

## Lesson 1

- The bible teaches who God is
- In the beginning
- What is prayer?

## The bible teaches who God is

### Lesson 1a

#### The bible teaches who God is

Although the bible is a very old book, it is still widely read today. The reason for this is that the bible is not related to a specific time in history. The bible speaks about God, who has always existed and will always exist. Throughout time, He remains the same. This is why the bible has a message for people of every day and age, wherever they might live.

#### The God who is there

The bible does not speak about a god, but rather about the one and only God. In the bible God introduces himself immediately and clearly. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. Without Him, nothing would exist, not even mankind. Many people live their lives as if God did not exist. They do not know Him or do not want to know Him. However, sooner or later these people will have important questions to deal with:

- Where do I come from?
- What is the meaning of my existence?
- Why is there so much suffering in the world?
- Is there a future for the world?
- Why do people die?
- Is there life after death?

Everyone knows this type of questions. It makes no sense to brush them aside or to search for human answers. No answer can be found outside God. This means everyone needs to know God. Fortunately, God makes himself known. He does so in two ways:

- Man can come to a knowledge of God through what He has made. Everything that can be seen in nature has been made by God: animals, plants, trees, stars, seas and rivers. The bible calls this 'creation'. The creation is a silent witness of God's existence.

Psalm 19:1-4

*'The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the works of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
Night after night they display knowledge.  
There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.  
Their voice goes out into all the earth,  
Their words to the ends of the world'.*

Creation can be compared to a book in which every single thing that God has made forms a character. Without using words, the creation speaks about God's power. Only God can make things of such beauty. He is also the one who ensures that the creation continues to exist. Examples of this are the endless succession of the seasons and the continuing alternation of day and night. Whoever takes the time to look at the wonders of nature has to be overwhelmed by God's power. No human being has an excuse not to believe in the existence of God. This is why the bible says:

Romans 1: 19,20

*'... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse'.*

- Through the bible man can come to a fuller knowledge of God. Amazement at the beauty of creation can bring someone to acknowledge God's existence, but only through the bible one can truly get to know God. The bible is the only source of reliable information about who God in reality is, which cannot be said of any other book.

*'The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.  
The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.*

Psalm 19: 7,8

*They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold'*

In the bible God, the Creator of life, addresses man. It should therefore be a natural thing for man to read the bible. Without the knowledge of God man's existence is futile. For this reason the bible is essential. Only the bible can explain the meaning of life.

### God's message to man in the bible

Throughout the bible two clear lines can be distinguished. They could be called the red and the golden wire.

- The red wire: man lets go of God. This first wire tells the history of how man rebelled against the very God who had created him. Man chose to live without God. The consequences were terrible, as can be seen to this very day. Life is full of sorrow: illness, death, war and hatred. This truth runs like a red wire through the bible. Time and again it speaks of how man refuses to acknowledge God. It also speaks of man's inability to make up for his rebellion to God.
- The golden wire: God does not want to let go of man. The love of God is opposed to man's rebellion. God's love for man is so great that He wants to save him from his hopeless situation. This plan of rescue is the golden wire that can be found throughout the bible. The very first human beings already received God's promise of rescue. The first part of the bible, the Old Testament, shows how God, through time, works towards the coming of the promised saviour. This saviour is Jesus, the Son of God. In the second part of the bible, the New Testament, the coming and the work of Jesus are described. The salvation that He brings, restores hope for the future. In short the bible puts it like this:

John 3:16

*'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life'*

### The bible offers peace

In the bible, God answers many of the questions that were listed earlier in this lesson. He explains where man comes from and He points out what causes suffering in the world. It is made very clear that man himself is the cause. Amazingly, God also expresses his desire to take care of man despite his rebellion and guilt. He promises salvation and an eternal future.

Not every question in life will be answered. However, God will give the power to live with unanswered questions. He holds every life in his hands, in every circumstance.

Matthew 11:28

*'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest'*

No one who comes to God needs to live a damaged life.

### Questions

1. After returning from a trip in space, a Russian astronaut remarked that he had not met God. He thought he had proved that God does not exist. Use this lesson to show how and where He could have found God.
2. Explain in your own words what Psalm 19:10,11 says about the bible.
3. Mankind itself causes the suffering in the world. Explain the cause more precisely.
4. Can you explain why many people find the red wire of the bible difficult to accept?

## Lesson1b

### In the Beginning

Where does everything originate? How did the universe, the human race and the animals come into existence? These are questions everyone thinks about from time to time. Is it possible to find a watertight answer?

#### Answers given in past and present

In ancient times people tried to explain the origin of the world and the human race through myths – manmade stories featuring gods or the powers of nature. According to those stories, sea and land, man and animal, came into existence through these gods or powers. The myths were told from father to son and through the centuries new elements were added to them. As man acquired more knowledge of nature and its laws, the faith in those myths disappeared. However, the questions remained.

Nowadays, many people explain the origin of the world through evolution theories. These theories claim that higher forms of living were developed from lower forms of living. In the course of millions of years, simple forms of animal life developed into more sophisticated forms, such as fish, birds and mammals. Man is said to have developed from the mammals.

There are different theories about evolution, which differ greatly from each other. None of them can give a watertight answer to the question about the origin of the world. Each theory is for a large part based on presuppositions. There is no proof for any of them to be true.

#### The answer of the bible

We are not dependent on theories to get an answer to the question of the origin of things. We can read it on the first page of the bible:

*'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'*

There is a lot of information in that one sentence:

- Who made everything: God. The bible does not introduce God. It does not explain that He exists and who He is. As he reads the bible, the reader will get to know God from what He says and does. God reveals himself in his words and deeds as an artist does in his work.
- How God made everything: He created. When the bible says that God created, it means that God made something in a miraculous way.
- What God made: the heavens and the earth. The heavens are the habitation of God. The earth is the habitation of man. God made everything.
- When God created the heavens and the earth: in the beginning. The bible does not give an exact date as to when this was but it makes clear that there was a beginning. The world has not always existed. However, God was there before the world came into existence. This is evident from the whole of the bible; God is beyond time. He is eternal. This means: He has always been and will always be.

*'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'*. It is only a short sentence, but it tells us how great and incredibly powerful God is. The bible is full of praise about God's power. Take for example Psalm 33:

*'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,  
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.  
He gathers the waters of the seas into jars;  
he puts the deep into storehouses.'*

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the people of the world revere him.  
For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded and it stood firm'.*

### A habitation for man

Read: Genesis 1:1-2:3

1:2 *the Spirit\* of God*: see vocabulary list in the *Helping Hand*.

God is present when the earth is still inhabitable.

1:22 *blessed*: God gave them the power to function well.

1:26 *us*: look in vocabulary list under 'trinity'

2:3 *made it holy*: He gave it a special place

It was impossible for anyone to live on the world when it was first made. Just like no one can live on the planets Mars or Venus now. It was formless, empty, dark and covered in water. Until God made the earth inhabitable. In six days He made the earth into a house for man.

- Day 1:

God provides light: the condition for life.

- Day 2:

God makes a ceiling: He makes the atmosphere. Apparently, the earth consisted only of water. There was no distinction between the waters that cover the earth and the waters that belong in the sky – clouds, mist and rain.

- Day 3:

God makes sure the future inhabitants of the earth will have ground beneath their feet. He makes the dry land. He furnishes the earth with plants and trees, a carpet for the world.

- Day 4:

God organises the light in more detail. The sun, moon and stars will regulate day and night and the change of seasons. Their positions will show man what day or what year it is.

- Day 5:

The earth is no longer empty. God makes fellow inhabitants to accompany man – fish and birds: animals to populate the sky and the seas.

- Day 6:

God creates the animals that will live on the land and as a crown on his work He creates man.

- Day 7:

God rests from his work. He stops creating. The creation is finished. God gives the seventh day of the week a special place.

### Man's uniqueness

Man and the animals were created on the very same day.

Does this imply that they have the same value in God's eyes?

Does man have the same place as the animals? It is clear from Genesis 1 that this is not true. God has given man a very special place and a special duty. It is apparent from Genesis

1:26-27:

*'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'.*

Only about man it says that God makes him '*in his own image*', in his '*likeness*'. The same thing is not said about animals or about the sun or the moon. Only man has been created in God's image. Being created in God's image means that man reflects God. Verse 26 explains in what way man reflects God: man is made to rule over the earth.

God is the King over all of creation. He made everything and rules over everything. However, He makes man his ambassador on earth. Man is king under God's authority. He reigns over the earth in God's name.

## In the beginning

### What is man that you are mindful of him?

It is not natural that man received this position of honour. When you think of it, what is man? David, a king and poet, who has a central place in the bible, expresses what he feels when he looks up at the sky one night:

*'When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?'*

David realises how small he is as a human being in the enormous universe. He also realises how small man must seem in the eyes of God, who made the moon and the stars. David also knows that God has given man the position of king and ruler, despite his smallness.

*'You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honour.  
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
You put everything under his feet'*

### The Garden of Eden

Read: Genesis 2:8-15  
2:8 *the LORD God*: God has several names. One of the names is LORD\*. In lesson 9b we will come back to the significance of this name.  
*Formed*: made, created

God gives man a special place to live. He makes him a beautiful garden by the source of a river. In the garden He puts a wide variety of beautiful trees with delicious fruits on them. He makes sure man will lack nothing at all. In the centre of the garden God plants two special trees: *'the tree of life'* and *'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'*. (In lesson 2b we will further discuss the trees and the reason that God planted them).

This garden, also called paradise, is man's place to live. He does get a special duty: he needs to look after the garden, to work in it and to guard it. Apparently, there is a force on earth that is capable of doing damage to paradise. Man knows he needs to beware.

We do not exactly know where the garden was located. We do know two of the rivers mentioned in verses 11 to 14: the Euphrates and the Tigris.

### Man and woman

Read: Genesis 2:18-25

In chapter 1 we read time and again how God saw that what He made was good. Now in chapter 2 verse 18, we read for the first time that God says of something that it is not good:

*'The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him".'*

First of all, God allows the man to realise that something is missing, that his happiness is not complete. He brings the animals before him. When the man sees that every type of animal has a male and a female, he realises that he himself does not have a companion. There is no one like him. When man is aware of this, God creates a woman for him.

When God brings the woman to the man, he is so happy that he bursts into a song:

*'This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman'  
for she was taken out of man'.*

The man recognises the woman that God made for him as his fellow human. He sees that she is like him. One of his kind. This is what he expresses with the words: *'This is now bone of*

*my bones and flesh of my flesh*'. In other words: finally someone like me, someone of the same flesh and blood.

The man, who earlier that day named the animals, now gives his counterpart the name 'woman'. In Hebrew, like in English, the words for man and woman are related and similar.

With the creation of man and woman, God introduces marriage. God made man and woman in such a way that they long to share their lives together. A man, after he is grown up, will leave his parents and 'cleave' to his wife: he will belong to his wife. Man and woman will become '*one flesh*'. This not only means they will have intercourse, it means they will become one in every area of their lives and make a history together.

### **It was very good**

When God finished his creation, He saw how beautiful everything was. Everything He made was as He had intended it to be. Unfortunately, man brought this to an end. This is what we will discuss in the following lesson.

### **Questions**

1. Explain the differences between the explanations people have given for the origin of the universe in ancient times and in modern times? What does the bible have to say about it?
2. Why can a Christian be so sure that God made the earth? Look up Hebrews 11:3.
3. How did God create man (Genesis 2:7)? And how did He create woman (Genesis 2:18-24)?

## What is prayer?

### Lesson 1c

#### What is prayer?

For someone who is not familiar with prayer from an early age, praying can seem a very strange thing to do. People fold their hands together, close their eyes and talk either quietly or out loud to someone they cannot see. No one seems to be answering them.

At first sight it seems very strange. What is prayer? Who do people pray to? Do they receive an answer? These are the questions we will look at in this lesson.

#### Speaking with God

The literal meaning of the word prayer is to ask someone for something, to make a request. Whenever we mention prayer in this course, it always means prayer to God. To pray to God means more than just asking Him for something, it means to speak with God.

The bible shows us on many occasions that it is possible to pray to God. In itself this is a miracle: for human beings to be able get in touch with the God who made heaven and earth. It is a miracle that people can come to God privately and tell Him about their problems, their pains, their worries or their happiness.

According to the bible this is not just a possibility for man, it is a necessary part of being a Christian. It is an essential part of life for someone who believes in God. Anyone who believes in God will have a desire to speak with Him regularly, just like two people who love each other will want to talk to each other.

#### Who is God?

To be able to talk with God, we have to know Him. Who is the one we pray to? This is an important question. We need to be careful not to create a wrong image of God.

In lesson 1a we said that it is possible to get to know God by looking at what He has made. The stars, the mountains, rivers, plants and animals show us something of God's power,

goodness and wisdom. We also said that we only truly get to know God from the bible. Without the bible we will never be able to get the complete picture of who God is. For this reason we will look in the c-series at the bible's portrayal of God. In this and the coming lessons we will discuss a number of things that are important to know when we pray to God.

#### God is King

One very important thing to realise when we pray is that God is King. He is a king beyond comparison with any ordinary king or ruler.

The bible calls God the 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. In other words, God is higher than any other king and is Lord over any other lords.

However great the power of a king or president may be, it is always a limited power. There is no one in our world who has supreme power over everyone else. God does have this power. He has all the power, not only over the earth but over everything that exists. He reigns over the whole of the universe. The bible calls God almighty; this means He has unending power.

In comparison to God's power man is nothing. This is something to realise when we pray. We should be aware of the fact that we are speaking to the King of heaven and earth. We should speak with reverence and respect. We cannot act as if He is our equal.

The other implication of speaking to the King of heaven and earth is that we can ask anything. God has supreme power. He can give us anything we need.

#### God wants to be our Father

How on earth will an ordinary human being ever dare to speak to the King of heaven and earth? Is He not too high and exalted to listen to our every day problems? No. God is not only King, He wants to be our Father. He wants to have us for his children.



Not everyone has positive experiences with their earthly fathers and therefore the word father might bring about a negative feeling. However, to know what it means for God to be a father, we should not look at our own earthly fathers. God shows us in the bible what real fatherhood is.

What does it mean to call God our Father? First of all it means that God is a personal God. Many people nowadays believe that something powerful exists that caused the world to come into existence and that still sustains the world in our time. However, the bible tells us that there is not just something, some power. There is someone: God, who wants to take care of people as if they were his own children. He wants to listen to them and protect them. The fact that God wants to be called our Father also means that we can trust Him. As human beings we are not delivered to the whims of an unpredictable, cruel divinity. We are in the hands of a God who wants to see us as his own children. He loves us. He holds us. He wants to take care of us in all circumstances. We can always count on Him.

Whenever we pray to God we should not only realise that He is the King of heaven and earth; we should moreover realise that He wants to be our Father. We can be intimate with Him. We do not have to be afraid of Him. We can ask Him whatever we feel we need and be sure that He will give us what we need.

### God listens

From his habitation in heaven, God listens to all people who pray to Him. He has attention for every one of them. It is not possible for us to understand this. Every moment of the day there must be numerous people throughout the world praying to God. God listens to all of them, whatever language they speak, whether they speak out loud or quietly in their hearts.

For a human being it would be absolutely impossible to listen to so many people at the same time. However, God is almighty

and besides, all-knowing. This means that He knows of everything that happens throughout creation. He knows not only the important things, but also the things that we might find unimportant. He knows what we experience and what we think. He hears what we say to Him, even if we do not say it out loud. The Israelite king and poet David wrote a psalm about this. It is a prayer to God spoken in awe:

*'O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise;  
You perceive my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out and my lying down;  
You are familiar with all my ways.  
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, o LORD.  
You hem me in – behind and before;  
You have laid your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
Too lofty for me to attain'.*

Further on in the psalm David shows how it is impossible for him to flee from God. Even in the night God still sees him. David is not frightened by this thought. On the contrary, it gives him comfort; he knows God will always hold him in his hand. He does not want to flee from God. David is full of awe for God's knowledge and power:

*'How precious to me are your thoughts, o God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
Were I to count them,  
They would outnumber the grains of sand.  
When I awake, I am still with you'.*

### Does God answer?

God listens to us when we speak to him. But do we get an answer? Do we hear anything from his side? We know that God did answer in paradise. God would regularly come to talk with Adam and Eve.

## What is prayer?

Further on in the bible there are other cases where God directly speaks to people. Especially in the first part of the bible, the Old Testament, we read about this. The people He spoke to could not see Him. No human being can see God. However, they did hear his voice and they could have a conversation with Him.

God does not speak directly to us. However, if we do not hear a voice from heaven when we pray, that does not mean that God does not speak to us.

### God answers us in the bible

God has given us the bible. He speaks to us in the bible. He gives us answers to many of our questions. He encourages us and shows us the way to go. This is why it is a good idea to read the bible after we have prayed to God. After He has spoken to us through the words of the bible it is good to pray again, to give an answer God again.

### God answers us through his deeds

God does not only answer us through the bible. He also answers through his deeds. He can for example give us the things we asked for in our prayers.

Jesus, the Son of God, said that we can ask God for whatever we need and He promised that God would give people who ask Him, everything they need.

This does not mean God is like a waiter, serving our demands without questioning them. God is like a father. A father does not always give his children whatever they ask for. He knows what is good for his children even more so than the children themselves. God is immeasurably wiser than an earthly father. He knows everything. He does not make mistakes. Because He knows every side of the situation, He can judge our needs much better than we can.

An example. Someone who is ill can ask God to be healed. However, God does not heal everyone who is ill and asks for health God can have good reasons not to do so. There are

examples of this in the bible. There are examples of people who are very ill and ask God for healing and God heals them. There are also examples of people who ask for healing but remain ill. Paul\* is one of them. Repeatedly, he asks God to be cured from an illness, but eventually he understands that God is not going to cure him. Because of his illness he can do more for God.

God does not always give us what we would like to receive. However, there are things He will always give when we ask Him for them: a stronger faith, wisdom to know how to act in certain situations, courage to acknowledge our faith in God in difficult situations, forgiveness when we have acted wrongly. God does not always make our dreams come true but He does always listen to us and whenever we ask for something that He has promised in the bible, He will give it to us. We can be sure of that.

### Prayer: only to God

Some Christians pray not only to God but also to saints who have died (devout people from the bible or from church history). They regard these saints as go-betweens between God and man. They believe that the saints will act as advocates for them before God. The saints would ask God to give certain things to the believers on earth, for example faith, forgiveness of sins and the power to live a good life. Because the saints lived such holy lives on earth, God would be more willing to grant them their requests.

The bible however teaches that we do not need go-betweens in our relationship with God. We do not need to ask the saints to pray for us or rather, we should not. God wants us to pray exclusively to Him. The only go-between we have before God is Jesus Christ, God's Son. God wants to listen to us because of his Son. In further lessons we will learn more about this.

### Questions

1. What is prayer?
2. God is almighty and all knowing.
  - a. What does that mean?
  - b. How is that related to prayer?
3. God answers people who pray to Him.
  - a. How would He do that in the time of the bible?
  - b. How does He usually do it now?
4. It is frightening to know that God is all knowing.  
What do you think of this statement? Read Psalm 139:1-6.