

A Gift From Heaven

The Necessity of the Bible

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REFORMED
EVANGELISM
TASKFORCE

The Necessity of the Bible

As you will discover, this course is very much centered and based on the Bible, and that may raise any number of questions in your mind. Why is it necessary to know what the Bible says? Why develop a whole course of study on such an old book? Why not deal with something much more up to date? To answer these questions let us examine some basic issues.

Basic Issues

In the course of the centuries mankind has solved many of the earth's mysteries. And yet, the first and the most important questions remain unanswered. What is the meaning of life? What is the future of the world? Will human life survive? Does God exist? What happens after death?

These are questions that really matter. They are basic. Of course, you can try to suppress them, but you know full well that it is useless to do so. Sooner or later they will surface again. Besides, you are not the first to wrestle with them. For ages men have looked for answers to these questions and many have been given. The trouble was that the answers were always different. It is the same today. Philosophers, politicians, scientists, biologists, all have answers; however, so often their answers contradict each other. What the one proclaims as the ultimate wisdom, the next labels utter foolishness.

In short, uncertainty reigns. You get the feeling that you are living in a world full of question marks.

The Bible and These Question Marks

In light of all this, it is a good thing that you have the Bible, for the Bible gives answers. "How is that possible?", you may ask, "How can the Bible supply answers? How can that be?" It is because GOD gave the Bible to man. He presents it to you. In it He tells you about Himself, and about all kinds of things that you could never have discovered by yourself. Indeed, God makes Himself known in the Bible. In it He reveals Himself to man. That is why the Bible is called "God's revelation" or "God's unveiling".

What this means is that you can trust the answers that the Bible gives for it is ultimately God who give these answers. And that makes the Bible important for YOUR life. The more you read and study it, the more your feelings of insecurity will disappear.

In the process of doing this you will discover that the Bible is also a book full of surprises. There are things revealed in it

that you would never have imagined. Let me give you some examples.

God Created the World

On the very first page of the Bible God tells you that He created the world (*Gen. 1,2*). He is the originator, the source of all life. You are told the same thing in the book of Psalms, where God's work of creation is poetically described (*Ps. 104*). The prophets, too, tell you about the majesty of God as seen in creation (*Is. 40:12-31*). Yes, and because the Bible tells you all of these things, you know and can be sure about them. When it comes to creation, the world dabbles in theories, but the Bible deals in certainty. "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." (*Heb. 11:3*)

The World Became Evil Through Sin

Everyone admits that the world is by no means perfect. There is violence, war, hate, egotism, sickness, hunger, poverty, and so on. How come? Where did it all come from?

The Bible points out the source of all this misery. It calls evil by its proper name - SIN. When God made the world, He made it good. But man spoiled a perfect world by his sin. What is sin? Since God is your Creator, He has the right (and He exercises it too) to demand that you live the way He wants you to live. Sin then is everything that man does, says, and thinks which conflicts with the will of God. It means that man does not do what God wants him to do. Sin is nothing else than rebellion and revolution. It is revolution against God, the Creator.

The Bible says that "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (*Ps. 14*) And that describes precisely the true nature of sin. It is godlessness. It is the desire to do without God, to be your own boss. And the result? You can read about that in *Ps. 14*. As a matter of fact, you can see it every day, and even in yourself. No one is better than anyone else. Your ancestors were sinners, so are you, and so will your offspring be as well. How come? Is a baby in a cradle not a picture of innocence?

A picture, perhaps, but the reality is different. To paraphrase a certain author: if children are like angels, where have all the rotters" come from?

Here too man has his theories but only the Bible gives a clear answer. It is a difficult answer to swallow, namely that everyone is born a sinner. That means that no one, no matter how well he lives or does God's will is exempt. Every man is a sinner. One of the poets who was involved in the writing of the Psalms says of himself: "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Ps. 51:7) Thus all men are guilty, those of the past, the present and the future. You are part of one large family which possesses one large guilt! You know this because God says so in the Bible.

God Saves You From Sin

We have thus far cited one example of what you could not have found out by yourself, here is another. All through the Bible you find God's message about your sins, but at the same time you also read about His message of salvation from sin. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (*John 3:16*). In other words, God gives you His Son, JESUS CHRIST. The Bible is all about Him. It emphasizes that you are saved from your sins by Jesus Christ. He alone does it "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (*Acts 4:12*) How will man ever be restored? Will it come through genetic developments, humanitarianism, or social revolution? All of these so-called solutions lead nowhere. The Bible has the only solution. Man's salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone.

One last example.

God Guides History

The history of the world covers many centuries. In the process it seems to be a hodgepodge of nations, peoples, events and facts. It presents an almost endless succession of good and bad times. It constitutes a tiresome repetition of life and

death, of rise and fall. However, the more that you get to know the Bible, the more you will learn to see that God directs history. Behind everything is God's guidance. Everything has a place in His plan. Man can make good or bad plans, can imagine or do all sorts of evil, but God uses it to bring about His plan for this world and those who are in it. The Bible says that all through history God has concerned Himself with the redemption and salvation of the world. The Bible tells you that this polluted earth will disappear, because God promises a new world: a new heaven and a new earth. Everything that happens in this world, in your personal life, but also in international political developments, is part and parcel of God's plan. He has His hand in everything.

This Gives Security

These examples show you only a few of the important matters which the Bible deals with. You would have been ignorant of it all if God had not told you. You do not know what lies behind all that happens. The sense and the purpose of history often escapes you, and you soon reach the limits of your understanding. Hence you are enriched by the fact that God has decided to make known to you what you otherwise would never have come to know. In the Bible God gives you answers to such questions as: Who is He? What does He do for me? Who am I? Where am I going?

Creation

Genesis 1-2

It is not at all surprising that the question about the origin of this world has intrigued and puzzled man throughout history. We are confronted with it every day. You cannot help asking, "Where did we come from?"

Neither is it surprising that many different answers have been given to this question. There are, for instance, ancient myths or stories about the origin of man and animals, of water and land. These tales have been strongly influenced by local circumstances. Sometimes a high mountain plays a role while at other times the sea is a central element in the story. All of these tales were invented by man and were passed on from one generation to the next. As time went by new elements were added. Nevertheless, as man's understanding of nature and of natural phenomena grew, myths and sagas began to play less and less of a role in man's thinking. Yet the original question remains relevant: "Where did we come from?"

Today there is a very popular answer to that question. It is the theory of evolution. This theory is based on the assumption that higher, more developed organisms came from lower, simpler organisms. According to it, life evolved from dead matter and after a long period of time, perhaps billions of years, and after many mutations, man made his appearance. Chance played a major role in this entire process. This is the central idea around which all evolutionary theories revolve.

Assumptions

If you study the theory of evolution carefully, you will soon discover that it proceeds on the basis of many assumptions. To name but two: non-living things gave rise to living material; and one species gave rise to a different one (eg. protozoa to metazoa). We call them "assumptions" because they have never been

proven or duplicated in any laboratory but have taken form in the mind of man by way of deduction. Evolutionists have yet to find the missing links that will substantiate their theory.

Certainties

There are many myths, and there are just as many scientific theories, but does that mean that there is no certainty, and

that no one knows how life really began? Not at all! There is a source of knowledge that many overlook today. It is the Bible. Already on its very first pages we receive the answer to the question of origin. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (*Gen.* 1:1) God did not create some primitive matter out of which everything slowly evolved. No, He gave to each creature its essence, its form, its appearance and its mode of life. God also created the first people. He made Adam and Eve,

and placed them in the Garden of Eden. That was where they were to live and work.

If you want more details about what the Bible says about creation you should turn to *Gen. 1 and 2*. Among other things it describes the first six days of creation.

Day One: God created light. He called the light "Day", and the darkness "Night".

Day Two: God separated the waters. He called the firmament "Heaven".

Day Three: Oceans come together and the dry land appeared. He called the dry land "Earth" and the water "Sea". On the same day He created the plants and trees.

Day Four: God created the sun, moon, and stars. The luminaries are there to separate day from night. They serve as signs for seasons, days and years.

Day Five: God created the sea animals and birds.

Day Six: God created the land animals. On this last day of creation God also created man. He created him in His image and after His likeness. Man had to rule over all that God had made.

Following this description of creation, it says in *Gen. 1:31*, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

You will not find a detailed description of creation in the Bible. What you will find there is enough for you to come to know God as the Creator of all things.

What May We Know?

If you know and believe that God has created all things, you will start to see things from a new perspective. In every part of creation, you will see God Himself. When you walk through nature, you will see and experience God's might and power. The writer of *Psalms 19* did too. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." In *Psalms 147* we read: "He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes. He casts forth his ice like morsels; who can stand before his cold?"

Besides telling us that God is the Creator of the world, the Bible also tells us that He still rules and upholds it. Even in our time when so much is possible, no creature can live under its own steam. The Creator gives life and governs life.

Since God is the Creator we should be careful with creation. We should do so not because we respect life itself, but out of respect for the Maker and Giver of life. Behind creation stands the Creator. As people we so easily run the risk of seeing life and nature as totally free powers. However, the Bible warns us against this when it says, "Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand." (*Isa. 64:8*) The idea that life is independent of God is a result of evolutionary thinking. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches us to show respect for God first of all, and consequently, to show respect also for nature and life.

The Place of Man

The Bible says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (*Gen. 1:27*) Man is the crowning achievement of

God's creative work. The words "image" and "likeness" indicate this and point us in a certain direction. They do not mean that man looks like God physically or that he has a little bit of divinity in him. No, when man is called God's image, it means that God created man in such a way and with such qualities that he is able to fulfill his appointment as the living representative of God on earth. In God's way and in God's name he has to rule justly over all creation. In *Gen. 1:28* it says, "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' ". Such was man's task.

In summary, God made everything and everyone, and He made them good. Everything turned out the way He intended. All of creation praised and served Him. Adam and Eve could work fully, freely and joyfully. Nothing hampered them. Their life was a continuous feast in honour of their God and Maker, who created everything to His glory.

Prayer: Does It Help?

Prayer means asking or pleading. You are asking someone for something. Prayer is asking GOD for something. Of course you will have to believe that there is a God, that He really and truly does exist. You will also have to believe that God will listen to you and can do what you ask of Him.

What Really Is Prayer?

Many people say that prayer is nonsense. Little wonder, if you don't believe that God exists. Prayer is nonsense, too, if you believe that there is a being called God, but you refuse to believe that He concerns Himself with man.

Believing in God and believing that He listens to YOU are not things that come automatically. Often there are difficulties that come to mind. How can God understand so many prayers in so many different languages? How can He possibly keep each of them separate with its own contents, problems and questions? Why if you believe that God can hear all of these different prayers at once, you will have to believe in a God who is all-powerful and in a God who is all-knowing.

In addition to asking and pleading, prayer is also an acknowledgment that you need help. Through it you are saying that you can no longer go it alone, you are unable to stand on your own feet, that you can't look after your own interests. It means admitting that you are no longer your own boss. To pray means to recognize your dependence.

Of course, many people are unwilling to admit this, with the result that they no longer pray. Then too there are others who do not believe that God will hear, will help, or can help. They do not pray either.

Can God Help?

Let us say that a man is in trouble. Does it help if he prays? To find an answer we should turn to the Bible, for it has much to say about prayer. It speaks about supplicants whose prayers were heard and who received what they asked for. It

also speaks about those whose prayers were not answered and who, as a result, did not receive what they asked for.

Are we to conclude from this that sometimes prayer helps and sometimes it doesn't? Read what Jesus Christ says about prayer. He makes some rather remarkable statements. "Ask, and it will be given you." (*Luke 11:6-13*) Everyone who prays, receives. What you ask for, you get. Now, that seems to contradict the facts. Most of the time prayer does not seem to amount to much. You are sick and you ask for health. Does it always happen? You pray for work. Do you then get a job the next day? If you do not get an answer to your prayer, did God not hear you? What if you find a job, was that a result of your prayer?

Prayer, does it help? It appears that this question does not lend itself to a simple and ready answer. Therefore, let us investigate further to find out what the Bible says about prayer.

No Doubting

A brother of Jesus called James who was a leader of the Christian church at Jerusalem says that we must pray in faith without doubting (*James 1:5-8*). What shouldn't we doubt? In the first place we should not doubt the existence of God. "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (*Heb. 11:6*) In the second place, you should not doubt that God will hear you. God always listens, even if you consider yourself to be thoroughly bad.

In this regard you should read what Isaiah says. This prophet is speaking to the Israelites who complain that God does not hear them. They said: "God does not see us. Our way is hid from the Lord and He does not do anything about the injustices we have suffered." (*Is. 40*) Isaiah points out to them

that God's might and help are given to those who wait for Him, that is to say, to those who trust in Him.

Perseverance

The Bible also says that we should not give up too soon. We have to pray and seek God continually. Jesus compares praying with seeking and with knocking on a door (*Matt. 7:1-12*). He means continuous seeking, and continuous, persistent knocking. You are to seek till you find, knock till the door is opened. In connection with this Jesus tells a story or parable and he concludes by saying: "If a wicked, unrighteous judge finally listens, surely God, who is merciful and righteous, will listen to you."

Answers To Prayer

In the Bible you can also read about miraculous answers to prayer. To cite an example, in the time of Elijah, an Old Testament prophet, the Israelites served an idol called Baal, a god whom they thought would bring fruitfulness. Elijah's task was to bring the people back to God. So he prays for a drought to teach Israel that only God the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth can give fruitfulness. Elijah bases his prayer on God's earlier warnings (*Deut. 28:11-14; 1 Kings 8:35-40*).

And do you know what? God hears Elijah's prayer. The rains cease and drought devastates the land. As a result, the people become aware again that only the Lord is God. They choose for Him. So Elijah prays once more, only this time he prays for rain. And his prayer is heard. You can read this story in *1 Kings 17:1-18:46*. Compare it with *James 5:16-18*. In dealing with the power of prayer, James cites the example of Elijah.

Prayers Not Answered

The Bible also speaks about prayers that are not answered even though God hears them. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, writes about a prayer that is not answered. He had the tremendous experience of being in heavenly paradise. He does not know whether it happened in reality or in a vision. He heard words that he may not pass on. It is something to boast about. Yet to keep him humble he receives a "thorn in the flesh". He does not say exactly what it is. The believers in Corinth knew what that was. It may have had something to do with his eyes. Three times Paul prays to God asking Him to take "the thorn" away. It does not happen. God says to him: "My grace is sufficient for you." (*II Cor. 12:9*) That means God's love, God's mercy, God's favour has to be enough.

Moses, a leader in Old Testament time, experienced something similar. You can read about it in *Deut. 3:23-28* and in *Num. 20:7-13*. Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land, because he had disobeyed God. He thought

that was terrible. That is why he asks God to be allowed to enter. But God says: "Do not speak about this matter anymore." God heard Moses' prayer, but He does not do what Moses asks.

Sometimes God says beforehand that He will not grant a certain prayer. He even forbids it. Read *Jer. 14:7-12* and *15:1*.

Prayer in the Bible

Prayer, does it help? Maybe the question is wrong. If you pray as a means to bend God's will to your will, it will not be heard. Prayer does not help either, if you see it as something to play with or experiment with.

There are many prayers in the Bible. If you read them carefully you will notice a number of things. Let us look at *Psalms 25* as an example. In some translations it comes with a heading which reads: "Prayer for guidance and protection". This heading was inserted by the translators, but it is a good summary of the Psalm. The author prays for guidance and protection, but he does not begin with that. He begins by voicing his trust in God, to whom he "lifts up his soul" (v. 1). After that he wants to learn to know God (v. 4,5). Then he confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness in the full confidence that God will grant him this forgiveness (v. 16-18). Only after he has praised God for His faithfulness does the writer ask for help.

Apparently there is something that frightens the author far more than the hatred of his enemies. His own guilt and sinfulness oppresses him even more. That is why his prayer for forgiveness comes first. Even though he is fully convinced that God will hear his prayer, he does not consider it a matter of course. This man knows himself and his needs, do you?

We have addressed the question: "Prayer, does it help?", but other questions must also be asked and answered. "How should we pray? Why and for what should we pray? May we pray for everything? Do we receive everything we pray for? Is prayer a mere request, or is it more than that?"

In the following lessons we shall deal with these questions. Together we will search for answers from the Bible.

Questions 1

The Necessity of the Bible

1. The lesson states that the Bible is necessary. Summarize why that is so.
2. What did the writer of Ps. 119 mean by, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"?
3. God busies Himself with things that we consider unimportant. He takes care of all creation. What does Matt. 6:26-30 have to say about that?

Creation

1. Adam was appointed ruler, or viceroy, over the earth by God. How does that appear from *Gen.* 1:26-28?
2. How was man created (*Gen.* 2:7)? How was the woman later created (*Gen.* 2:18-23)?
3. What did God do on the seventh day (*Gen.* 2:2,3)? Why is that so important (*Ex.* 20:8-11)?

Prayer: Does It Help?

1. Do you have to use many words when you pray? (*cf. Matt.* 6:5-8)
2. In *Matt.* 6:9-13 Jesus teaches His followers a prayer. What is it called? Examine its structure.
3. If you really want to pray, what do you have to pray for above all?