

Lesson 24

- The bible is worth the effort
- The gospel reaches Europe
- Prayer as expression of gratitude

The bible is worth the effort

Lesson 24a

The bible is worth the effort

Studying the bible is not always easy. There are things in the bible that are hard to understand. In the previous lesson we said that many problems can be solved by using modern translations. However, some difficulties will remain.

Questions

Many people have been familiar with the bible from childhood. In the families where they grew up the bible would be read daily. They would go to church from an early age and often they would go to a Christian school. People who only start to read the bible at a later age often miss the foundational knowledge that others acquired as children. This can make it even more difficult to read the bible.

Having grown up with the bible still does not make it an easy book. Those people who have been familiar with the bible from childhood will also have questions about the meaning of certain passages. The bible contains many difficult passages. There will be parts that you do not understand or that you wonder what to do with. These passages can raise questions or doubts and there will not always be an answer immediately available.

Difficult passages

Many books of the bible will cause little problems when we read them. However, the books of the prophets in the Old Testament and the letters in the New Testament contain parts that require some effort before we will be able to understand them. They are by no means an easy read. Peter writes in one of his letters about the difficult passages in Paul's letters:

2 Peter 3:15-16

'Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and

unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.'

Peter acknowledges here that not all passages in the bible are easily understandable. He warns Christians that it is for their own good not to interpret these passages wrongly. Paul himself was also aware of the fact that some of the things he had said were misunderstood or misinterpreted. In his letters he often tries to solve misunderstandings. Sometimes the gospel that Paul preaches is so contrary to people's expectations that they shift around its words. For example in Romans 3:8 we read:

'Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – "Let us do evil that good may result?" There condemnation is deserved.'

Paul has told the people that they will not be saved by their good works but only through faith. Some people thought he was saying: You can do what is wrong because good will result. In other words: You can do what you like, if you believe you will be saved anyway. Obviously, Paul never meant to say that and he fiercely puts those people who misinterpret him in their place.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes that Christians are free. They do not live to serve the law because Jesus set them free:

Galatians 5:1

'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.'

But immediately Paul prevents a possible misinterpretation:

Galatians 5:13

'You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge in sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.'

Christians are free. However, that does not mean they can now do whatever they like. They are not to use their freedom

to give in to their sinful desires. The freedom they have received through the work of Jesus Christ should not result in lawlessness and, what is an easy next step, licentiousness. They should help each other to resist this.

It is not an imaginary danger that Christians would misinterpret Paul's words about freedom. It happened for example in the church of Corinth. The Christians in that church summarised Paul's teaching about freedom in the slogan '*Everything is permissible for me*' (1 Corinthians 6:12), in other words, '*I am allowed to do anything*'. They used this slogan to justify all sorts of wrong practices. They allowed, for example, that a man and his stepmother could live together as husband and wife. Wasn't everything permissible?

Obviously, Paul never meant this. He clarifies this to the Corinthian Christians. Freedom does not allow you to do things that God has forbidden.

Some passages in the bible are easily misinterpreted. For that reason it is always important to read them in their context. Something that seems confusing at first sight often becomes easier to understand when it is read in the context of the surrounding passages.

Do you understand what you read?

To be able to use the bible it is important to receive teaching. God knows the bible is not an easy book and for that reason He provides people who can explain his Word. We can see examples of that in the bible. The apostles Paul tell his fellow worker Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:2

'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.'

A wonderful example of a person helping someone else to understand the bible can be found in the book of Acts:

Acts 8:26-40

'Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.'

The bible is worth the effort

The eunuch knew the Old Testament but there were passages that he did not understand. He needed someone to explain him how to read the bible.

We also need to have explained to us what God tells us in the bible. It is therefore important to go to church because there the bible is read and explained.

Some questions remain

It is not true that everything in the bible can be understood if only we do enough effort or go to church regularly. There are things in the bible that surpass our understanding. There are questions that we will not find an answer to such as: What exactly are angels? What do they look like? How could the Fall happen? How could Mary get pregnant without the help of a man? Why is there so much suffering in this world?

Every believer can struggle with such questions. God does not give us immediate and complete answers to them. But do we need to have an answer for all these questions? Jesus teaches us that to enter the kingdom of God we need to become like a child. In the same way that a child accepts stories from the bible without questioning them, we should also simply believe what the bible tells us. Even when we do not understand it. Even if not all our questions are answered.

God tells us what we need to know

Some questions remain. That is not surprising if we think about the fact that we are only human. Our understanding is too limited to conceive how endlessly great, powerful and wise God is. We will not be able to understand everything that God does and how He does it. But we can praise Him for it:

Romans 11:33-36 *'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?"*

*"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.'*

In the bible God does not give us an answer to all our questions. However, He does tell us everything we need to know. He tells us everything we need to get to know Him and to be saved. That is the aim of the bible: that we come to know and love God and that we give ourselves over to Him. There are things in the bible that we cannot understand, things that will raise questions for us as long as we live. However, the most important thing, the greatest secret, God has made known to us:

'Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:

1 Timothy 3:16

*He appeared in a body,
Was vindicated by the Spirit,
Was seen by angels,
Was preached among the nations,
Was believed on in the world,
Was taken up in glory.'*

God loves us, people who would rather choose the side of his opponent than to join Him. God loves us so much that He cannot bear the thought that we would give ourselves over to death. Through his Son He came to us in the appearance of a man. He wants to save us. Why? We cannot understand. We do not need to wonder how it is possible. We can accept his love with gratitude.

The bible is worth the effort

The bible is not always easy. There are even some things that we will never understand. Nevertheless, even through those difficult passages we can see the love of God. God reaches out to take our hands. He wants to save us. That message is so great that even if we sometimes struggle with the effort we

need to make to understand the bible, it is still worth it in every way.

Questions

1. Explain the meaning of Isaiah 53:7.
2. The bible is worth the effort. Do you agree? Explain.

The gospel reaches Europe

Lesson 24b

The gospel reaches Europe

In the previous lesson we saw how the Holy Spirit sent out Paul and Barnabas into the world to tell about Jesus Christ wherever they go. After a long journey Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch to report to the Christians there.

The meeting in Jerusalem

After Paul and Barnabas have given an account of their journey they stay in Antioch for a while. At a certain point a great confusion arises in the church. Jewish Christians from Israel have arrived saying that any Christian who is not circumcised will not receive eternal life. In other words: no salvation without circumcision.

Paul and Barnabas object strongly to this opinion. The church in Antioch sends them to Jerusalem to discuss the issue. In Jerusalem the apostles, the elders of the church in Jerusalem and a few delegates from Antioch all come together in an important meeting.

All together they discuss everything that God has done amongst the gentiles. Whilst studying the Old Testament, the members of the meeting come to the conclusion that gentiles do not need to be circumcised.

Finally the issue that has caused so much confusion all along is settled. Gentiles do not need to become Jewish before they can be saved. Just like the Jews they only need to do one thing and that is to believe in Jesus Christ. With this answer Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch.

The second mission journey

Paul and Barnabas want to go on another journey. They want to see how the people who became Christians during their first journey are keeping. However, this time they do not go together. Barnabas goes together with his cousin Mark who has also written the gospel that bears his name. Paul chooses a certain Silas to accompany him. During his journey Timothy, a young Christian also joins them.

Paul travels more than a thousand kilometres on foot through Asia Minor, which is more or less present day Turkey. He visits the churches that were started during his first journey. He tells the Christians about the decision that was made in Jerusalem. He also teaches the Christians and encourages them. They need encouragement because it is not easy to belong to Christ in those days. Someone who has become a Christian stands out. He no longer joins in the worship of his previous gods and lives differently in many other aspects. The chances are that his family and friends no longer want to associate with him and his faith can even cost a Christian his job and his life.

When Paul and his friend arrive in the town of Troas on the coast one night, he has a vision. He sees a Greek man who calls out to him: 'Come, cross the sea and help us!' This way the Holy Spirit points out to Paul that he has to go to Greece. Paul and his companions travel from Asia Minor to Greece on a ship. By now their company exists of four people: Luke, the writer of the book of Acts has joined Paul in Troas. We know this because from this moment onwards the book is largely written in the first person plural.

For Paul and his men this crossing was just going from one province of the Roman Empire to the next but for us it is very important that Paul makes this crossing to Greece. The good news now arrives in Europe and from Europe it will reach the whole of the world in the course of the centuries.

The Jailor of Philippi

Once they have arrived in Greece, Paul and Silas first of all go to the city of Philippi. They stay there for a while and tell people about Jesus Christ. One Sabbath they meet a slave girl who is possessed with an evil spirit. Because of this evil spirit the girl can foretell the future and her owners earn a lot of money because of her. When Paul and Silas are on their way to the place where the believers meet on the Sabbath the girl follows them. She calls out after them: '*These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.*'

The girl tells the truth but she does not do Paul and Silas a favour. This is not a woman of faith speaking but rather an evil spirit, a devil. Satan would never tell the gospel to bring people to God. His intention has to be to harm the message Paul is bringing.

To begin with, Paul does not pay a lot of attention to the girl but when she keeps following him and Silas day after day he can no longer bear it. He tells the evil spirit: *'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her.'* At that very moment the spirit leaves the girl and she comes back to her senses. However, Satan does not bring his opposition to a halt. He tries to use the girl's healing to get rid of Paul and Silas.

Read: Acts 16:19-40

16:21 *Romans*: At that time all the countries surrounding the Mediterranean belonged to the Roman Empire. The inhabitants of Greece therefore counted as Romans. Being a Roman citizen gave a person certain privileges and was something to be proud of.

The owners of the slave girl are furious when they realise their source of money is taken from them. They blame Paul and Silas and drag them to the centre of the city where the magistrates' court is. The 'victimised' owners do not only win the favour of the magistrates but also of a large crowd of citizens. They first of all point out that Paul and Silas, whom they disdainfully refer to as Jews, have brought the city in uproar. Then they accuse them of trying to establish a strange religion, which is officially forbidden in the Roman Empire. Paul and Silas are treated as serious criminals. They are stripped of their clothes and publicly flogged, using a whip with bits of sharp metal on the end. Then they are thrown in prison covered in blood. They are put in the inner cell with their feet in stocks to make it impossible for them to escape.

Despite the humiliation and pain, Paul and Silas do not lose courage. In the middle of the night they pray out loud to God and sing songs to praise Him. They do not whimper in pain or

curse the people who have done this to them but they sing to God. All the other prisoners are witnesses to this exceptional behaviour.

Then all of a sudden there is an earthquake. The doors of the prison open and the prisoners' chains come undone. The jailer, who has woken up, knows that this is his end. If a prisoner escapes, he will be condemned to death. In his despair he decides to commit suicide.

However, Paul stops him. He calls out to him that none of the prisoners have escaped. The jailer is deeply impressed. Apparently, he has heard something about the message that Paul and Silas bring. After what has happened he wants to hear what they have got to say. He realises that the message that Paul and Silas bring is also of vital importance to him. When he humbly asks how he can be saved, Paul gives him a straightforward answer: 'Trust in the Lord Jesus. If you do that you and your family will be saved.'

All of the jailer's family is interested in the salvation that Paul talks about. Paul and Silas tell them more and the whole family comes to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul baptises the jailer and his family. This way God guarantees them that his sins have been forgiven and that they belong to Jesus Christ.

The jailer serves Paul and Silas a meal and the whole family celebrates that they have come to faith in God and from now on belong to Him.

The next morning the magistrates want to set Paul and Silas free. They probably think that they have learned their lesson by now. However, Paul refuses to just leave the prison and the city. Silas and himself have been beaten up without any form of trial while they are Roman citizens just like the citizens of Philippi. No Roman citizen can just be flogged and Paul wants a public justification. The magistrates have to personally escort them out of the city.

When they have done so, Paul and Silas are ready to leave. However, before they go they stop to visit Lydia, a woman who has become a Christian. Many other Christians have gathered

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together in her house. Paul and Silas encourage them and say goodbye.

A church is started in Thessalonica

Paul and his fellow workers continue their journey and come to Thessalonica, a harbour located about 120 kilometres further on. When they arrive Paul first visits the Jewish synagogue. During three weeks he speaks in the synagogue every Sabbath. From the Old Testament prophets he explains that the Christ, whom the Jews in Thessalonica are still waiting for, had to suffer, die and rise from the dead.

When he has explained that to them, Paul tells the Jews about Jesus. He tells about his life, the miracles He has done, his death and resurrection. Then Paul tries to convince his listeners that this Jesus is the promised Christ.

Some Jews believe what Paul tells them and are converted. There are also many non-Jews who come to faith. The Jews who do not believe Paul get so angry about it that they cause an enormous uproar. Some Christians even end up in prison because of the false accusations of the Jews. The Christians urge Paul and his fellow workers to leave the city. It would be irresponsible to stay any longer.

Paul in Athens

Read: Acts 17:15-34

17:18 *Epicurean and Stoic philosophers*: philosophers belonging to different streams of philosophy

After Paul has been in Thessalonica and after that in Berea, he goes to Athens. There he wants to wait for Silas and Timothy who have stayed behind in Berea. In Paul's days Athens is the cultural centre of the world. It is a beautiful city full of impressive buildings and monuments. The city is the home of philosophers of many different streams. Every day they meet to publicly discuss all sorts of deep matters. Paul does not pay much attention to the cultural wealth of Athens. There is one thing that attracts all of his attention, the multitude of carved

idols he sees. To him Athens is a city that is totally immersed in the worship of idols. Paul is touched when he sees all these images. It hurts him to see that the people of Athens do not worship God. He does the only possible thing: he tries to convince people that they need to come to faith in Jesus. Every Sabbath he goes to the synagogue to reach his fellow Jews with the good news. But he does not leave it at that. The other days of the week he goes to the market in the centre of the city. He speaks to the people he meets, with ordinary people and with philosophers.

Paul's words attract the attention of the people of Athens. They do not know what to think of him but they are interested in what he has to say. Because they want to know more about the 'new teaching' that he brings, they take him to the Areopagus, where normally the court of justice meets. When they get there they ask Paul to tell them more about his teaching. This way God gives Paul the opportunity to tell scholars from all over the world about Him. Paul addresses them in a very special way. He starts by addressing the religiosity of the people of Athens. He tells them: 'Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious. In your city I have even found an altar with the inscription: *to an unknown god*. I will tell you what you worship unknowingly.'

Then Paul tells the people of Athens about his God. He explains to them that it is the God who created the heavens and the earth (verse 24), who sustains life on earth (verse 25), who rules over all nations (verses 26-28a), who is a Father to the people (verses 28b-29), and who is the judge over the world (verses 30-31). He so tries to convince that there is only one God, the God that he worships.

The people give Paul every opportunity to speak about God. However, as soon as he begins to speak about the resurrection of Jesus, they object. They cannot believe such a thing. Nevertheless, Paul's speech is not entirely fruitless. Some Athenians come to faith.

The third mission journey

After his second journey Paul returns to Antioch. He does not stay long. Very soon he leaves for a third mission journey. He goes to Asia Minor to encourage the Christians there and to tell the people who have not yet heard the gospel about Jesus Christ.

He continues from there to Macedonia and Greece to visit the Christians there and then he returns. However, he does not go to Antioch. God has made it clear to him that he needs to go to Jerusalem.

Paul goes to Rome

In Jerusalem Paul is imprisoned. He is unjustly accused of having desecrated the temple. After a long trial he is brought to Rome where his case will be brought before the emperor.

The bible does not tell us what happens to Paul. We do read that in the two years that he needs to wait for his trial, he has every opportunity to speak about Jesus Christ. This way God has made it possible for the gospel to even reach Rome.

Questions

- 1a. Which group of Christians is of the opinion that gentiles need to be circumcised and keep to the laws that God has given Israel? Read Acts 15:5.
- 1b. Explain why it is precisely those Christians who think so? (See also lesson 15a).
- 1c. Try to explain why it is understandable from a Jewish point of view that circumcision was so important. (See also lesson 6b).
- 1d. Why is circumcision no longer necessary?
2. What is the difference between the Jews in Thessalonica and Berea, the city Paul visits after he leaves Thessalonica? Read Acts 17:1-14.

Prayer as expression of gratitude

Lesson 24c

Prayer as expression of gratitude

In this and the next lesson in the c-series we will discuss prayer, the same topic we looked at in the first two lessons in the c-series. Then we looked at questions such as: What is prayer? Who do you pray to? And how should you pray? In these last two lessons we will discuss the topic in some more depth.

An expression of gratitude

Anyone who fully realises what God has done for him can only do one thing: show God his gratitude. This can be done through actions, by living the way God asks from people in his law, but gratitude can moreover be shown with words, by praising God and thanking Him for what He has done. From numerous places in the bible we see how important this is. An example is Psalm 103:

Psalm 103:2-5, 22 *'Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits-
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the LORD, O my soul.'*

People often tend to think that their deeds are what counts the most to God. However, that is not true. People can do innumerable things for God but if they do not thank God, they forget the important thing. They forget to praise the one who has given them life and who has saved them. Whoever is truly

happy about what God has done for him will not only show it with deeds but also with words.

An expression of love

Prayer is not only a way of showing gratitude, it is also an important way of showing our love to God. You could compare prayer to a conversation between two people who love each other.

People who love each other are interested in one another. They talk a lot; they discuss what is on their minds; they tell what has happened to them; they share their worries and joys. If they have had an argument, they will talk it over. People who care for one another never stop communicating. Conversation is of vital importance for a relationship.

This is not only true for people amongst each other. It is also true for the relationship between people and God. Just as it is natural for two people who love each other to talk about everything, it is natural for a Christian to speak with God every day about the things that are on his heart, to tell God about his worries and problems and about his joys, to ask God for forgiveness for his sins. Prayer is of vital importance in the life of a Christian. It is an expression of his love for God.

An expression of dependence

Finally prayer is also an expression of our dependency on God. In everything people are dependent on God, whether it is forgiveness of sins, health or a living. A person cannot acquire these things himself. God needs to give them to him. For that reason it is important to pray daily and ask God for what we need. When it comes to this, prayer is like breathing. It is as important for a person.

What should we ask God for in our prayers? God tells us in the bible. He wants us to pray for forgiveness of sins and pardon from guilt. That is very important. We do not naturally have God's pardon. He only gives pardon and forgiveness to people who ask Him for it every day.

Besides that we should also ask God to give us the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot live as God's children.

God knows we also need other things such as food, drink, clothing, a roof over our heads. We can also ask God for those things. Paul tells the Christians in Philippi:

Philippians 4:6-7 *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'*

In other words: there is nothing that we cannot ask God for. We can bring all our wishes and desires before Him because He is our Father. He knows what we need and He will give it to us. Moreover, He will make us experience his peace.

The Lord's Prayer

We can bring all our desires before God. However, that does not mean we can present God with a long list of everything we would like to have. In our prayer we should not be focussed on ourselves, but firstly on God. God's own Son taught us this with the following prayer:

Matthew 6:9-13 *'Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever.
Amen.'*

This prayer, which is often called The Lord's Prayer, contains the following parts:

- The address
- Three requests for God
- Three requests for ourselves
- An expression of praise

Jesus shows us in this prayer that we should start our prayers with God. First we should ask God if his name may be honoured, if his kingdom may come and if his will may be done. From ourselves we would perhaps pray differently. We would probably begin with our own problems or desires. However, Jesus teaches us to firstly focus on God and only later ask for things that we may need ourselves like the things we need to stay alive, forgiveness of our debt and power to resist Satan and sin. All these things are also related to God. We ask God for what we need to be able to serve Him.

In this lesson and the next we will go through the different parts of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven

Praying is not just self-reflection or talking into thin air. When someone prays he is addressing a person. Even if that person is not visible, He is there and He listens. Someone who prays speaks to God, the creator of heaven and earth. Jesus has taught us that we can relate to that powerful God confidentially. We can address Him as *'our Father'*. Through the work of Jesus, God has become our Father. We can ask Him reverently and confidently whatever we need. We can be sure that God gives us everything we ask of Him in faith. If an ordinary father gives his children what they need, then God, who is a perfect Father, will certainly do so.

We can address God as *'our Father in heaven'*. By adding *'in heaven'*, Jesus makes it clear to us that God is not just an

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ordinary Father. He is the king in heaven who has unlimited power over everything. He can give us everything we need for our bodies and for our spiritual lives. Perhaps that is not always what we think we need but it will be sufficient to do our work in God's service.

Hallowed be your name

In the first part of the Lord's Prayer we ask God if his name may be hallowed, honoured. The name of God, his reputation, is very important. We already saw that when we discussed the third commandment. Believers should honour the name of God. They should hold his reputation high. When they speak about God and all that He has done, it should be full of admiration and reverence.

We would not naturally think about honouring God's name.

That is why we need to ask God to make us do so.

With the words '*hallowed be your name*', we ask God first of all if we may know Him better and better and honour Him as the powerful, wise God who has made heaven and earth and who leads history. We also ask Him if He change us in such a way that our lives are no longer focussed on ourselves but only on his honour. We ask him to learn to live in such a way that we do not keep other people from God but rather attract them to God.

Your kingdom come

In the second part of the Lord's Prayer we ask God if his kingdom may come. This request reminds us of the war that is going on in our world: the war between God and Satan. Ever since the Fall Satan has the power over the earth. Many people obey him and do his will. Satan seems to be the king of our world.

It only seems that way. However powerful Satan seems, he has never been able to take over God's throne. It would be impossible – how could an angel defeat the God who created him? God is and will be the king of the earth. He is working on the renewal of his kingdom in all its splendour. His kingdom is increasing. Every time someone comes to faith in Him, his

kingdom has gained another citizen. God's kingdom starts off small but will be all-encompassing.

Satan still has power but it is only temporary. God's kingdom is coming. Jesus will return to earth and destroy Satan once and for all. God's reigning power will then be visible for all. All people will have to acknowledge God as king of heaven and earth.

Jesus teaches us that we should pray for the coming of God's kingdom. When we ask '*your kingdom come*', we do not only ask God to come to the earth and bring his kingdom soon, we also ask God to be our king now and to rule over us through the bible and the Holy Spirit so that we will start to behave as his citizens. We also ask God if He will cause more people to be converted and to start a life as his citizens.

Your will be done

In the third part of the prayer we ask God '*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*'. From the bible we know what God's will is. In the Ten Commandments God has made known what expects from us. In this third part of the Lord's Prayer we ask God if He will help us to live according to his law. We ask God for his will to be done on earth in the same way as the angels do his will in heaven. From the bible we know that the angels in heaven are always ready to do God's will. We ask in the Lord's Prayer if we on earth may become like them, always ready to do God's will. From ourselves we could not do it. That is why we need to ask God to change us. We need to ask God if He will help us to put our own will to one side so that we can obey Him. If that happens the earth will begin to be a little bit like heaven. We will be able to see a beginning of what it will be like when God's kingdom has come.

Questions

1. Why is prayer so important?
2. Can we ask God for anything we need? Read Philippians 4:6-7.

At the same time Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer that we should firstly be focussed on God in our prayers. Does that contradict one another? Explain.

3. In the first three parts of the Lord's Prayer we ask for things that concern God. At the same time these requests concern us. What do we ask for ourselves with the words:
 - a. Hallowed be your name;
 - b. Your kingdom come;
 - c. Your will be done?