willemse, M R	2007-2019	Hamilton
Williamson, G I	1962-1968	Mangere
	1972-1983	Silverstream
Zorn, R O	1961-1967	Hamilton
Zuidema, J	2003-2007	Foxton
Zwaan, L	1961-1967	Palmerston North

## Previous Minister, Tom Tyson recollects . . .

Thanks for the opportunity to pass on some recollections to *Faith in Focus* readers on the 70th Anniversary of the RCNZ. Herewith:

Congratulations to what has become my second most favourite denomination in all the world, right after the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (which came into being just one year after my birth in 1935). My wife, Jean and our children immensely enjoyed our 7 and a half years among you all back in the sixties. Two came with us “down under,” three were born there, and one more appeared after we returned to the States.

Here’s what I learned, and grew to appreciate, from my years of service to the Lord in the RCNZ: the very close biblically Reformed character of our two denominations, evidenced by our happy ability to confess together both the Three Forms of Unity AND the Westminster Confession of Faith. That’s a unique “stand-out” among world-wide Protestant denominations.

Second to that would be: the praiseworthy functioning of the sessions of your churches – your elders and deacons don’t just “hold” a position, they work at it diligently and fruitfully. I’ve come to be a believer in “term” eldership, particularly.

Then, there’s this: your families are firmly committed to catechetical instruction. Yeah!

*Yours in Christ,  
Tom Tyson*



# Masterton: Reformed Church 35th Anniversary

Late last year, on November 12th to be exact, our congregation celebrated 35 years since its official institution. Originally a church plant during the early 1970's, it slowly grew into a daughter congregation from the Reformed Church of Silverstream. The Reformed Church of Masterton was then instituted as a stand-alone church in 1987. The small congregation of three families, 2 elderly women and one single girl began meeting in the elder's home initially and later gathered in the

Legion of Frontiersmen Hall until 1982. At this point the church rented part of the old Homeleigh Building and subsequently purchased it, which is where we have worshipped ever since.

In the early days, Rev GI Williamson was the Pastor in Silverstream and he came over to Masterton every second Sunday to conduct the afternoon service, and on alternate weeks on Wednesdays to lead catechism classes and the weekly Bible Study group. In 1982 the Reformed Church of Silverstream appointed Rev B Hoyt to the position of Home Missionary in Masterton.

There have been 5 Pastors in these 35 years: Rev. B Hoyt, Rev. PN Archbald, Rev. E Rademaker, Rev. PS Kloosterman, with our current pastor being Rev D Stares.

We have experienced growth and decline

in church members over the years, but currently we have over 220 people worshipping on Sundays and at times we split at the seams! So much so that, as of April 23, 2023 we have started a church plant in nearby Greytown, where now 20-25 of our church family meets for a morning service, with the vision to spread the Gospel to others in South Wairarapa.

*Back to the anniversary:* while 35 years is not a big milestone, we still felt it reason enough to praise the Lord and organise a church event for our members. An afternoon/early evening celebration was organised and most members gathered together for a glorious afternoon of lawn games, singing, food, fellowship and fun. The rain held off, so we could all mingle in the fellowship hall and outside, chat around the picnic tables and enjoy the green & silver themed decorations which the organising team had put up.

One of our founding members, Mrs Janette Bartlett, gave a lighthearted but insightful speech about the early years of congregational life. She noted the blessing of being part of a small congregation, realising how vital each member is and the essential role of showing love to one another. She also acknowledged the tireless and faithful service of the founding elder, Albert Snoeijer, who for years led all the Church services (other than when Rev Williamson was there) and provided pastoral care for everyone.

Then another long-standing member, Mr Wim Stolte, spoke about his experiences of over 30 years in Masterton. How the idea of being a church in Masterton came about and how the Lord saw fit for it to grow to what it is today.

We closed the afternoon off with a meditation by our current Pastor, David Stares, and enjoyed a delicious light meal; followed by a beautifully decorated and yummy celebration cake (it sure is a blessing to have 2 bakery-owners in our midst!). As mentioned, the weather was exceptionally good for the time of year (the organising team gave a sigh of relief and praised the Lord for that blessing!) and people mingled until well after the official closing time. Always a good sign of a great party.

Ps 133 verse 1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" If heaven is anything like this wonderful afternoon, we can't wait to get there!!

*Janette Bartlett and Heidi Hendrikse*





# Masterton Reformed Church 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



(Above)  
Founding member Mrs Janette  
Bartlett (nee VanderBerg) cutting the  
anniversary cake



(Left)  
Masterton members enjoying the  
good weather and fellowship  
(Below left)

Time of celebrating 35 years of  
God's faithfulness to our  
congregation

