



History of 10 Days of Prayer before Pentecost

The 1860 revival had ripple effects all around South Africa. There was, however, no clear working of the Spirit in the Boland town of Paarl and the churches there still experienced dryness. In other parts of the Western Cape quite a few towns experienced revival. Rev. G.W. Van der Lingen, *Dominee* (Pastor) of the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) in Paarl had been longing for revival in his church. At the beginning of 1861, there were some signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in his congregation.

The first move

At the beginning of 1861, Paarl decided to heed the global call of the Evangelical Alliance to participate in a corporate prayer week that took place annually in January. Already before this corporate prayer week, the Holy Spirit had moved amongst some young girls, who had responded to an invitation to come and hear about accounts of the Worcester revival during the previous year. When the speaker recalled the events, highlighting the role of young people, the meeting burst into simultaneous prayer. During the following week, the movement gained momentum among other young people in Paarl.

During that prayer week, Rev. Van der Lingen preached, saying, *"Are you, the congregation of Paarl, being awakened by these cries of Revival? Wake up, you who sleep! Arise from the dead and Christ will shine His light on you! And what if you don't awaken now? Will you then ever be renewed before the terrible awakening to take place in the hereafter?"* It was during the week of prayer in January 1861 that revival swept through Paarl. There were heart-rending pleas for mercy and soul-wrenching confessions of sin.

Members of the Paarl congregation experienced lengthy periods of wrestling with self-examination, repentance and surrendering all to God. There were great cries for mercy and ultimately many tears of thankfulness and joy. Rev. Van der Lingen exclaimed, *"How many years have I not served God as a servant? But what a great difference is serving Him as a servant and serving Him as a son! I only now understand the freedom."*

When the January week of prayer drew to a close, all those who had participated in it felt the urge to continue to meet for communal prayer. Crowds that had streamed to prayer gatherings increased daily, as did places allocated for prayer.

On 6 February 1861, Rev. Van der Lingen arranged a special meeting of approximately 100 prayer leaders of his *Strooidak* (Straw Roof) congregation (including women and children) to discuss their concerns. After experiencing the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit and His

quicken power, the congregation was fearful that His presence would decrease over time and eventually stop. They wanted, therefore, to find ways of preserving and spreading the blessing.

At Van der Lingen's suggestion, it was decided to divide each district into small cell groups that aimed to meet as often as possible. In conjunction with this new approach, he developed a set of guidelines which covered topics for discussion and prayer. By this means, he hoped to give everyone the opportunity to pray in public and to claim God's promises and even greater blessings.

A great number of extraordinary experiences occurred, and many people were seen to be living in tremendous fear and distress, as like those who had a death sentence. They became aware of the evil things that they had done in their lives. One man said, "*In the past I knew that I was a sinner, but now I can feel it.*" Rev. Van der Lingen told them that conviction of sin was not enough; they had to seek Christ and His forgiveness until they knew that they had received forgiveness and moved into a life of joy and victory.

Pentecost

By May 1861, there was once again a yearning in the congregation to come together for communal prayer and plead for a special blessing. It would appear that the vision of cultivating God's presence was beginning to dim in some quarters at this time.

In one cell group, Gideon Malherbe, son-in-law of Rev. Van der Lingen, suggested that cell groups should come together each evening for communal prayer during the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday. They intended to follow the example of the first Christians, who had met regularly for prayer whilst waiting in Jerusalem to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. Just like these early Christians, they too would plead for the promise of the Father.

Without seeking Van der Lingen's approval or participation, this cell group published an invitation in *De Kerkbode* (the church newspaper) for all existing prayer groups in Paarl to participate in corporate prayer from 9-19 May 1861. Rev. Van der Lingen was at first reluctant to join the meeting. However, there was a gradual build-up of expectation during the week, mingled with cries for mercy. Not only did Rev. Van der Lingen finally relent, he became God's anointed vessel of blessing on Pentecost Sunday, 1861.

Increasingly, congregants started to attend prayer meetings. Just prior to Pentecost Sunday 1861, the *Strooidak* Church engaged in ten days of prayer, just as the early Church in Jerusalem had done whilst awaiting the Lord's promise of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The prayer meetings of May 1861 were well attended. On Pentecost Sunday, there was great expectancy in every heart, and they were not disappointed. During the morning service, nothing happened, but during the afternoon service, there was a powerful presence of God when Rev. Van der Lingen prayed. He had a supernatural experience with the Lord while he was standing in the pulpit.

As Rev. Van der Lingen started to pray, he cried with tears of deep emotion. Then he said: *"Father, Father... who is He... come and stand between Him and us... in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, He who is splendid in his apparel..."* (Isaiah 63:1).

Initially, the congregation could not understand what was happening. Sometime later, Rev. Van der Lingen explained, *"While I was on my knees, and prayed that God would fulfil His promise, I saw snowflakes moving up to heaven, and then suddenly lightning came out from the throne of God. Then, the Mighty One, with His garments dipped in blood, positioned Himself between the snowflakes and the lightning to protect the people from the lightning."* Initially, he did not understand the meaning of this vision, but he realised that the snowflakes were the prayers of Christians that could not be accepted by God without the blood and intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A powerful revival broke out, which has been described as the beginning of a 'second' revival in the Southern and Western Cape. A year later, it was Rev. Van der Lingen, himself, who suggested the congregation should meet for communal prayer during the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost. When this news began to spread to neighbouring congregations, they too decided to follow Paarl DRC's example. Over the next few years, more and more congregations joined in.

Widespread 10 days of prayer

As a direct result of this, the 1867 Dutch Reformed Synod advised all DRC congregations to conduct ten days of prayer in the run-up to Pentecost Sunday every year. This tradition became a major blessing to the nation. The annual 10 Days of Prayer before Pentecost Sunday impacted Afrikaners for many decades. Many Afrikaners look back to a particular Pentecost prayer season as the time they were converted. Soon afterwards, the Wesleyan Methodist Church adopted the same concept.

The increasing attendance of prayer events coincided with an exceptional interest in worship services. The role Rev. Van der Lingen played in the awakening is significant, operating on the periphery and insisting that he needed to step aside to let God speak through His Holy Spirit. While he had done little by way of organising prayer meetings himself, the fact that his congregation had done so on their own accord had made a deep impression on him. In one of their prayer initiatives, he was requested to speak at the conference of the Evangelical Alliance, 16-17 January 1861. The essence of his address at this occasion (repeated in English the following day and performed on his behalf by Dr. Andrew Murray) was that revival should not be expected to emanate from pastors, but from the Holy Spirit after persistent prayer.

In 1867, the Dutch Reformed Church Synod encouraged churches to observe Ten Days of Prayer before Pentecost Sunday as an annual practice. This led to many blessings and spiritual fruit over the next 150 years in the Dutch Reformed Church. After the 1860-1861 revival, several other revival periods followed during the next 60 years in 1868, 1874, 1884-1885, 1889, 1895, 1897, 1901-1905, 1923 and 1927.

One account of the 1874 revival in the town of Montagu

Dr. Servaas Hofmeyer, *Dominee* (Pastor) of the Montagu DRC, preached with great power. On Pentecost Sunday, some 300 people came for the early-morning prayer meeting. That evening, there was such an intense atmosphere that people could hardly bear to leave the church. During this awakening, extraordinary scenes occurred. Literally thousands shouted anxiously, "*Lord, help me*", "*Lord, I am lost.*" People had been experiencing disturbing dreams and visions. There was deep confession of sin. People were crying out for salvation in the privacy of their own homes, sometimes in prayer meetings, and other times behind bushes or rocks or in the valleys. This continued for months, and all this happened without the intervention of man. It was simply the work of God.