

## **CHAPTER 47 : SOUTH AFRICA – A NEW BEACHHEAD FOR PROTESTANTISM**

The Dutch East India Company was used by God to spread the gospel to many lands, especially during the Golden Era of the Netherlands' history. It was then that the established reformed church in the Netherlands was most sound, and it coincided with the apex of Dutch power in the world. We have already seen how the gospel came to many parts of Asia by this means. Now let's consider one great effect it had upon Africa.

In the middle of the seventeenth century the Dutch East India Company sought to establish a refreshment station halfway on the long trip to the East. The Company primarily had a commercial set-up in mind. However, the settlers who were to establish the port founded the church at the same time. The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was established on the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck, along with ninety of his countrymen, there in 1652. Religious upheavals in the Netherlands between Catholics and Calvinists led more settlers to flee their homeland over time.

The first pastor to arrive in Tablebay (Cape Town) was Rev Joannes Van Arckel (1665). The Rev van Arckel began to organize a congregation to represent the church in the Netherlands. Two elders were chosen and the minister and the elders signed the articles of faith. These articles of faith were the Heidelberg Catechism, the Dutch Confession of Faith (Confessio Belgica) and the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), just as they were for the mother church back in the Netherlands.

The Dutch were followed in 1688 by an influx of French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution. They provided a wide variety of skills, improving the settlement's chances of survival. But under the rule of the Dutch East India Company, the Huguenots were forbidden to speak their own language. Within a generation of their arrival, the French language had disappeared from the Cape Colony. Virtually all that remained of their roots were their family names, many of which survive to this day. The Dutch and the French Huguenots, being one in the reformed faith, quickly integrated.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Dutch community numbered about 37,000. Their farming settlement enjoyed a century of peace and stability. They even reached out with the gospel to their black neighbors. In its early years black converts and whites worshipped together as part of the same reformed church. This settlement at the tip of Africa proved an important beachhead for the gospel throughout Africa.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

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Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA, 1997). (see electronic version at <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm> )

J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/> )

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.

Other references especially consulted for this chapter include:

<http://www.worldandi.com/public/1994/may/cl1.cfm>