

Lesson 2

- The bible has divine authority
- Unfaithfulness
- How can prayer be possible?

The bible has divine authority

Lesson 2a

The bible has divine authority

In the bible we come to know God. Everything the bible says about God is reliable. We can be sure of that because God himself is the author. For this reason we say that the bible has divine authority.

The word of God or the word of man?

The bible can be bought in any bookshop and many people do not think the bible is any different from other books. It is therefore important to think about what sort of book the bible is.

There are only two options. Either the bible is a book in which people have written down their thoughts about God or it is the book in which God speaks to people. In other words, the bible is either a book from down here, a human book or it comes from above and it is a gift from God.

In the bible God makes clear which of the two options is right. He shows that the bible is not a human book with its imperfections for He himself is the author. The bible has been written by men, but the words are from God. God used men to bring his message to the people. He helped the authors with their work. They were led by the Spirit of God*, who gave them the words. We call this inspiration. The bible is an inspired book.

2 Peter 1:21

'For prophesy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

God is behind the authors of the bible and therefore the bible has divine authority, which cannot be said of any other book.

God uses prophets to speak his words

We can conclude from the words of the bible that God really is the author. In the Old Testament are many examples of people

who are told by God to bring his message to the people. This was not always an easy task. Sometimes, they would have to announce punishment to people who were not listening to God. Some of them would think they were unable to do the task. For example, Moses says:

Exodus 4:10

'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'

And Jeremiah says:

Jeremiah 1:6

'Ah, Sovereign LORD, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.'

However, God encourages them. They will be able to fulfil their task because God will help them. To Moses He says:

Exodus 4:12

'Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.'

And to Jeremiah God says:

Jeremiah 1:9

'Now, I have put my words in your mouth.'

When these men go on to speak God's message, they use expressions such as: *'This is what the LORD says'* and *'Hear the word of the LORD'*. They can say this because they do not speak their own words but the words of God.

God speaks through his own Son

God used the prophets to speak his words. However, He has used an even more striking and powerful way to speak his word. He has sent his own Son to the earth to speak his word. Jesus has been called 'the Word'. As Son of God He brings us the words of his Father. He says:

John 12:50

'Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say'

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and:

John 17:8

'I gave them the words You gave me'

When we hear Jesus speak, we are listening to God. Jesus only says what He has heard from his Father. He speaks to us with divine authority. When Jesus' followers heard the words He spoke they had to admit that He spoke with divine authority:

John 6:68

'You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

In Jesus we meet God. For this reason we can be sure that his words are true and reliable.

Jesus' disciples speak the words of God

In the bible we read how the disciples of Jesus go out into the world to bring the good news about the saviour. Jesus has told them to tell everyone about all the things they had seen and heard. In the book of Acts we can read how they did this.

Acts 1: 8

'... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'.

So the disciples passed on the words of Jesus as reliable witnesses.

God had his words written down

If God's words had only been passed on by word of mouth, it would have been lost today. No one would have remembered the exact words any longer. This is why God made sure that the words of the prophets and the words of Jesus were written down.

We read for example how God told Moses to write a book:

Exodus 17:14

'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered'

Jeremiah is also told to write down the words that he has spoken:

Jeremiah 36:2

'Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations...'

The disciples of Jesus have written down all that He has said and done. For example, John writes:

John 20:31

'... these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'.

In the last book of the bible, Revelation, we also read how John is told to write down the word of God:

Revelation 1:19

'Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later'.

You may wonder if the people who wrote down all these words of God and Jesus have not made any mistakes. Fortunately, we know that this is not the case. The authors of the bible were assisted by the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to his disciples so that they would be able to exactly remember all that He had said and done.

John 14:25,26

'All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you'.

The written word of God is reliable because it is God who has given it to us. That is why the bible is also called the holy bible.

The bible has divine authority

2 Timothy 3:15, 16 *'... from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'*.

The bible has divine authority. Both the spoken and the written words of the bible come from God. In the bible we can hear the voice of God. He tells us: take the bible, read it and believe with all your heart the words that are in it.

Questions

1. The bible has been called the inspired word of God. What does this mean?
2. In which ways does God make himself known?
3. Why does God put such emphasis on the fact that He is the author of the bible?

Lesson 2b

Unfaithfulness

Everything God had made was good. Everything functioned the way it should. People were happy. They did not need to be afraid of illness, hunger, loneliness or death. How can it be possible that we live in such a completely different world? We will try and find an answer in this lesson.

One command

Read: Genesis 2:15-17

It is not God's intention for man to do whatever he wants on the earth without taking Him into account. He wants man to be focussed on Him in everything he does. In other words: God wants him to live for his glory. This is not a heavy burden for man. God made people in such a way that they love Him with all their heart and want to do his will. Adam and Eve, as the first people will be called, are completely dedicated to God. God gives Adam and Eve a particular way to show their love to Him. He has given two of the trees in the garden a special meaning. One is the tree of life. God promises to give people eternal* life when they eat from this tree.

The other tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve are not allowed to eat the fruits of this tree. By telling them not to eat from that tree, God tests their love and obedience. God does not want robots, no people who cannot do anything but obey Him. He wants Adam and Eve to love Him, to consciously choose Him and to trust Him completely as a child trusts its father. He wants them to do what He asks them, even if they do not understand his command. He wants them to show, with their behaviour, that they recognise Him as the owner and the King of the earth.

The choice against God

Read: Genesis 3:1-7

God only gives Adam and Eve one command. Nevertheless, they decide to break it. A snake persuades them to rebel against God. The snake behaves very crafty. In a number of steps he causes man to break God's command.

1. He makes sure not to meet Adam and Eve at the same time, but just Eve by herself. Perhaps he chooses Eve because she has not heard the command directly from God but via her husband.
2. He causes Eve to doubt: *'Did God really say...?'*
3. He makes a very slight change in the words of God and makes God's command thus seem incredibly oppressive. *'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'.*
4. He presents God as a liar: *'You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'.*
5. He makes it very attractive to break the command: *'You will be like God, knowing good and evil'.*

The moment that follows is a turning point in history. Eve does not tell the snake to leave the garden, but starts to look at the tree in a different way. She believes the snake's lies. She picks a fruit from the tree and eats it. She then offers it to her husband and he eats as well.

That moment man made a terrible decision: a decision against God. Although they know that a terrible punishment will follow, Adam and Eve choose to break the only command God has given them. It is not a matter of fate that this happened. God did not set a trap for man that he could not avoid falling into. Although man knows better and can do better, he decides to choose against God.

Satan

What happened in this chapter has a history to it. When God created the heavens and the earth, He also made angels* ('messengers'): spiritual beings, whom God destined to be his special servants and who would live with Him in heaven.

At one point – the bible does not tell when exactly – some of the angels have rebelled against God. The leader of the rebellion is called the devil ('insulter') or Satan* ('opponent'). He did not want to recognize God any longer as his king and was joined by many other angels. Satan and his followers, the devils, are thoroughly wicked. They try and oppose everything God undertakes.

When God made man, Satan saw a new opportunity to spoil everything. He could try to persuade man to join his side, to rebel against God. By breaking the one command God had given them, Adam and Eve joined Satan's rebellion. Because of this we know that it was Satan who spoke to Eve and persuaded her to eat the fruit. He used the snake as a disguise.

The fall

The moment that Eve and Adam break God's command is called 'the fall'. The fall is the moment that man chose to decide for himself what is good and what is bad. By doing so mankind chose:

1. against God. They retreated from God's service and with their choice against God they immediately chose the punishment God had warned them about: death.
2. for God's enemy: Satan. They became slaves serving a liar and a murderer. They cannot expect anything good from him at all – only misery. As Satan's slave there is only one option: sin, doing what is bad. Despite their knowledge they chose their own ruin.

God promises salvation

Read: Genesis 3:8-24
 3:20 *Eve*: 'source of all life'
 3:24 *cherubim*: angel

When God visits Adam and Eve that evening it is immediately clear that the good relationship they had, has been broken. Adam and Eve are afraid when they hear God approach them.

They do not dare to meet Him and try to hide themselves. God calls them out of their hiding place. First of all He holds Adam accountable because He had given the command to him. When God asks him if he has eaten from the tree, Adam does not answer a straight 'yes'. He tries to blame his wife Eve and in a way he even tries to blame God:

'The woman you put here with me'

Eve also tries to avoid the blame: the snake seduced her.

Then God directs himself to the snake. He does not hold him accountable as He did with man. They had a chance to defend themselves. The snake is immediately condemned:

Genesis 3:14-15

*'Because you have done this,
 Cursed are you above all the livestock
 And all the wild animals!
 You will crawl on your belly
 And you will eat dust
 All the days of your life.
 And I will put enmity
 Between you and the woman,
 And between your offspring and her;
 He will crush your head,
 And you will strike his heel'*

The snake itself is punished (verse 14), but more importantly, Satan, who used the snake as his disguise, is punished. We know this from verse 15 where God is speaking to Satan. God promises: I will personally make sure that there will be enmity between Satan and man. By listening to the snake, man had started a friendship with Satan and thus chosen for death. However, God ends this friendship. He moves Adam and Eve back over to his side.

This does not mean that everything will be all right for all people who will come after Adam and Eve. There will be people who will choose Satan's side ('your offspring'). But

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there will also be people who want to be on God's side and who will fight Satan ('her offspring').

God promises in these verses that the snake – Satan – will eventually lose the battle. His head will be crushed. This will be done by one of Eve's descendants. It is a marvellous promise: someone will be born one day, who will defeat Satan for good and save people from his power. Before this happens Satan will be able to harm the woman, but he will not be able to kill her. He can do no more than wound her foot, painful but not deadly.

This means: everyone who wants to live on terms of friendship with God, like Eve, will experience the enmity of Satan. Satan will not let go of people easily, but he cannot defeat them.

Summary

- There will be a war between Satan and the people who want to belong to God. The friendship between Satan and man has ended.
- Someone will come into the world who will defeat Satan and save believers.

Genesis 3:15 is an important passage. Although it is short it contains a great promise. In a way it is the mother of all further promises that God will make to his people.

Throughout the bible we see the two components of this promise:

- There is a continuous battle going on between Satan and his followers and the people who want to belong to God.
- Throughout the bible we find promises that someone will come who will save people from the power of Satan. In the New Testament we see how God fulfils those promises.

The punishment for man

The snake is punished. However, man also receives his punishment. At the most important moments in their lives

people will be painfully reminded of their disobedience in paradise:

- The woman will feel the punishment when she gives birth to a child and when she finds her husband ruling over her. Good relationships between men and women are no longer the norm.
- The man will feel the punishment when he works. Work will become difficult and burdensome. God curses the ground, which means that everything on earth will no longer function the way He meant. People will have to struggle to earn a living and fertile soil, rain and draught at the right times and a good crop are no longer the rule.
- People will die and with it they will have to cope with pain, illness and grief.
- Adam and Eve will have to leave paradise, the place of life. God makes it impossible for them to return. He guards the entrance to the garden with an angel with a sword.

The impact of sin on mankind

Adam and Eve broke the friendship they had with God and chose for Satan. They were the ones to break God's command. However, it does not stop there. Their descendants will not be able to make a clean start without sin. It is like a tree with damaged roots: it cannot bear healthy leaves and fruit. The same goes for all the people who are descended from Adam and Eve. They will be infected from birth. They will inherit sinfulness, wickedness, from their ancestors. They will have a desire to disobey God.

Adam and Eve were the first man and woman, the father and mother of all people. When they chose the side of God's opponent, they made a choice for all people who would come into the world after them. All of mankind has broken the friendship with God in Adam and Eve and chosen Satan's side. What happened in paradise concerns everyone. Everyone is guilty before God. Ourselves included. This implies that we also deserve God's punishment, death.

Just like Adam and Eve, we need God to come to us and save us from the power of Satan and move us back to his side.

Fortunately, God has kept his promise. He made sure someone came who could defeat Satan: Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ can live on terms of friendship with God. He can be assured that the relation between him and God is good. He does not need to be afraid of death. For whoever believes in Jesus Christ death no longer is a punishment but just a transfer to a wonderful life with God that will last forever. In a later lesson we will continue on this subject.

Questions

1. At the start of this lesson we asked the question: How is it possible that we live in such a different world compared to the first people? Try to answer this question.
2. These two statements give different views on the fall:
 - a. 'God should have made it impossible for man to sin'.
 - b. 'We should be grateful to Eve for eating the fruit. She enabled us to know the difference between good and evil. Mankind has progressed from paradise'.What do you think about these statements from a biblical point of view? Explain.
3. What happened in Genesis 3 is not just history to us. Why?

How can prayer be possible?

Lesson 2c

How can prayer be possible?

In the last lesson in the c-series, we looked at the subject of prayer. We mainly focused on what prayer is and who we pray to. In this lesson we will think about how prayer is at all possible and in what way we should pray.

How is it possible?

It is a great privilege to be able to speak to God. God is the powerful King who reigns over heaven and earth. However important we think we are, compared to God we are no more than a speck of dust on a scale or a tiny drop of water in a bucket. It is a miracle that God wants to relate to us at all, that He is concerned about us and wants to talk to us. We can talk to Him in an intimate way, the way a child speaks to its parents.

The miracle of God's willingness to relate to us is even greater when we realise we are not only small, but also very bad people. We are guilty.

In lesson 2b we saw how all men are guilty before God. We might think that we are doing all right, that we are not the worst cases. However, God sees us the way we are. He knows our thoughts and our emotions. He looks right through our smooth appearance. He does not think we are doing all right. He cannot turn a blind eye to our wickedness even when we think it is not so bad after all. God cannot ignore wickedness, because He is holy. That means He is thoroughly good. He cannot stand wickedness. The bible says He cannot look at evil.

When we pray, we need to realise that in ourselves we are guilty before God. We cannot come before Him as we are and pretend that nothing is the matter.

When a good friend has insulted you or hurt you, something needs to happen before you can be friends again. It would be intolerable if he would act as if nothing had happened the next

time you saw him. The friendship has been damaged and the relationship needs to be restored.

The situation between God and us is similar. We cannot pretend nothing has happened. When we pray we need to admit that we are guilty before Him. We need to ask God if He wants to forgive our bad thoughts, words and deeds and if He will forget our failure to live up to his holiness.

God forgives

Fortunately, we do not need to doubt whether God will forgive our sins and failures. God wants nothing more than for the relationship between Him and us to be restored. Whoever asks God for forgiveness in all honesty, will receive it. David wrote about this in the book of the Psalms. In Psalm 32 we read how David felt before and after he had asked God for forgiveness for a certain sin.

Psalm 32:1-5

*'Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven,
Whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count
against him
And in whose spirit is no deceit.
When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
And did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" –
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.'*

Also in the New Testament we see that God forgives us our sin when we admit to Him that we have done things that were wrong:

1 John 1:9

'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'

God does not forgive us because we are so honest about our sins or because He is willing to turn a blind eye. He forgives us because his Son has already been punished for our sins. We deserve God's punishment. In his holiness, God cannot look at us as we are. The bible compares our sinfulness to us wearing dirty clothes. We cannot come to God in our dirty clothes. However, they can be washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Testament puts it this way: '*The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sins*'. That means: Through the death that Jesus died, we count as sinless before God.

We cannot earn forgiveness of sins. We cannot restore our relationship with God ourselves. God gives us forgiveness. It is a gift. We do not need to do anything to deserve it. The bible calls this gift of forgiveness 'grace'. Grace is the undeserved freedom from guilt before God.

How do you pray?

When we pray to God we need to realise who He is:

1. The mighty King who rules over heaven and earth. This implies we need to show respect and reference when we pray to Him. We need to be aware of our position. We are small people before God.
2. The holy God who cannot tolerate our sin. This implies we need to come to God in awareness of our guilt and in humility. We need to realise that we have failed God by sinning but also that our relationship can be totally restored when we ask God for forgiveness.
3. The God who wants to be our Father because of his Son Jesus. This means we can tell Him everything in complete confidence and be sure that He listens.

Our attitude

The attitude we have when we pray shows our respect for God. In the past people used to stand up when they were praying. They would look up at the sky and raise their arms. In that way they showed that they expected everything from God.

The bible also tells of people who kneel when they pray. Even Jesus would kneel down in prayer to God.

Nowadays many Christians still kneel when they pray. Kneeling is a good way to show our respect for God, the King of heaven and earth. This does not mean we always need to kneel when we pray. We can also pray standing up or sitting down.

In our culture it is common to close our eyes when we pray. It is a good habit because it stops us from being distracted by things we see around us. It is also common to fold our hands together as a sign of stopping all other activity and focussing on God.

Addressing God

How should we address God? There are different ways. Jesus taught us that we can call God, 'Our Father in heaven'. Addressing God in that way shows both our intimacy with Him by calling Him Father, and also our respect for Him because we say 'in heaven'. He is the mighty God who lives in heaven. However, we can also choose to address Him in different ways such as 'Dear Lord' or 'Faithful God'.

The content

What do you say in the actual prayer? As long as you keep in mind who it is that you are talking to, you can say anything that is on your heart. You are free to use your own words. They do not need to be glamorous or difficult words. You can be yourself with God. Your prayer does not need to be long either. God knows exactly what you need, even before you ask.

God teaches us how to pray. In this lesson and the last we looked at a few Psalms, which were prayers to God. There are many of such Psalms in the bible. We can learn a lot from them about what a prayer should be like. There are certain recurring elements.

How can prayer be possible?

The Psalms teaching on prayer

We learn from the Psalms that it is important to praise God in our prayers. This means to express our awe for God and our enthusiasm about everything He has made. It is an expression of our joy about our relationship with God and our admiration for everything He does.

Praising God goes hand in hand with thanking Him.

Thanksgiving should be a substantial part of prayer as there are always a great number of reasons to thank God. He made us, He keeps us alive, He provides us with food and drink and a roof over our heads. God loved mankind so much that He continued to care for them after they had turned away from Him. He did everything to save them from Satan's power. Nothing is more natural than to thank God.

The Psalms also show us again and again that we should ask for forgiveness for our sins as we discussed earlier in this lesson.

Finally, we can learn from the Psalms that we can ask God for help when we face difficulties of whatever kind. God is concerned about his children. He listens to them and helps them when they have a hard time.

Jesus' teaching on prayer

Not only the Psalms teach us about prayer. Jesus also taught us a number of things about prayer. He even taught his disciples a specific prayer. This prayer is called the Lord's Prayer. Jesus teaches his followers in this prayer that they need to ask God first of all to increase their knowledge of Him and their attitude of worship. They also need to pray that they might more and more live in a way that pleases God. They can also ask for the things they need every day like food and drink, forgiveness of sins and power to resist Satan. (In the lessons 24c and 25c we will further discuss the Lord's Prayer).

Amen

Jesus taught us to conclude our prayer by saying 'amen'. The Hebrew word 'amen' means, 'indeed, it is true'. When we conclude our prayer with the word 'amen', we show that we are certain that God has listened to our prayer.

Pray

Prayer is intrinsically related to reading the bible. While doing this course, you will be looking up and reading a lot of passages from the bible. It would be good if you would also pray. In the passages you will read God will speak to you and He would be very glad if you would answer Him in your prayers. He would like you to come to Him with whatever is on your mind. We hope that you will make prayer a daily habit.

Questions

1. a. What does it mean that God is holy?
b. What does God's holiness imply for our prayer?
2. a. Why does God want to forgive people's sins?
b. When does a person receive forgiveness for his sins?
3. To be able to pray, you need to know both God and yourself. Explain.