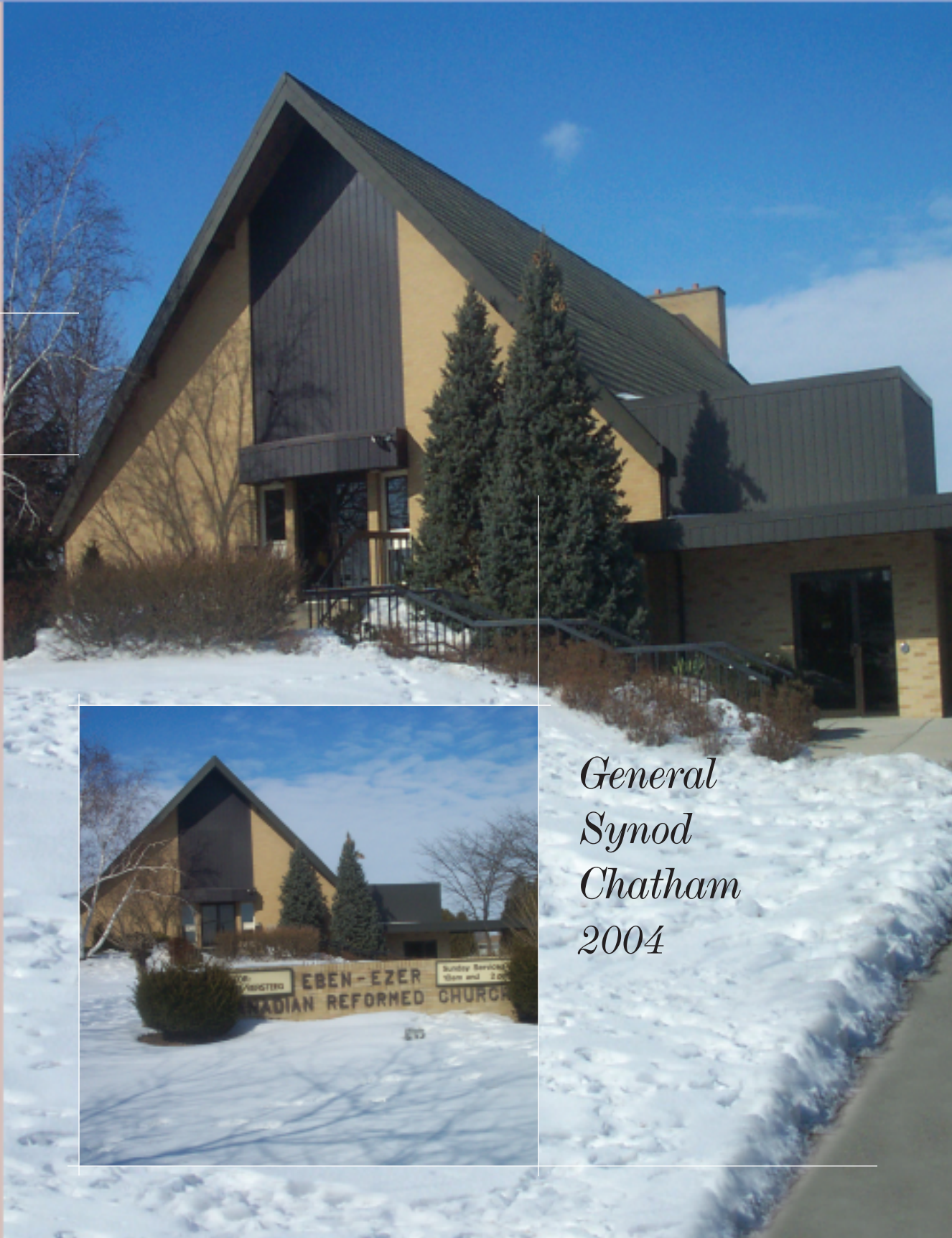


*Sleepers,  
Awake!*

*The Example  
of the  
Recabites*

*Living in the  
Joy of Faith –  
Reflecting the  
Image of God  
in Christ*



*General  
Synod  
Chatham  
2004*



**J. Visscher**

Rev. J. Visscher is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia.  
[jvisscher@canrc.org](mailto:jvisscher@canrc.org)

# Sleepers, Awake!

*If our delight is really in God and in his Word then sleep will be driven far away.*

## A minister sits in the pew

It does not happen often, but from time to time I receive the opportunity to sit in the pew. When I do so in my home church of Langley, the pew happens to be on the front row of the balcony and it gives me an unobstructed view of the pulpit and the minister.

Recently, however, this was not the case. I happened to be visiting another congregation. I came early and sat towards the back of the building. Slowly the church filled up as couples, singles and families filed in. It was good to see so many people coming together to worship the Lord.

All the while the pew before me was still empty. But then, just before the service was to commence, several young men sauntered in and slid into the pew. Almost immediately the service started as the minister gave the salutation, the organ came to life, the congregation raised its voice in praise, and the liturgy flowed on. Soon it was time for the sermon.

Only then a strange thing happened. The young men in front of me started to shift and move around. Their bodies sunk lower and lower. Their heads turned downward. Their eyelids came down and they went to sleep. It all happened somewhere between the reading of the text and the opening sentences of the sermon. It was as if the words, "Beloved Congregation of Our Lord..." acted as a cue or a command to go to sleep.

Yes, and sleep they did, all through the sermon. Oh, once in a while they adjusted their posteriors and on occasion an eye would half open as if to make sure that the minister was still holding forth, but for the rest it was clearly siesta time. That is, until the minister said "Amen" and then it was as if another command had been uttered, for the eyes immediately clicked open, the bodies sat up in the pew and they were back in the world of the living.

## Not a rare event

Now I am sure that the scene which I have just described is not an unusual one for most of our readers. On almost any Sunday, and then especially in the second worship service, you can look around and see some people who are doing a lot of agreeing with the pastor as their heads bob back and forth. Should someone dare to make a comment to them about this, even a humorous one, they often become defensive and claim that they were not sleeping at all but rather listening with their eyes closed. Perhaps!

In any case, it is not my intention to pick on young men or to insist that all who close their eyes are really snoozing. Instead, I want to address this strange phenomenon that has been around in the church probably since its inception. After all, we can read in the book of Acts about a young man called Eutychus who went into a deep sleep as Paul preached on and on, fell from a third story window sill and died (Acts 20: 7-12). How some preachers are tempted to moralize about that incident and to use it as a springboard to discuss the great danger of sleeping in worship!

## Unacceptable behaviour

Yet even if we resist that temptation, there is still an issue here that needs to be addressed. For no matter how you approach it, sleeping in worship is not an acceptable thing. The reasons for it are many and they are diverse, but at the end of the day, it is not something that anyone can be proud of or boast about.

Why not? In the first place, because it displays a lack of respect for the Lord. The Bible says that whenever and wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, He is present. He is present with his majesty, grace and Spirit.

If you were in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, would you dare to go to sleep? Would you snooze as she sits there



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**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:**

Editor: J. Visscher; Managing Editor: R. Aasman  
Coeditors: N.H. Gootjes, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam

**ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:**

CLARION, 26 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J3  
Fax: (780) 418-1506 E-Mail: [raasman@canrc.org](mailto:raasman@canrc.org)

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CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
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on her throne and as one of her servants speaks on her behalf? Of course not! So why is something that is deemed utterly unfitting in the presence of a human dignitary practised in the presence of the Lord of all the earth? Why, frequently it is even excused, rationalized and joked about!

In more than one place the Psalmist informs us that our God looks down from on high at the affairs of men. What must He think when He looks down at a congregation assembled for the express purpose of worshipping Him and sees a segment that are tuned out? I can hardly believe that such a sight brings joy to his fatherly heart.

In addition, the fact that this goes on while the Word is being preached makes it doubly offensive. Here you have a Word that is unlike any other: inspired, infallible, inerrant.

**Inside . . .**

Sleeping in the worship service has to be the height of folly. Here we meet with our God and hear his Word – and somehow that is ignored by going to sleep. Who dares to do that? And yet it happens all the time. Dr. J. Visscher examines the implications of this in his editorial.

Rev. H. Versteeg writes about “Living in the Joy of Faith.” This is the first part of a two-part series. He shows that joy is essential to the image of God and it is manifested in all who are redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Margaret Helder reviews a book dealing with the biblical account of creation. It is an extensive review which will allow the reader good insight into this book and to come perhaps to the decision to read it entirely.

Last month Rev. D. Moes introduced the *Emmaus* Course to us. Beginning with this issue, he introduces the *Nurture* module of this course. *Nurture* is a 15-lesson course for exploring the Christian faith.

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Church at Kerwood took place some time ago in May, 2003. That makes the press release of that event somewhat late. Nevertheless we enjoy hearing how the Lord has blessed this congregation over the past fifty years. May the Lord continue to bless.

We have our regular columns, *Treasures, New and Old* and *Children’s Catechism*. We also have a press release of the Inter-League Publication Board and a letter to the editor.

RA

**IN THIS ISSUE**

Editorial – Sleepers, Awake!  
— J. Visscher ..... 102

Treasures New and Old – The Example of the Recabites  
— E. Kampen ..... 105

Living in the Joy of Faith – Reflecting the Image of God  
in Christ (I) — H. Versteeg ..... 106

Letters to the Editor ..... 109

General Synod Chatham 2004 Snapshots ..... 110

Children’s Catechism — J. Wiskerke van Dooren ..... 112

reformedevangelism.com — D. Moes ..... 113

Press Release – ILPB ..... 114

Book Review – Margaret Helder ..... 115

Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Grace Canadian Reformed  
Church at Kerwood, Ontario ..... 117

Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty ..... 118

Here you have a Word that gives light to the eyes, that makes the simple wise, that revives the soul, that deals with the great issues of sin, salvation and service, that climaxes in Jesus Christ, the living Word. How is it that so great a Word is accorded such a dismal reception?

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*Yes, and sleep they did, all through the sermon.*

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And there is more. Does sleeping in worship not send a very disconcerting signal to all who are present and who earnestly desire to worship the Lord with their whole heart? What does it not do for the guests who come into the worship service? Here your church is convinced that outreach and evangelism are important but when visitors are present, what do they see when they look around? Members sleeping! What a disincentive to join the congregation of the Lord.

### **Is the preacher to blame?**

Of course, at this juncture you may be itching to rebut. You may want to point a finger at the preacher and say that a good deal of the blame lies with him. After all, when Eutychus fell out of that window, or whatever it was, it was because Paul “talked on and on.” In the same vein there are ministers today who do not seem to know when to stop.

Now, I think that those of us who are preachers need to take this charge seriously. We have a constant duty to examine ourselves and our preaching. Are we long-winded? Moreover, are we going too deep and preaching over the heads of most in the congregation? Or are we dull and boring? Are we too

divorced from life and from the issues of daily living? Are we treating the text too lightly and coming to the people of God with half-baked sermons?

As preachers we always need to be willing to look at ourselves and how we bring the Word. Does my sermon really open up and apply the text? Do I use my introduction to generate interest and relevancy? Do I have logical structure? Do I use pertinent illustrations? Is my language current or archaic? Is there something here for the people of God to work with on a daily basis?

There are so many things for the preacher to weigh. In some respects it is an almost impossible charge. Time, training, thought and prayer all go into it – lots of prayer especially. In the process it can be so humbling. Here what you thought was a masterpiece turns out to be a dud and what you considered to be a meagre meal is praised as if it were a sumptuous feast. How the Spirit humbles and surprises preachers!

In short, preachers must engage in self-examination and they must be open to constructive criticism. They must strive to give the people of God their best.

### **What about the congregation?**

What applies to preachers applies to members and congregations too. The latter must also be willing to look in the mirror. For starters, how much conscious and spiritual preparation is there for worship in your lives? Do you understand the meaning of worship and its great importance in the life of every child of God? Do you look forward to it? Do you pray for it? How well do you prepare your hearts?

And what about your bodies? If you make it a habit to come home during the

wee hours of Sunday morning, how is it even possible to keep those eyelids open and those minds sharp during worship? Such a lifestyle is a recipe for worship disaster.

Sunday morning dawns and what do you do? Is rising from slumber a chore and does it include a mad dash to the church? Do you arrive on time or just in the nick of time? Are you ready to meet the Lord? How well and with what degree of determination do you focus your mind and heart?

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*Does sleeping in worship not send a very disconcerting signal to all who are present and who earnestly desire to worship the Lord with their whole heart?*

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Worship, you see, is not an idle affair. It also requires something of you, the worshipper.

### **Common ownership**

In the end, however, it must be said that meaningful, wide-awake worship involves a common calling and a common challenge. Pastors and members alike need to be willing to look at themselves. We need to go beyond finger pointing at one another and we need to focus much more on the Lord who is our common treasure. If our delight is really in Him and in his Word then sleep will be driven far away.

May the Lord be gracious and grant us all open mouths, open hearts and open eyes.



E. Kampen



MATTHEW 13:52

# The Example of the Recabites

Rev. E. Kampen is minister  
of the Willoughby Heights  
Canadian Reformed  
Church at Langley,  
British Columbia.  
[ekampen@canrc.org](mailto:ekampen@canrc.org)

*“The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab have carried out the command their forefather gave them, but these people have not obeyed me.”*

Jeremiah 35:16

In Jeremiah 35 we read about the Recabites. While they were known by the name of the Recabites, the key figure was Jonadab, the son of Recab. We read about this Jonadab in 2 Kings 10:15-27. There we learn that he accompanied Jehu in his effort to purge Baal worship from Israel. From 1 Chronicles 2:55 we learn that Jonadab's father, Recab was a Kenite. That means he was a descendant of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, the son of Jethro the priest of Midian. This Jonadab had commanded his children not to drink wine. Not only that, he had commanded them not to be involved in anything to do with wine in terms of having a settled existence, which would include having vineyards. He told them to live a nomadic life in tents.

From Jeremiah 35 we learn that Jonadab's descendants had remained faithful to the command of their father. If we keep in mind that Jeremiah lived in the time leading up to the exile, this means that the Recabites had remained obedient for over 200 years. When, upon the LORD's command, Jeremiah put pitchers full of wine in front of them and urged them to drink, they refused, remaining obedient to the command of their forefather.

Try to picture that timeframe. Can you imagine that you today would refuse to drink wine because your ancestor in the year 1750 had made this a rule for the family? Many children have difficulty

remembering a command their father gave them only five minutes ago. The Recabites, however, were unflinching in their obedience.

It is this obedience to a rule made by a man that is put in contrast to the obedience to a rule from no one less than God, a rule necessary with a view to eternal wellbeing. That is the rule to have no other gods but serve the Lord God alone. The people of Judah and Jerusalem had shown no such loyalty to the God who had saved them from Egypt and given them the Promised Land. That is what we hear in verse 16, “The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab have carried out the command their forefather gave them, but these people have not obeyed me.”

As the LORD held up the example of the Recabites, so obedient in their command given by a man, to the people of Israel, it is also held up as an example for us today. It causes us to ask how obedient we are to the command of God to serve Him alone, and how resolute we are in rejecting any suggestion that we compromise in that obedience. The God who asks this of us is the one who has set us free from bondage to Satan and sin through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jeremiah had to put pitchers of wine in front of the Recabites as a test of their obedience. What happens when we are tested, or, we could say, tempted with the ways of the world, its values, its riches

and principles? What happens if we are tempted to compromise just a little in order to find acceptance in the world?

The end of the chapter shows that the question of obedience to our heavenly Father is not one that can be shrugged off lightly. Because of the persistent refusal to listen, the LORD would bring evil upon the people. As for the Recabites, the LORD promised to reward their faithfulness to the command of their father. His promise was that they would always have a member of the family serve the LORD. Their name would not be blotted out from among the people.

What we have here is the covenant promise of blessing upon obedience to the Lord and his commandments. Many of the Psalms stress this too. Think of Psalm 112:1, 2, “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” This is the great incentive to keep on walking in the obedience of faith.

Let us then remember the lesson from the Recabites in terms of their obedience to the voice of Jonadab their earthly father and listen to the voice of God our heavenly Father in Christ to have no other gods before him but to serve him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.





Rev. H. Versteeg is minister of the  
Canadian Reformed Church at  
Chatham, Ontario.  
[hversteeg@canrc.org](mailto:hversteeg@canrc.org)

# Living in the Joy of Faith – Reflecting the Image of God in Christ<sup>1</sup> (Part 1)

*Zephaniah 3:14-17*

What is your view of your God? Do you see Him as an angry and just God? Then you will likely be afraid of Him. Then you may do the things He wants you to do, but you do them out of fear of his anger and his wrath.

Do you view Him as a very forgiving and compassionate God? Then you may be more inclined to live a rather carefree and careless life before the LORD, a life with little or no effort to exercise self-control. Or you will curb the evil desires that sometimes rise up within your heart since you see God as One who is infinite in love and mercy, One who will always forgive anyone who comes before Him with a contrite heart, genuinely seeking his forgiveness.

Between these two opposite ends are many variations. Hopefully, most of us stand somewhere in the middle so that we reckon with God's mercy and God's justice equally. We acknowledge that He will indeed be very angry with our sins, yet we know that He is also very forgiving in our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we fail after having given our best effort.

## God who has pleasure

But, apart from viewing God as a merciful and just God, have you ever viewed God as the God who also has pleasure; who takes pleasure; yes, even as the God who sings? Indeed, in Scripture we read about much singing, singing about God, and singing to God: to God the Father as our Creator and God the

Son as our Recreator, our Saviour. But what about God Himself singing? We don't hear so much about that.

Yet that would appear to be what the Word of the LORD, via the prophet Zephaniah, would be revealing to us when Zephaniah wrote in chapter 3:17b:

He will take great delight in you,  
He will quiet you with his love,

He will rejoice over you with singing.

Then it appears that our God is also a God who has joy, who takes delight, who also loves to sing. What would our God then be singing about? That's a good question.

## What does God sing about?

We sing and the songs in Scripture sing about the majesty, glory and grace of our LORD, about the goodness, compassion, and love of our LORD, about his righteousness, justice, and gracious mercy. Yet, there are also those who know these virtues of the LORD, who confess them, and yet live grumpy lives. They never seem to sing spontaneously, but only sing when they are in a group setting, such as in a worship service. It never seems to come up within them to sing at any particular moment or on the spur of the moment. Others sing almost constantly, either in words or in whistling a tune. You can hear them whistling while preparing the meal, washing the dishes, or sweeping the floors. They do that because joy is on their hearts. That joy is there because of knowledge. Yes, they too, have knowledge

of and experience the very same misery and sorrow as those grumpy persons who never seem to be able to sing unless driven by a group setting. But they also have knowledge of who their LORD God is and what He has done for them and how wonderfully they can now live in the joy of that knowledge and conviction.

Now, from the book of Zephaniah, we also receive a glimpse of the joy of our Lord's heart. That is more often expressed in Scripture. The Lord delights in those who are his, those who walk in his ways. For example, Psalm 147:11 says: "the LORD delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in his unfailing love." Here, in Zephaniah 3:17, the LORD takes delight in his saving work.

Zephaniah prophesied concerning the coming judgement that will surely come on the nations, as well as apostate Judah. But Zephaniah also made clear that God would yet be merciful towards his people. He would restore a remnant by his saving power. And the LORD takes pleasure in the work of his hands. He takes pleasure in saving his people; so much pleasure that He rejoices with singing. His heart is filled with joy in doing this marvellous work for his people. It is of great value to us to know that our God is a joyful God. He is a God of joy. He is a God who ultimately delights in things. He is such a God of joy that He thinks of things that give Him delight. Yes, that is our God.

## Created in his image

And then to think, sisters, that we were created in his image. We understand that to mean that we were created in true knowledge, holiness, righteousness, having dominion. Since we have a God who takes pleasure, who has joy, He would also then have instilled this joy in man's heart when He created man. Man was neither created to be grumpy, nor to be depressed, sorrowful, distressed, burdened. No, as God took delight and rejoiced over his beloved with singing when He saved them from inevitable eternal damnation by the power of his hand, so the LORD would also have created all things out of joy in the beginning.

Yes, sometimes, a person asks, "Why did God create everything anyway? Was God lonely? Was the LORD bored so He sought for something to do? Did He think to create the heavens and the earth in order to find some relief from his boredom?" I doubt that. God is not a lonely God. Our God is not a God who has a need. He is a God who is all in all, so He does not lack, has no needs;

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## *What would our God then be singing about?*

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nothing is missing. He has it all. He is the one and only true God, the One and Only who exists from eternity to eternity. Yet, although He is the one and only true God, He is not a lonely God, for our God exists with three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are three distinct persons within the one godhead of our God. He could not have been lonely, for these three persons, although very distinct, yet are so united that they support each other in every way. There is such a bonding within the Trinity that

cannot be found anywhere else. No, our God is not a lonely God that He should create the heavens and the earth out of loneliness, out of boredom, for something to do. Quite the contrary.

## Why create?

Why then did God create the heavens and the earth? Well, I would suggest, that perhaps He did so out of the great joy of his heart, for joy, pleasure, glory, and praise. For He is also a God who is joyful, who has joy, who has delight and takes pleasure. You sisters know how you sometimes want to knit or sew something, or bake something, or plant some flowers; not because you need it, not also because you are bored, but simply out of the joy of your heart. You enjoy knitting or sewing, gardening, baking. You take pleasure in doing those things and, as you take pleasure in them, doing them out of the joy of your heart, you also receive joy and pleasure. Just doing these things that you enjoy doing out of the joy of your heart may then also move you to sing or to whistle a tune.

The LORD created the heavens and the earth out of the sheer joy of his heart. He took pleasure in the work of his hands. After He had created all things, He stood back, as it were, much like a builder would do, delighting in the work of his hands, or as a painter would do, adoring his painting, or as a housewife would do, admiring the sweater she knit, the birthday cake she made, or the meal she made, etc. So our LORD God had a good look at what He had made and He said, with much joy and delight in his heart: "Yes, indeed, it is very good."

## Joy in man too

Now, if God is a God of joy, then would man whom He created, whom He had given the possibility to express emotion, not also have been given the ability to enjoy, to have joy, and to

express joy? Would that not also have been part and parcel of being made in the image of God? God, being a God of joy, would also have created man with the ability to have joy and to express joy. We can be sure that Adam and Eve, before their fall into sin, certainly had much joy, joy as the LORD God walked with them in the garden, joy as they took care of the garden of the LORD, joy in their relationship with each other and with the other creatures God had made. Then you can imagine that, as Adam and Eve did their work, they would have sang a song of praise for such a wonderful and magnificent God, for such a wonderful relationship with God, for each other,

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*Since we have a God who takes pleasure, who has joy, He would also then have instilled this joy in man's heart when he created man.*

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and for God's beautiful creation in which they may serve Him. You can also imagine the LORD God singing a song in his heart, rejoicing in his handiwork, a song that spoke of the wonders He had placed in each creature, and how they now give Him praise and glory for his indescribable majesty and unfathomable wisdom.

## The joy stopped

But suddenly, there was little singing; in fact, there was no more singing. Just as the songs at a wedding banquet suddenly are cut short because of news of a sudden tragic death in the family, so suddenly there was no joy in heaven, no joy in the heart of our Lord, no joy in

Paradise, no joy in the heart of Adam and Eve for they rebelled against God. There was disobedience, disloyalty, disrespect for authority, and rebellion for the Creator of all things. And when those things occur, the beautiful, glowing flames of joy go out.

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*And because He is a God of joy, He would not allow sin to destroy everything He had made.*

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You can be sure that there was no singing on the LORD's heart, no tune on his lips as the LORD God walked in the garden to meet with Adam and Eve after they had sinned. It was not the sound of joyous singing or the whistling of a glad tune that alerted Adam and Eve that the LORD God had come to the garden to meet them. No, the joy had gone out. And yet, our God remained the God of joy. And because He is a God of joy, He would not allow sin to destroy everything He had made. Yes, all things would need to be purified through fire, even the very elements of this earth will melt in the heat. (2 Pet 3:12)

Yet God will establish a renewed heavens and earth on which only righteousness will dwell. He will do so at the cost of shedding the blood of his only beloved Son. And so, when the LORD God found man and his wife, He punished them with curses, curses that affected not only themselves, but all of the heavens and the earth. Yet, the LORD God also spoke of promises, promises of a Redeemer to be born of a woman who would save them from their sins. That promise of the Redeemer to come left joy in man's heart, that is, in the heart of he who would believe it and live in it in faithfulness. It gave man hope. And, in that hope, he could still have joy, find joy, and receive joy. But man must believe that

hope of eternal life in order to receive joy and live in that joy. The strength of his belief would determine the degree of joy he would experience until after this life. God will again grant man full and complete joy in the restored Paradise, the New Jerusalem, having restored man completely in his image through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Faith leads to joy**

That the strength of his belief would determine the degree of joy he would experience can be compared to a young lady who was promised by her boyfriend that he would give her a promise ring on her birthday. Then, that promise should give her joy, should it not? But what if she doubts his word? Do you see that her joy is related to how much she believes his word? If she doubts his word, rather than receiving joy, she receives misery.

She would have been better off not having heard that promise. But if she really believes it without a doubt, her joy is great, as great as if she had already received the ring. Yet, at the moment of actually receiving the ring, her joy would be complete and would know no limits.

Yes, for as long as this mortal, fallen, earthly life continues, the joy that existed

at creation will never be the same again. Yet, the God of joy left joy in the heart of man, in the man who lives by faith.

Now of course, since the fall into sin, we can break down joy into two categories: earthly joy and heavenly joy. While there are things in this life in which the Lord does grant us to take pleasure so that we may have joy and also be an expression of our joy (such as marriage, the bearing and raising of children, even our jobs to certain

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*In Christ, his Son, God begins to restore in us that eternal joy.*

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extent, although there will also always be a certain amount of slavery to it, a weariness of the flesh – “by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” Gen 3:19), yet, only the things that focus on the life to come can give us everlasting joy: that joy that the LORD intended to be a part of our lives if we would not have eaten from the forbidden fruit.

## **THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

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*Dr. N.H. Gootjes*

Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

110 west 27th Street, Hamilton, ON L9C 5A1

Phone: 905-575-3688; Fax: 905-575-0799; Email: [nhgootjes@canrc.org](mailto:nhgootjes@canrc.org)

College Website: [www.canrc.org/college](http://www.canrc.org/college)



## Letter to the Editor

### In Christ

In Christ, his Son, God begins to restore in us that eternal joy, and so, also in that way, we again reflect his image, for He is also a God of joy. In Christ, the LORD is restoring us in the image in which He originally made us so that we would again have true knowledge of Him, live holy lives, distinct from not only the other creatures God has made, but especially now from evil man. And we would know ourselves to be righteous before God, in Christ alone, through faith, and also again begin to exercise dominion, foremost in our personal lives with respect to our sins, weaknesses, shortcomings and exercising self-control. The more we live in that restored image of God, by Christ's Spirit

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*We could learn to express the joy of our faith more freely and easily.*

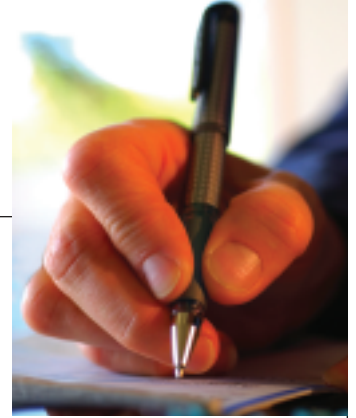
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at work in our hearts, through his Word, and also acknowledge and confess that Christ's blood was shed also for the forgiveness of our sins, the more we begin to live in that eternal joy which God originally intended for us before we fell into sin. That restored, eternal joy begins to grow in our lives when we believe what God has done for us in his Son.

And, as said before, the degree of joy experienced is related to the depth of our faith. Yet, even among those who have faith, even a strong faith, they do not always experience the joy of faith. Why is that? Well, there are two things that can stifle the glowing flame of the joy of faith. The one is formalism. The other is allowing the burdens, the trials, the concerns of this life to be more in our focus than the blessings the Lord our God has given us. In relation to the topic of this morning, we will focus mainly on

### Letter to the Editor:

I am writing in response to a Letter to the Editor by brother Glenn Tams in issue 1. What can be the argument for not sending one's children to a Canadian Reformed School? Is brother Glenn Tams' real problem perhaps that he feels addressed?



T.M. Veenendaal  
Chestermere, Alberta

the joy of faith which seems to glow dimly or at times not at all because of the troubles of life.

### Careful in measuring joy

But before we go into this, it must also be said that we should be extremely careful to evaluate one's faith by the joy one expresses. For the manner in which a person expresses joy can differ from culture to culture, from nationality to nationality, as well as from person to person within one culture or nationality. Some nationalities express joy more freely and quickly, while others are more reserved in the expression of their emotions. Take an African, for example. An African-American person tends to express his emotions much more freely than a Dutchman. But even among African-Americans, and so within any particular nationality, there will be those who express their joy quite freely and easily, while others who experience the same joy in their heart are not so inclined to show their joy so openly. Therefore, although the degree of joy experienced is related to the depth of faith, yet, one must be very careful to make sweeping judgmental statements when that joy is not always so outwardly noticeable.

Yet, the apostle Paul listed among the fruit of Spirit, who works faith in our hearts, also the gift of joy (Gal 5:22). Why is it, then, that some do not experience that joy? Some even struggle with the fact that they do not experience that joy. As stated above, among other reasons, two reasons can be mentioned for why

the joy of faith may not always be so experienced in our lives, namely, formalism or depression, burdens of one sort or another.

### Formalism

Formalism can be defined as following the form of religion, keeping the strict adherence to doctrine, without really giving the origin and purpose of the doctrine itself much thought. Thus, one lives the outward form of religion without enjoying the inward content and intent of doctrine. Stating this in another way, it can be said that it is to live by the letter of the law or doctrine but not according to the spirit of the law or doctrine. Not giving much thought to the spirit of the law, to the content of doctrine, will not give the doctrine or law its intended result, namely the joy of faith. True knowledge and understanding of doctrine should produce joy and delight in the life of the believer and should not stifle the joy of faith. Yet, perhaps, most of us know some people who have left our federation because they did not experience the joy of the Christian faith within our circles. Indeed, people in other circles do, at times, seem to show greater joy in the expression of their Christian faith. We could learn to express the joy of our faith more freely and easily. For the joy of expressing the faith is also an aroma that can, and does, draw those lost in their misery to the only Saviour of life.

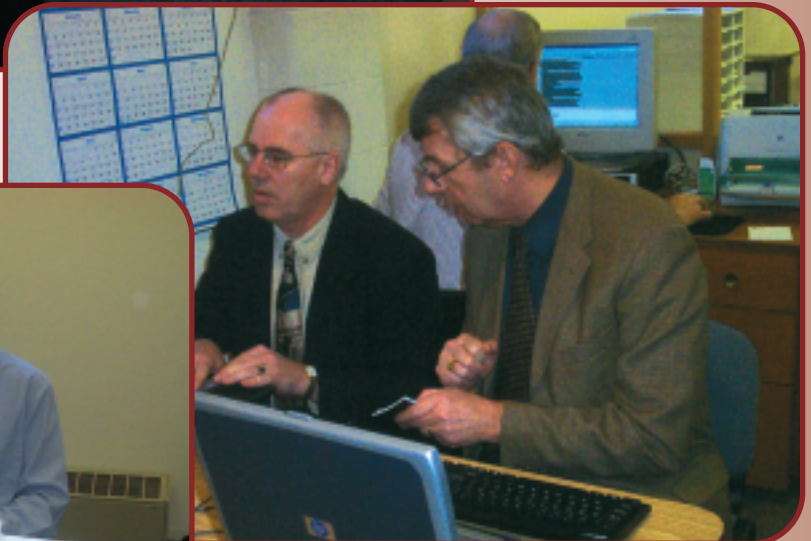
<sup>1</sup> Speech held for Women's League Day in Chatham, October 22, 2003

# Synod Chatham 2004 Snapshots



*Photo credit: Rev. W.B. Slomp*





*A Synod Review, with photos, will be published in our next issue.*



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

# Lord's Day 5



*Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.*

Your Dad bought a car. Cars are expensive. Did your Dad take his wallet and count out a stack of twenty dollar bills? I am sure he did not. His wallet would not even hold so many bills! He said to the car dealer: "How much do I have to pay for this car?" Then he wrote out a check. The salesman will take that check to the bank. And the bank will put the money on his account.

Your father had to pay. This Lord's Day also speaks about having to pay. When someone buys a car, he has a

debt. And a debt must be paid. When the bank transfers the money to the car dealer, his debt is paid off. Then he no longer is in debt.

But what about the debt we have with God? This debt becomes bigger every day. You, too, are in debt with God because of your sins. Our heavenly Father is very upset at us for the bad things we do every day. He gets angry when we sin. That is divine anger. He is the holy God, the creator of heaven and earth. What can we do about that?

Your father could say to the car dealer: go to the bank and you get your money. But we cannot give money to God to pay for our sins. We have nothing in a heavenly bank account to pay off our debt.

And do you know how great our debt is? Not \$5000. It is impossible to pay this debt with money. Therefore you cannot escape punishment. If no one comes to help you, you will come to the end of your life in hopeless debt. The result will be that when you would die you will go to Satan. And God's love cannot be found there. There, it is always dark and you are always lonely.

When you think about that, you shiver. For that is really the punishment we deserve. Who can pay this debt? The bank cannot pay for it, for God does not want money. He wants people to make up for this. Can your father or mother, your uncle or aunt do that? No, they cannot, for they themselves have great debts with God.

Yet there is a solution. What a relief! Salvation can come from a man. But this person must be without sin. And he must be very strong. Strong enough to undergo the punishment God gives for sinning. This person can only take the full punishment if he is also God. And you know his name: the Lord Jesus.

More about him next time.



## Dick Moes

Rev. Dick Moes is minister of  
the Surrey Covenant  
Reformed Church in  
Cloverdale, B.C. (URC)  
[dickmoes@canrc.org](mailto:dickmoes@canrc.org)



# reformedevangelism.com

## Part 1: What Christians Believe – Believing in God

In last month's column, we introduced the *Emmaus* Course to you. Beginning with this issue, we will introduce the *Nurture* module of this course. *Nurture* is a 15-lesson course for exploring the Christian faith. These fifteen lessons are divided into three parts: (1) What Christians believe (2) How Christians grow (3) Living the Christian Life. The topic of this issue is Lesson one of Part one: "Believing in God."

After some introductory exercises, the lesson begins by asking the participants in the course to discuss the following question: "If someone were to come up to you in the street tomorrow and ask whether you believe in God and why, what would you say?" The intent of this question is to get the participants to think about how they would articulate their belief in God to an unbeliever or someone who is showing interest in the Christian faith. At the same time, it allows unbelievers and interested persons to participate in the discussion. Should the latter be the case, it should make for an interesting discussion.

After having discussed the question for about five minutes, the facilitator asks the people to share their answers. Once this is done, he goes into a brief teaching session, based on the handout all participants have, aiming to show two things: (1) the question whether or not

God exists is very important and (2) the question of God's existence is not a matter of opinion, but trust supported by evidence.

### Going into groups

Having completed the teaching session, the participants discuss in groups of three or four again. This time, they talk about their own belief in God, focusing on one or two of the following questions: (1) Do you identify with these two things people often say (see paragraph above)? (2) Has your faith in God been constant through your life or has it changed? (3) Why do you think some people find it hard to believe in God? (4) What evidence can you think of that supports belief in God? The goal of this discussion time is to allow the participants to share some of the things they have experienced on their journey of faith or lack of faith. Again, when unbelievers or interested people are present, this discussion time is extremely valuable for all concerned.

Once the various groups have discussed their questions, the facilitator once again asks the people to share some aspects of their discussion time. Having taught lesson one myself, I know that during this time of sharing a number of very valuable and personal insights are brought forward.

### Teaching session

After this time of sharing, the facilitator goes into a brief teaching session again. He does this in an interactive manner by asking the participants to share what they find most amazing about creation and the natural world. Once you have explored the wonder of the universe, ask the three questions listed in the participant's handout: (1) The universe had a beginning? Who began it? (2) The universe has order and beauty. Who arranged it? (3) The universe shows evidence of design. Who is the designer?

God not only reveals Himself in the world at large; He also reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus made some very extraordinary statements about Himself and God. He was condemned to death. One accusation that played a key roll in his condemnation was that He was a blasphemer. A few weeks after He had died, his friends and disciples came with a public declaration that after He had died on the cross, He came to life again because He had arisen from the dead. At this point, the participants are asked to discuss the following question: "Imagine it is indeed true that Jesus arose from the dead (more about this in lesson 4). What implications would this have for God and the statements Jesus made about Himself and God?"

## Sharing experiences

Besides revealing Himself in the world at large and in Jesus Christ, God also reveals Himself in our own persons. The facilitator draws this out by asking the participants to share something “wonderful” about themselves. Since some people may not be comfortable in doing this, the facilitator should give the lead by sharing some things he finds “wonderful” about himself. He may want to point to the fact that he is able to think and remember, see in colour and create works of art. Once he has done this, others will realize what the point of

the exercise is and will feel more comfortable in participating.

At this time, it is good to ask the people to discuss in small groups again what they make of all that has been said. The purpose of doing this in small groups is that it is usually easier for people to identify questions in small groups than in the larger gathering.

After about five minutes of discussion time, you should have a general question and answer session. After this question and answer time, the teaching session concludes with knowing God for yourself. This is very important, because

there is a world of difference between knowing about God and knowing God.

The session is closed with prayer and the participants are encouraged to read some Bible passages that relate to the lesson material.

If you would like to view the outline for lesson one, go to [www.reformedevangelism.com](http://www.reformedevangelism.com) and follow the links. Since this lesson is about believing in God, it may be helpful if you are informed about the “Openness of God” debate. We have posted an article on this debate which you can access by hitting the “Library” link on our website.

Next time, we hope to introduce the second lesson “We need God in our lives.”

## Press Release

### Press Release of the Inter-League Publication Board with the Administration Committee held on November 7, 2003.

#### Opening

Don Bos opens with the reading of Philippians 1:1-11 followed by prayer. Present on behalf of the Board: Don Bos, Joni Vis, Elaine Spriensma. Absent with notice: Mike Vandeburgt. Present on behalf of the Administration Committee: Paul DeBoer, Theresa Westrik, Debbie Swaving, Cathy Jonker. Absent with notice: Annette Nobel, Bernie Kottelenberg.

#### Progress report

New books published and available for sale are:

*1 & 2 Timothy* (workbook) by

Rev. D.G.J. Agema

*Believe & Confess Vol. 1* by Rev. C.G. Bos

*The Lord and Giver of Life* (work of the Holy Spirit) by Dr. A.N. Hendricks

*Joshua* by Rev. H.M. Smit

From Australia:

*Enumerations in the Wilderness Vol. 1* (Book of Numbers)

*God comes to His People Vol. 1* (Book of Exodus)

Reprints:

*Messianic Motherhood and the*

*Significance of the Book of Ruth*

*Enduring Joy*

*1 Corinthians*

Books in progress:

*A King According to God's Will*

*Believe and Confess vol. 2*

*Isaiah*

*James* (workbook)

*Jonah: God's Prophet*

*What is Your Answer?*

Books being re-edited:

*The Brides Treasure & To the Praise of His Glory*

*Purim*

The typists' job has been eliminated because of the computer. In its place we now have a second editor. This is to enhance the quality of the book.

#### Marketing report

Representatives in each congregation continue to receive new brochures and price lists of the books. They continue to promote this Reformed material in their local congregation. Advertising is done in *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal*. Brochures will be sent to the United Reformed Churches.

#### Financial report

Total revenue for the fiscal year of June 1, 2002 - May 31, 2003 was \$29,659.96. Expenses were \$26,674.16. There is an inventory of approximately \$60,000.00 worth of books. Auditor's



report stated that the Treasurer performed his duties faithfully and thoroughly. A recommendation for the committee which we have already implemented is a better system for keeping track of the inventory.

#### General discussion

The need to print more than 1000 copies for the first print will be looked at on an individual basis. A second editor is approved. Amendments to the Policy Manual were handed out. The Board is making progress in finding new books to print. We should continue to have potential editors and translators evaluated before they do extensive work.

Paul DeBoer closed the meeting with prayer.



Reviewed by Margaret Helder

**Kurt P. Wise. 2002. *Faith, Form and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms about Creation and the Age of the Earth*. Broadman and Holman Publishers. Nashville, TN. Paperback 287 pages.**

There is a Bible chorus that declares “We’re on the battlefield for our Lord.” Indeed Christians have always understood that they are part of the army of believers dedicated to the fight against sin, the world and the devil. Of course this battle against evil and rejection of God is unrelenting and continuous. Moreover the fight seems to have become more intense since the adoption of evolution theory by most of the intelligentsia of the world beginning in England in the nineteenth century. Many Christians today however wonder if the fight against evolution is a necessary undertaking of the church. For people not involved in the study of nature, the constant emphasis by some people on origins seems particularly irrelevant.

It is to address the issues of misunderstanding and ignorance of the creationist position that Dr. Kurt Wise has written a new book entitled *Faith, Form and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms about Creation and the Age of the Earth*. While the title is certainly a mouthful, this is not a discussion of science *per se*, but a search for truth based firstly on Scripture and secondly on nature. It is an apologia for the historic Christian faith.

Few Christians in science today are as qualified as Kurt Wise to talk about origins theory. His field of expertise is fossils and he obtained his Ph.D. in this discipline from Harvard University. His research director was none other than arch-evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould who well understood that Wise was a creationist. Unlike most of his fellow graduates from Harvard, Dr. Wise did not go on to an influential and well paid job. Instead he accepted a position in a small Christian college in Tennessee. There he has encouraged a nucleus of like-minded scientists to cooperate on highly technical research of relevance to

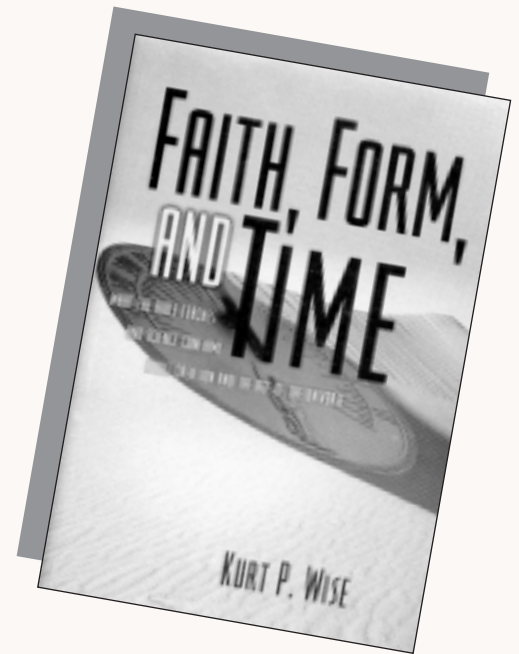
creation. He does not appreciate superficial efforts. Indeed he has made himself unpopular in some circles through his insistence on high standards in scientific research and in the drawing of conclusions. Thus one might expect his new book to deal with science but it only lightly touches on the issue. What this book does is to provide a Scriptural defence of the creationist position.

### **The Bible is the standard**

Not only does the author discuss in detail exactly what the Bible tells us about the creation, but he also discusses the importance of these statements. For a start, he points out that “if the Bible is the preserved issuance from the mouth of God and carries some of the attributes of God in its basic essence, then it seems only natural to give it authority over any claim of man” (p. 20). This of course includes any claims of modern scientists. Having established that the Bible is the standard by which to evaluate any question, Dr. Wise then goes on to examine the issue of evidence from the natural world. Here too, he declares, that the Bible is the standard. Thus he remarks: “The Bible is not reliable because evidence exists that it is, evidence exists that it is because the Bible is reliable. Evidence can encourage unbelievers to place their faith in Christ, but ultimately Christian faith can only grow as Christians rely upon faith and not evidence. The Bible is preserved, reliable and true because of the nature of its author. It should be believed over observation and evidence” (p. 26).

### **The great synthesis**

Dr. Wise next anticipates the reader who might well, in response, ask what value there is in making observations and collecting evidence from nature. He replies that there is much value, not the least of which is that God wants us to study his creation. Following scriptural defence of this argument, he next launches into a discussion of the “Great Synthesis.” In that the “Great Divorce” is the pursuit of knowledge without recourse to God’s revelation, the Great Synthesis is an attempt to “focus on God once again and base all our academic disciplines on God and his truths” (p. 27).



This objective, of course, includes science. Indeed, declares Dr. Wise, it is a fact that study of nature can only be justified in terms of a biblical worldview. Of the three necessary presuppositions that must be true if science is to be pursued, none can be proved but are based on the word of God. The presuppositions are that the physical world exists, that information about it can be known, and should be known. On this issue Dr. Wise declares: “The doctrine of the Creator (that God created the physical world so that all people everywhere through all time could come to know Him through it) is the foundation for all the presuppositions of science. Science, then, is founded upon presuppositions that are themselves founded on the truth of Scripture – and thus on the nature of God. Outside of Scripture there is no known foundation or justification for the presuppositions of science” (p. 35).

### **The creation week**

Having established that God wants us to study his creation, and the primacy of Scripture over all interpretation of the evidence, Dr. Wise then proceeds to discuss the creation week, the implications of the fall of Adam, the flood and the march of history from Noah to the New Earth. Plenty of scientific issues are connected with past history. One issue of special concern to most people is the age of the universe and of earth itself. The author’s initial statement that a face-value examination of the creation suggests an ancient universe will certainly

surprise many readers. However he is not actually saying that the universe bears witness to an old age. As we read on, he clarifies this remark. His point is that such conclusions are based on a superficial reading of the evidence and are in fact not justified on several counts. Thus he declares: "Although there are many different indicators that the universe is old, each one struggles with data that does not seem to fit. Because God created things with the appearance of age, some of the excessive, apparent age is due to the nature of the initial creation" (p.70). The whole issue, the author has already told us, boils down to belief in God's Word. He earlier wrote concerning God: "He provides sufficient *ambiguity* in the creation for humans to conclude erroneously a history that never actually happened – if they so choose. This is apparently because God requires faith of us (Heb 11:3). At the same time, however, God does provide truth and gives us reason to believe it. In each of the above examples, God does tell us the truth" (p.60 italics his).

As Dr. Wise moves briskly through a wide variety of disciplines in connection with a discussion of the creation week, he shares with us some interesting insights into God's character. It is his contention, for example, that God loves variety. We see this, he says, not only in the great diversity of form among heavenly bodies but also among living creatures. Furthermore and perhaps even more interestingly, God reveals his love of communication. Not only do we see this in the structure of the genetic code, but the whole universe bears similar witness in that so many aspects can be described in mathematical terms (a language). Dr. Wise concludes his chapter on the heavens with the words: "because God created all things by his Word (John 1:1-3; Heb 11:3), evidence of language was created throughout the creation (such as the mathematical precision of the universe and the mathematical nature of the natural laws). . . The universal presence of language in the structure of the universe suggests that the cause of the beginning of the universe may be a communicator" (p. 91).

## The garden of Eden

Beyond the creation week Dr. Wise turns his attention to events in the Garden of Eden. Based on Scripture he argues that God cursed all nature, including the whole universe, as a consequence of Adam's fall into sin. Furthermore, all the evil that we see here in nature stems from this corruption of God's very good creation. As Dr. Wise remarks: "The young-age creation model suggests that these biological evils of death, disease, struggle for survival, poisons, thorns, and carnivory were all a consequence of man's sin. Other theistic models of origins are forced by their time lines to claim that all these things preceded man's sin and are part of the world the way God created it. Since this seems to strain the conventional understanding of goodness and mercy, the young age creation model for the origin of biological natural evil is more consistent with the nature of God as revealed in Scripture" (p. 166). Almost as sad as the fall of man, of course, was the universal flood of Noah's time. The author discusses not only Scripture but also probable geological ramifications of this event. The modern theory of plate tectonics for example, is taught to every school age child in geography or earth science courses. This theory requires millions of years to work, but catastrophic plate tectonics (connected to the flood) achieves the same or better results within a short time frame.

It is evident that Dr. Wise wrote this book to encourage Christians to pursue truth in all their endeavours. Important derivative issues include the special value of every human life and our mandate to protect the environment. He touches on these issues too. The importance of this work is to argue that there is only one truth and that is God's word. It was as a direct result of God's command that the creation came into existence. Thus we are able to observe and appreciate what God has wrought. Specifically we are able to observe in the creation "symmetry and beauty, complexity and order, unity and variety, language and mathematical precision, completeness

## Church News

Eligible for call:

**Candidate Walter Geurts**

3417 Rockwood Drive  
Burlington, ON L7N 3H6  
905-631-8433  
[wgeurts@cogeco.ca](mailto:wgeurts@cogeco.ca)

The new and enhanced website for the  
**International Conference of Reformed Churches** is  
[www.icrconline.com](http://www.icrconline.com)

Declined the call to Neerlandia, Alberta

**Rev. W.M. Wielenga**  
of Lynden, WA, USA.

and abundance, persistence and adaptability, provision and the centrality of man" (p. 150). To understand this is indeed a cause for joy but also for renewed dedication to God's word.

Dr. Wise wrote this book to encourage us to fight untruth and error and that most emphatically includes evolution. Certainly not every creationist will agree with all his interpretations of the scientific details. For example, I personally think he could be a little more critical of appearances of age and of diversification of whales. Nevertheless his overall message is excellent. It was his objective, with this book, to reach a much wider audience than the scientifically literate. While not everyone enjoys the details of science, everyone can nevertheless appreciate the discussion of Scripture. In addition, the details from nature are discussed in such general terms in this book that most people should obtain some insights from these sections. *Faith, Form and Time* is recommended for anyone studying or teaching Scripture or science, as well as for anyone who enjoys learning about these disciplines. That should include most of us.

# Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Kerwood, Ontario (formerly Watford)

On the evening of Friday, May 30, 2003, we had a glorious reason to celebrate: it was the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of our church. Everyone was welcomed, and I mean everyone – the new church building was filled to the rafters. Special guests for the evening included former ministers Rev. Vanderwel (who came all the way from B.C.!) and Rev. J. VanWoudenberg from Guelph, Ontario. Rev. R. Wynia joined us as representative from Wyoming URC, as well as Mr. R. Bos from Strathroy URC. Mr. B. Dokter came forward and pointed out some world events that occurred in 1953: Sir Edmund Hilary scaled Mt. Everest, Queen Elizabeth was crowned, but most importantly, with very humble and small beginnings, Grace Canadian Reformed Church was instituted. It began with a few families meeting together above a store in Watford, and fifty years later we are privileged to meet together in a beautiful new church



*Our first church building.*

building in Kerwood. We feel we have been truly blessed!

The choir then sang Psalm 149, which was also the text on which the sermon was based for our very first worship service. The choir also delighted us with enjoyable selections of psalms and hymns for the program.

A pastoral address was given by Rev. J. Slaa, who brought to our attention the fact that the fiftieth year is known in the Bible as the Year of Jubilee. This then brings to mind the word jubilation, and the liberty and freedom which God has given us. We have been given the freedom to teach the Word of God, the liberty from slavery to sin, and the calling to live that freedom in faith. The Lord has preserved this congregation, and as a church we look forward to the ultimate day of freedom from all that is sinful.

Every society was then given an opportunity to explain their position in our church:

The Kids Club was first. It began as a Mission Club which was formed when Ambassador School unfortunately had to close. Under the direction of their leader, Mrs. C. Haan, they sang “Lord I Lift Your Name on High” together.

The Teen Club was next, and presented the minister with a beautiful rug hooking which had the words “God With Us” worked into the design. They also entertained us with trivia questions about the church.



*Where we worship today.*

The Young People’s Society was next. Mr. Rob Lenting, the president of “Watch and Pray” spoke about being alert. The devil is increasingly desperate, and in the coming days we must always watch and pray.

The history of the Women’s Society was given by Mrs. E. Wattel. They had found a copy of minutes recorded in the Dutch language from 1962! It was noted that the society had been meeting together to study God’s Word for over forty-five years, and that they hoped to be able to continue, seeking God’s guidance and direction as reflected in the name of the Society: “Teach Us Thy Way.” Next was the Bible Study Club which had evolved from the previous Men’s Society in years gone by. It was explained that this is actually not a society because they have no president, no executive, and no real structure. It is simply an evening set aside to study God’s Word together. The only requirement is that the participants come prepared for the topic planned for the evening. It is our fervent





Members of Kerwood (Watford) from institution to the fiftieth anniversary.

prayer that the societies may remain faithful to God's Word.

Then to the Evergreen Club, our "eldest." Anyone fifty years old and over, who looks or feels like a senior is welcome to join. Even though the

majority of the members are more grey than green, they still call themselves the "Evergreen Club." The topics discussed are those dear to our hearts. The meetings include singing praises to the Lord with psalms and hymns, and the various needs of the congregation are brought to Him in prayer.

Finally, the Dokter sisters delighted us with a joyful selection of music. For this occasion, the consistory presented all the members of the congregation with a copy of the fiftieth anniversary commemorative book. This book is a collection of history notes, special memories, and lots of pictures, and is a wonderful keepsake!

The special guests came forward and spoke words of congratulations, and

letters were read from the neighbouring congregations of Chatham and London. The evening ended with thanksgiving to our heavenly Father from whom all blessings flow. To Him be the glory!



The Teen Club and Kids Club of Kerwood singing at the celebration.



## Aunt Betty

# Our Little Magazine



Hello every one! I hope you are all doing well. Are there certain hobbies or crafts which you enjoy doing. God has given each of us different talents and abilities. It is wonderful when we can use these to do different activities. Some of you probably like to build things out of wood or maybe some of you like to draw pictures or make paintings. Others may enjoy making jigsaw puzzles or building things with Lego. Let me know what you enjoy doing.

Thank you for your letter **Leanne Oosterhoff**. Wow, your little baby brother Daniel sure gets a lot of attention from you and your brother and sister. I'm sure your mom appreciates all the help you give her. I agree that it's too bad I can't see him but I'm sure he's cute like you wrote.

Hello **Brittany Ligtenberg**. Thank you for writing me a letter. Do you like to go outside in winter, when you can't ride a bike? Reading is fun. Do you have certain types of books you like to read? Maybe you and your sister can make up some puzzles to put in the magazine for other boys and girls to do.

Until next time,

Love, Aunt Betty

**Aunt Betty**  
 c/o Premier Printing Ltd.  
 One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5  
 Email: [clarion@premier.mb.ca](mailto:clarion@premier.mb.ca)



# Puzzles

## Old Testament Words

Can you unscramble the letters below and write twelve words found in the Old Testament?

1. MATMEONSCMDN
2. LEMTEP
3. CETRABLEAN
4. PURTTEM
5. FRACESCII
6. PHRA
7. RAALT
8. LODI
9. SARPVOES
10. STINCKADELC
11. SLEVESS
12. AMANN

## PEN PAL WANTED

Brittany Ligtenberg would like to have a pen pal. She is 9 years old and likes to ride her bike and read books.

Her address is:

134 Limeridge Road East, Hamilton,  
Ontario L9A 2S3

## We Can Know God

Complete the sentences below. Then find the answer to each in the correct line of the puzzle. Circle the letters as you find them. The remaining letters will give an important message.

Write it in the space given.

1. In the \_\_\_\_\_ God created the heaven and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Was a land of slavery (Ex. 3:7)
3. The Egyptians had a king named \_\_\_\_\_ (Ex. 3:10)
4. God's people were promised a land of milk and \_\_\_\_\_ (Ex. 3:15)
5. As a punishment, the children of Israel had to live in the \_\_\_\_\_ for forty years. (Josh. 5:6)
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ was a place of worship (Numb. 1:1)
7. God's people were known as the \_\_\_\_\_ Of Israel. (Lev. 19:2)
8. When God asks us to do something it is called a \_\_\_\_\_. (Deut. 1:3)

1	R	B	E	E	A	G	I	D	N	A	N	I	N	G
2	N	D	E	O	G	B	Y	E	Y	T	P	H	T	E
3	B	P	I	H	B	A	L	R	A	E	I	O	N	H
4	L	I	F	E	Y	H	O	O	U	N	W	E	Y	I
5	W	L	I	L	D	E	L	R	H	N	E	A	S	S
6	V	T	A	E	B	E	R	M	N	A	C	L	U	E
7	C	H	C	I	H	L	S	U	D	C	R	C	E	N
8	C	O	E	M	M	S	A	N	S	D	M	E	N	T

## Old Testament Books

Write the names of the Old Testament books that will complete the acrostic.

\_ \_ O \_ \_ \_  
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 \_ \_ \_ D \_ \_ \_  
  
 \_ \_ T \_  
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