

Lesson 3

- The bible is a unity
- Will Satan win the battle?
- Who is God?

The bible is a unity

Lesson 3a

The bible is a unity

The bible is a gift from heaven. The good news that God wanted to share was written down in the bible. He used people to do this. Many different people have been able to contribute to the work. However, the bible has not become incoherent because of it. God made sure the bible became a unity.

The bible has many authors

The bible consists of 66 different books. These books have been written by more than thirty different people. The authors are all very different. The same goes for their background, the time in which they lived and the language that they used. Between the writing of the first and the last book there is a period of about 1500 years. Despite all of this, the bible is a unity. All those 66 books tell one single story, God's story.

For many of the books in the bible we are not sure who the author is. For other books we do know the author. To be able to come to a good understanding of the bible, it is useful to know something about these authors. We will look at the ones who are the most well known.

- *Moses*

Moses is the author of the first five books in the bible. He was an Israelite boy, born in a time when the people of Israel lived in Egypt. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt used the Israelites as slaves. Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and thus became part of the noblest family in Egypt. He was brought up and educated as a prince. When he saw how his people were being treated, he decided to defend them. However, the Pharaoh was not pleased with Moses' attitude and he had to flee the country. However, God then used Moses to liberate the people of Israel from the hands of Egypt and to bring them to the country of Canaan. The books written by Moses deal for the largest part with this liberation and the laws that God gave to his people after they were liberated.

Exodus 3:11-12

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said: "I will be with you"

- *David*

David was a shepherd, chosen by God to become king of Israel. He became one of the most powerful kings of Israel ever. At the same time, he also composed music and wrote poetry. In poetic songs that we call the Psalms, he tells about his life and his relationship with God. David's psalms are often prayers to God.

2 Samuel 23:2

The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue

- *Amos*

Amos was a farmer when God asked him to leave his business and to move to a different part of the country. God asked him to become a prophet to warn the people against injustice and the exploitation of the poor. Amos's message is that God does not tolerate this.

Amos 7:15

But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel"

- *Luke*

Luke was a physician. Because of his profession he had contacts within the upper classes of society. For one of them, Theophilus, he wrote a very precise account of the life of Jesus. This Theophilus had heard about Jesus and wanted to know more. Lucas' intention was to show him that the stories that he had heard were true. Lucas himself knew witnesses of all that Jesus had done.

Luke 1:4 *So that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught*

Besides this account of the life of Jesus, Luke also wrote the book of Acts.

- *John*

John and his brother worked as fishermen along with their father. When Jesus called them to come and follow Him, they obeyed immediately. John wrote five of the books of the bible: one gospel, three epistles and the book of Revelations. This last book he wrote on the island of Patmos. He was banned to the island because he told people about Jesus in a time when that was illegal. God specifically chose this man who was banned, to write this part of the bible. It is a good example of how nothing can stop God's plans.

Revelation 21:5 *"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true"*

- *Paul*

Paul was trained as a Jewish religious scholar. He was very much opposed to the teaching of Jesus and wanted to imprison Jesus' followers. Despite all of this, God decided to use Paul. He says:

Acts 9:15 *This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.*

After Paul became a Christian, he was sent to Greece to tell about God and Jesus and as a result churches were started all over that part of Europe. Paul sent letters to these churches to encourage and teach them in their faith. Most of these letters can be found in the New Testament.

Nevertheless the bible is a unity

We saw that the bible has many different authors.

Nevertheless, all the different books of the bible form one book

together. The authors of the bible all tell in their own way about who God is and what our faith in Him means to our everyday life. When we read the bible we discover how the different books are all related to one another and add to each other. The authors use passages from other books of the bible to clarify or reinforce what they are saying. Many authors quote from the Psalms. In Psalm 103:15 and 16 it says:

*'As for man, his days are like grass,
He flourishes like the flower of the field;
The wind blows over it and it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more'*

The same lines we find in Isaiah 40:6-8, James 1:10-11 and 1 Peter 1:24.

The Psalms in their turn often use the stories of the historical books of the bible. For example, Psalm 106:9-11 takes its readers back to the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt. The author of the Psalm emphasises how it was God's work:

*'He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;
He led them through the depths as through a desert.
He saved hem from the hand of the foe;
From the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.
The waters covered their adversaries;
Not one of them survived'*

The gospels quote the books of the law and the prophets. In John 6:45 John repeats the words from Isaiah 54:13:

It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God'

When the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament, it usually just says:

...as it is written in the Scriptures,...

The bible is a unity

or:

...as the Holy Spirit says:...

Whenever the bible speaks of 'the Scriptures' it means the Old Testament, which already was in existence as a book on its own since about 100 BC.

When we compare the first chapter and the last chapter of the bible, it again shows a remarkable unity.

The first chapter of the bible tells us about paradise, the first habitation of man. There man lived in peace and harmony with God and everything else around him. Then, because of his disobedience, man is expelled from paradise. However, man has not lost paradise forever.

God promises that man will be restored to paradise. A glimpse of this future is shown in the last book of the bible. The end of the bible picks up from where it started.

The first book of the bible tells us:

Genesis 1:1
and 2:8,9

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (...) Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the East, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. (...) In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'.

The last books of the bible says:

Revelations 21:
1 and 22:2

'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth (...) On each side of the river stood the tree of life'

The circle of the bible is complete. Although many different people have contributed to its writing, God's Spirit has guarded its unity.

Questions

1. What is remarkable about the different professions of the authors of the bible?
2. God used human beings to bring his message. In this lesson you find a quote from the bible with every author. From which texts can you clearly tell that God is behind the authors?
3. What shows the bible to be a unity? Give more than one answer.

Will Satan win the battle?

Lesson 3b

Will Satan win the battle?

After the Fall God said that there would be two groups of people: 'the descendants of the woman', people who want to belong to God and 'the descendants of the snake', people who want to serve God's enemy, Satan. It is not long before people are divided into two camps: for God and against God. Even in Adam and Eve's own family there is division.

Cain and Abel

Read Genesis 4:1-16

4:3 *offering*: a gift for God. See list of words

4:4 *fat portions*: the fat was regarded the best part of the animal

In Genesis 4 we read about two of Adam and Eve's children: Cain and Abel. One day both Cain and Abel bring an offering to God, something their parents apparently taught them to do. God only accepts Abel's offering. He does not accept Cain's offering. Is God being unfair? Cain and Abel seem to do exactly the same thing: they offer up something of their possessions to God. However, there is a difference between the two offerings. The New Testament tells us so:

Hebrews 11:4

'By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did'.

In itself, Cain's offering is of the exact same value as Abel's. However, God is not concerned about the offering itself. What use has He for sheep or fruit? He is concerned about the attitude that Cain and Abel have toward Him. Abel has faith: he loves God and knows that he is completely dependent on Him. Cain's offering is not one of faith and love for God.

Cain's attitude shows when he notices that God ignores his offering. He is furious. God warns him not to be overcome by evil and to control his bad thoughts. However, from his answer

it is clear that he does not care about the warning. He kills his brother.

God asks from Cain to account for what he did. Cain tries to save himself with a lie: 'I don't know where Abel has gone. Am I responsible for my brother?' When God tells him that He knows what has happened, Cain admits it. He knows he has done something wrong, but he does not regret it. He only fears for his own life.

However bad Cain might be, God is patient with him. He punishes him, but allows him to live. God gives him a guarantee that he will not be killed. Cain receives a sign, something to prove the reliability of God's promise. The bible does not tell us what the sign is.

A life without God

Read: Genesis 4:17-24

This passage tells us what happens to Cain. He seems to become a successful man: he has a son; he builds a city; his family extends itself. We do not know how many of his descendants Cain has known for himself. From Genesis 5 we do know that people in that time just after the fall reached a very old age: 800 years of age was no exception. This could be regarded as a leftover from the good start. God had made people strong and healthy. People carried over their strength and good health to their children, just like people in our time carry over certain genetic disorders to theirs. It is therefore possible that Cain knew Lamech.

In Lamech's time a certain culture starts to develop. It is the culture of the nomads, who live in tents and keep flocks. One of Lamech's sons invents musical instruments. Another discovers how he can mould iron and bronze. People learn how to make weapons and tools out of these materials. Cain's descendants seem to have successful lives, but from Lamech's behaviour we can tell that people no longer care about God. Lamech has two wives, which is not what God had intended. Besides, he continues in the footsteps of his

ancestor Cain. He does not mind killing someone even if it is only for a scratch. Lamech wants to intimidate, as he tells his wives:

Genesis 4:23-24

*'Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
Wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
A young man for injuring me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
Then Lamech seventy-seven times'.*

The descendants of Cain have chosen the side of Satan. There is no love for God in their lives. They only care about themselves.

A life with God

Reading: Genesis 4: 25-26

Not everyone in this time after the Fall chooses the side of Satan. Some, like Seth, choose God's side. In the time when Seth's son Enos is born, people start *'to call on the name of the Lord'*. This means that people started to meet regularly for worship. Such worship meetings are gatherings of people who believe in God. They come together to thank God for what He gives, to bring Him offerings, to praise Him and think about what He has to say.

Satan seems to win the battle

Hundreds of years go past. God's world is deteriorating. It seems that Satan is winning territory. The large majority of people are faithful slaves to him, even the descendants of Seth and Enos. When God looks at the world, He sees the amount of evil that people cause. Everything done by man is bad. Everyone is acting against God's will. Violence and injustice seem to rule everywhere and people have made a mess of

God's world. It seems that the 'project man' has turned into a disaster. Satan seems to have reached his goal.

Judgement and salvation

It is painful for God to see how man has chosen the side of Satan. He even regrets ever having made man. God decides to clean up the earth with a great, big flood. Every living creature shall drown. It is a horrendous punishment, but man has asked for it.

Nevertheless, this punishment does not mean the end of the human race. God wants to continue on earth with one family: the family of a man called Noah.

Noah has been faithful to God. The bible says of him:

Genesis 6:9

'Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.'

'Noah walked with God': this means to say that Noah lived to please God. In everything he did he was focussed on God.

God wants to save Noah and his family from dying in the flood. He tells Noah about his decision to destroy all living creatures and He commands him to build a big, chest-like ship. This ship, which is called the arc, is going to save Noah and his family from drowning. The arc is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high: a time and a half the size of a football pitch. It must have been an extraordinary size for a ship in that time. The ship needs to be so big, because besides Noah's family it will have to take a pair of every single type of animal and seven pairs of some types and of course food for all of them.

Noah has 120 years the time to build the arc. The people around him have plenty of time to clean up their lives. It is likely that a lot of people came to have a look at what Noah was doing. The arc must have been an extraordinary sight. Who on earth would build such a huge ship on the land?

Will Satan win the battle?

Noah tries to convince the people who come to see what he is doing, that they need to change their lives. He warns them that God will punish the earth with a great flood.

We know that Noah has done this, because in another part of the bible he is called '*a preacher of righteousness*' (2 Peter 2:5). He must have been well known for trying to convince the people of his time to change their lives.

Despite his warnings, nobody repents. After 120 years, when the ship is finished and all the food is stored, Noah and his family are still the only ones to be on God's side. Even when the people stand and watch the animals lining up to enter the arc, nothing happens. They live as if nothing is the matter.

The big flood

Reading: Genesis 7

7:2 Clean/unclean animals: In the Old Testament there is a distinction between clean animals which are suitable for bringing sacrifices and unclean animals which are not.

The springs/floodgates: the water comes from both the earth and the skies.

Genesis 7 tells the account of God's punishment. Heavy rains and floods cause the whole world to disappear under the water. The water raises more than seven metres above the highest mountaintop. Every living creature drowns except for the people and animals inside the arc.

In this horrendous event we see how God acts as a punishing judge. He has given the people, however bad they were, plenty of time to clean up their lives. However, because they refused to do so, He had to punish them.

Back on the earth

Reading: Genesis 8

8:20 altar: a platform that was used to burn an offering on

burnt offerings: an offering that would be burned and in that way given to God

Almost a year goes by before Noah and his family see a little patch of earth again, a few mountaintops. Noah tries to find out whether the world is inhabitable by letting out a raven and a dove. It is not a surprise that the raven does not return. There must have been plenty of food for him on the water.

The dove brings a sign that the water really is receding. He returns to the arc with a leaf in its mouth. This means that there is trees growing above the water and they are sprouting leaves.

A year after the flood had started Noah and his family can leave the ship. The first thing Noah does when he touches firm ground is to thank God. He builds an altar, kills a number of clean animals and burns them on the altar. With this sacrifice Noah shows how grateful he and his family are for having been saved.

When God sees the smoke rising from the altar, He decides that he will never again destroy all life.

The rainbow

God makes a covenant with man and the animals. He promises that He will never again flood the earth. He emphasises this promise with the sign of the rainbow.

Whenever God will see the rainbow in the sky, He will remember his promise to man and the animals to sustain the earth and its seasons forever.

Whenever people see a rainbow, they can remember that they do not need to be afraid of another flood that will destroy everything. God promises to sustain the world.

God keeps his promise

God had promised Adam and Eve that one day someone would be born who would defeat Satan and save mankind.

God wants to keep that promise, even when man chooses the side of Satan. For this reason He gave Noah and his family the faith to trust in Him and that is why they could be saved.

Satan has not won the battle. The line to the future Saviour has not been cut off. In the following lessons we will be able to see how God continues this line.

Questions

1. Make a family tree for the people mentioned in Genesis 4. Point out who is on God's side and who is in on Satan's side and if possible explain.
2. In Genesis 4: 23-24 we find the song that Lamech sung for his two wives. In the song Lamech's attitude seems to be: 'If anyone causes me harm, he will regret it'. What do you think of this attitude? How does the bible judge this attitude? Also read Matthew 18: 21-22 and Romans 12: 17-21. Matthew 28: 21 *Peter*: a follower of Jesus Christ, *to sin*: to do something wrong, Romans 12:19 *leave room for God's wrath*: let God be the judge.
3. Use your own words to explain why the flood happened.
4. Noah worked on the arc for more than a century – in the time just after the fall people still reached a very old age, see Genesis 5. During that whole period not one person repented and changed his life. How was it possible for Noah to continue to work on the arc – even while there was no water around? Look at Hebrews 11:7 *...became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*: he was given righteousness; God made him righteous.

Who is God?

Lesson 3c

Who is God?

To be able to understand who God is – what He has done and still does – we have to read the bible. Obviously, we are not the first people to do so. We can learn a lot from people who have studied the bible before us.

An age-old summary

As early as the second century AD Christians have been able to accurately summarise what the bible teaches us about God. This summary, which contains twelve brief points, is called the Apostolic Creed. The word 'apostolic' indicates that it is a summary of what the apostles taught. In other words: it is a summary conform the bible.

The word 'creed' comes from the Latin verb *credere*, to believe. A creed was used to summarize the Christian faith to an outsider.

Centuries later, the Apostolic Creed has not lost its value. To this very day, the twelve points, or articles as they are usually called, are used as a reliable summary of what the bible teaches about God. Every Sunday the words of the Creed are recited in many churches.

Because the Apostolic Creed gives such an accurate summary of the bible, we will go through it in the coming lessons.

The Apostolic Creed

1. I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
3. who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell;
5. the third day He rose again from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

7. from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

8. I believe in the Holy Spirit;

9. the holy catholic [apostolic or universal] church; the communion of saints;

10. the forgiveness of sins;

11. the resurrection of the body;

12. and life everlasting.

One God

The creed consists of three parts. The first part is about God the Father and his work. The second part is about Jesus Christ and his work and the third part is about the Holy Spirit and his work.

This division raises an immediate question. How can the creed speak about God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? The bible is very clear about the fact that there is only one God. Apart from Him there are no others.

The people of Israel, with whom God had a special relationship for a very long time, was told: '*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*' (Deuteronomy 6:4). In other words: there is only one God and He is the Lord (Lord is a special name for God).

There is only one God. That is for sure. It is obvious from the entire bible. However, it does not end there. In Genesis 1, in the account of the creation, we read something about the '*Spirit of God*' (Genesis 1:2). After the fall, God said: '*The man has now become like one of us*' (Genesis 3:22). The New Testament speaks about the Son of God and '*the Father*' (John 5:26).

Apparently, this one God can speak about 'us' and within this God there is a Spirit, a Son and a Father. This is incomprehensible. God is one and at the same time there appear to be three persons within this one God: the Father, who made heaven and earth and sustains them; the Son, who became man and died to save mankind; and the Holy Spirit,

who makes forgiveness of sins and everlasting life available to man. Because this one God consists of three persons, He is called a triune God.

Three persons

God consists of three persons. What does the word person mean here? Usually the word is used to indicate an independent being, a man or woman who is completely separate from other people surrounding him or her. However, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are no separate individuals who operate independently. Together they are one God. They are one in power and goodness. They are one in being God. At the same time they can be distinguished. It is not one and the same person who is being called by different names on different occasions. When the bible speaks of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, it means to indicate a specific, distinguishable person.

For example the bible says:

'God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life'.

John 3:16

This clearly indicates that the Father, who is often called God, send his Son to the world. This is how independent the persons are. The Father can command his Son to do something and the Son can do his Father's will.

Criticism

Many people do not believe that God can be a trinity. One does not equal three, nor does three equal one. God cannot be three and one at the same time. They say when the bible speaks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it does not mean that God is three in one. According to them the Father is God, but Jesus, whom the bible calls the Son of God, is not truly his Son. He was a good man, adopted by God as his special son. They neither believe that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is a divine power, an extension of God.

These thoughts are not new. Even 1700 years ago there were people who thought the same. It is hard to accept not to be able to explain everything. It is not possible for human beings to understand how God can be three and one at the same time. However, we should rely on the bible rather than on the power of our imagination. Only God can tell us who He really is.

When anyone reads the bible in all honesty, it is impossible to deny that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. We will go into more depth now using a number of passages from the bible.

The bible about the Father

It is clear from the entire bible that the Father is God. On many occasions the Father of Jesus Christ is called God. One example from the New Testament:

Colossians 1:3

'We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you'

In many other places we read the blessing:

2 Thessalonians 1:2 *'Grace and peace to you from God the Father'*

Not only because He is called God, we know that the Father is God. It is moreover clear from the work that He does. He made the heavens and the earth. He sent his Son from heaven to the world and after his Son died He made Him alive again.

The bible about God's Son

God's Son Jesus Christ is also God. The clearest evidence is that the bible itself calls Him so. It speaks of Jesus as *'the true God'* (1 John 5:20). It is also evident from the fact that Jesus claims to be one with the Father. Just like his Father is God, so is He.

Another proof of Jesus being God is that He has all the characteristics that only God has. For example, God is eternal:

Who is God?

there has never been a time that He did not exist. He will always be. Jesus is also eternal. The bible says about him that He is '*without beginning of days or end of life*' (Hebrews 7:3). Furthermore, Jesus' divinity can be seen in the fact that He can do things that only God can do. He can forgive people their sins and take away their guilt before God. He can give people life.

It is evident from many bible passages that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is truly God. For this reason the bible calls Him '*Immanuel*' (Matthew 1:23), which means: God with us.

The bible about the Holy Spirit

The Father and the Son are God; the same goes for the Holy Spirit. This is how the bible calls Him. For example, when a certain Ananias has acted dishonestly, he is told:

Acts 5:3-4

'How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit? (...) You have not lied to men but to God'

This passage does not only show that the Holy Spirit is God, it moreover shows that the Holy Spirit is a person rather than an impersonal force. How else could Ananias have lied to him? No one can deceive an impersonal force.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is not only evident from the fact that He is called so in the bible. It is visible from his work. He acts in a way that only God can act. He was involved in the creation of the world. He sustains life on earth. He causes the trees to bud in springtime and new life to appear everywhere. He is also the one that caused the bible to be formed. He gives people faith. His deeds are the deeds of God.

The Holy Spirit

We have been talking about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is easy to imagine what the bible means when it talks about a Father and a Son, but what exactly is the Holy Spirit?

The dictionary defines spirit as 'the inner part of someone that includes their thoughts and feelings'. Our spirit is intangible. A spirit is not a person, only part of a person.

The Holy Spirit is different. He is not to be thought of as the inner part of God, his thoughts or emotions. The Holy Spirit is a '*power*' (Luke 1:35), which comes forth from God. At the same time is the Holy Spirit a person. Jesus Christ calls Him '*the Counsellor*' (John 14:16-17). Again, this is incomprehensible to us. We cannot fully understand who the Holy Spirit is and how He can be a power and a person at the same time. The only thing we can do is to listen to what the bible teaches us about Him.

Later on in the course there will be a number of lessons about the Holy Spirit, where we will go into more depth as to who He is and what He does.

The Triune God

God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit: all three of them are God. They are linked and belong together. In the bible they are regularly mentioned together. We will briefly look at a few examples.

The bible tells the story of how Jesus started his work on earth. The very moment that He starts his ministry, the Holy Spirit comes down from God to empower Him to do his work. From heaven the voice of God speaks: '*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased*' (Matthew 3:17). The Father, the Son and the Spirit are acting all together in this moment.

Jesus Christ tells his disciples when He sends them out into the world:

Matthew 28:19

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

Paul ends one of his letters with the following blessing:

2 Corinthians 13:13 *'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'*

God is one and within this one God there are three distinct persons. This is not just an interesting theory for theologians to keep themselves occupied. It is a living truth, important for anyone who believes in God. The confession of God's trinity shows us more of who He is and of the greatness of his loving kindness. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have worked together to save mankind:

- God the Father sent his Son to the world to become man and through the work of his Son He wants to become our loving Father.
- God the Son became man and gave his life for mankind. He wants to be our Saviour.
- The Holy Spirit makes the forgiveness of sins that the Son has earned for us, available to become ours. He wants to live in us.

Questions

- 1a. How do we know from the bible that there is only one God?
- 1b. How do we know from the bible that God consists of three persons?
- 1c. What is meant by the word 'person'?
2. How do we know that Jesus Christ is truly God?