

# A Gift From Heaven

*The Bible Is Authoritative*

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*Praying Is Easy*

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EVANGELISM  
TASKFORCE

# The Bible Is Authoritative

At one time or another, most people have leafed through a Bible. Some people have become familiar with it during their childhood years, at home, at school and in church. Others, however, have only glanced at it superficially in a hotel room or at a friend's house.

Hopefully the previous lessons have made you somewhat more familiar with the Bible. Yet questions most likely remain in your mind. What does the Bible do? What does it require from me?

The Bible wants to convince you not only to listen to its message but also believe it. Indeed, the Bible has authority. God's words, whether they are spoken or written down, are not meaningless. They should not cause you to react with stubborn resistance, but instead, you should accept God's Word for what it is. Then the Bible will be a powerful influence upon you, and it will deeply impress you.

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## One Cannot Get Away From It

God approaches you with His authoritative Word in the same way as Jesus did. Luke's gospel gives a good illustration of this (*Luke 24:13-35*). On Easter Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, two men were travelling the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they walked, they discussed Jesus' death-sentence, His crucifixion, His burial, and the incredible news of Jesus' resurrection that morning. This message had deeply shaken them. They had been followers of Jesus themselves, but they did not fully understand why He had to die. They were even more baffled by the news that He was now raised from the dead. They simply could not believe it. Then to their surprise, Jesus, the living Jesus, joined them on their walk. Yet they did not recognize Him. At this point Jesus joined in their conversation. He wanted to convince them of his resurrection by presenting and explaining the Old Testament to them. "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." (*Luke 24:27*)

Jesus also convinces the eleven apostles of his resurrection with the Scriptures (*Luke 24:44,45*). He opens their minds so that they can understand the Scriptures. Such is His authority!

Later, after Jesus' ascension, the apostles start to work with this Word, too. All they need to do is preach this authoritative Word to the people by quoting the Old Testament: "Thus says the Lord", "as it is written". Note especially what the book of Acts reveals. During the feast of Pentecost Peter addresses a huge crowd in Jerusalem. Using quotes from the prophecies of Joel and the Psalms, the Holy Spirit used Peter to convert 3000 people (*Acts 2:14-36, 41*). When Paul is in the synagogue in Thessalonica he also quotes Scripture passages, explaining and proving to his listeners that Christ had to die and rise again from the dead (*Acts 17:1,4*). He showed them which Old Testament books already prophesied Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. The result was that "some of them were persuaded" (*Acts 17:4*). Paul preaches similarly in the metropolis of Rome. From morning to evening he tried to bring them to Jesus using the law of Moses and the prophets (*Acts 28:23*).

God's Word still convinces people today. Many surrender to it because there is just no other way!

## **This Word Touches You**

The Bible also says great things about itself. This Word does not simply utter sounds or bring noncommittal messages. On the contrary, God's Word is a power, a conquering truth and, as Paul emphasizes in *Rom. 1:16*, "... it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith."

Therefore, you should not have a low opinion of the Bible, since its authority is immeasurable and limitless. Whoever views the Bible with respect will keep himself from blaspheming it or treating it carelessly.

The Word of God is living and active. Since it is sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates deep enough to divide soul and spirit or joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. The Word of God can touch you very deeply. It can not only convince, but it can sweep you off your feet and conquer you. But, on the other hand, if you resist and scorn it, that same Word can become a curse and judgment to you.

Once you become convinced, you will find yourself becoming more and more involved with the Bible. This is a miraculous truth. Your understanding of the

Bible's true value will grow and so will your appreciation of its impressive truth. Repeatedly you will discover how powerful and truthful the Bible is. Whatever God says comes true. The Bible cites many examples of this. One obvious example is that the Lord promised the Israelites they would inherit Canaan after a period of oppression in Egypt. He kept His promise!

God promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Although this seemed very unrealistic at the time, God nevertheless fulfilled this Word. Abraham was promised a son when he was very old. Again God remained true to His Word and a whole nation was born from Isaac.

Yes, God's Word is like the rain. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return thither but water the earth... so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and prosper the thing for which I sent it." (*Is. 55:10,11*) God Himself repeats this in the last Bible book where John has a vision: "...for these words are trustworthy and true." (*Rev. 21:5*)

God says this so that today we might be convinced of the truth of the Bible, and acknowledge that "Your Word, O Lord, is eternal and it stands firm in the heavens." (*Ps. 119:89*) In summary then, some allow God's Word to convince them, whereas others simply refuse and continue to live in darkness.

# Judgment and Salvation

## *Genesis 6-9*

After the fall into sin the unity of mankind ended. Two groups of people started living in two separate worlds. The first group worshipped God, whereas the second group placed man in the centre. On the one hand, there was Seth's world, apparently dull and lifeless, and on the other hand, there was Lamech's world, seemingly full of excitement.

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### Choosing is Necessary

At first glance, life around Lamech's tents seems exciting, much more exciting than Seth's uneventful existence. Of course, both of them make music and dance, and both of them have joy and pleasure, yet, everything in Lamech's world looks more appealing. In his world you are the centre of attention, whereas in the other world it is God who directs everybody's life.

Despite appearances, however, it is Seth and his descendants who are better off. They do not have to fear punishment for their sin since they live at peace with God and can look forward to eternal life. Surely it is a privilege to be at peace with the Creator. It is very beautiful and comforting when parents may tell their children about the God who will free them from sin and its consequences such as disease, loneliness, war and tribulation. Suddenly, Lamech's exciting and enticing world becomes empty and meaningless. They do not have any purpose in life; they live in the present only.

Still, the curiosity of Seth's children is aroused and they want to explore the culture of Lamech's godless world. Life in the fast lane appeals to them and gradually they start to mingle with Lamech's nation. They even marry his daughters. The Bible is very brief about this development, however, it is also very negative about it. "Why? How come?" you may ask. "By seeking to establish a relationship with an unbeliever, a believer is not necessarily going to deny his faith. Why can't you combine worshipping God and serving yourself?"

Does God's Word reveal something about this matter? Read *1 John 2:15-17*. "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in Him."

Sin is at the root of every man's heart. Since the fall everyone is inclined to be hostile to God and to love himself. Unbelieving people give themselves over to selfish, evil lusts and they start defining the law for themselves. Believers, on the other hand, must put up a stiff fight in order to overcome their egotism. Yet God's mercy and strength is given new to all believers every morning, and He will help them choose for Him. Unfortunately, some of Seth's children gave up their daily fight against sin. They traded their eternal treasures for what appeared to be a more exciting and free lifestyle.

As we said in the previous lesson, everyone is left with only two choices, life with God or life without God. That is, you either serve God or yourself. When Jesus was on the earth He made it very clear that there was no middle ground. Jesus says in *Matt. 6:24* that:

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon (money)."

Jesus did not intend to say that one cannot possess or earn money. Rather He taught that money should not become an end in itself. On the contrary, money, and all other possessions such as music, food, and clothing should be viewed as God's gifts and, therefore, should

be used in His service. Also in these things, you either serve God or yourself. No one is neutral.

## God's Answer

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." (*Gen. 6:5,6*)

Satan was already hard at work using every available means to pull people away from God. The distinction between believers, the seed of the woman, and the unbelievers, the seed of the serpent, was becoming blurred. The believers had to a great extent amalgamated with the unbelievers. They had given up the fight against Satan and were now collaborating with him.

Satan's battle against God, which was already raging in those times, has remained of timely importance. Also today Satan rejoices in those people whose only concern in life seems to be how to make more money or how to get more leisure time. Satan loves it when laws concerning authority and morality are made more flexible. In this way, his final aim, to set people up against God, is accomplished.

If Satan is busy lowering mankind's moral standards, then it would only seem logical that God would be fighting to raise them. But is He? Our world is plagued with street violence, civil disobedience, intolerance, and illegal strikes. Why doesn't God do anything? The first thing that must be understood is that God is not responsible for these problems. They are a consequence of man's departure from God, not God's apathy. Rather than inquiring about God's actions, we should be looking at our own failure.

## Disaster and Deliverance

Noah, one of Seth's descendants, had to struggle with similar questions. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. He was the only one who walked with God, with the result that God was filled with both sadness and anger.

"And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'" (*Gen 6:13*)

Yes, God decided to destroy the world. He would do it through a terrible flood, but He would save Noah and his family. How? Noah was told to build an ark for himself. Undoubtedly, he must have become the laughing stock of the town. Who builds a huge barge on dry land? Yet, he obeyed and built the ark. Meanwhile, every hammer blow sounded judgment upon all those who lived under the motto: "Let us eat, drink and be merry ....."

At first the mockery seemed justified. For many years the ark was under construction. Then suddenly, one day, God opened the floodgates of heaven. The rain poured down and the springs in the ground were opened. Rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights. Even the highest mountaintops were covered. This natural catastrophe wiped out every living creature on the face of the earth. Only Noah, his family, and the animals they took on board survived.

We are not able to comprehend the full extent of this disaster. Yet, it should fill us with terror because it signaled God's judgment over creation. At the same time we should be thankful too, that God did not terminate human history. He allowed it to continue through Noah and his family in order that the Christ could come and redeem all believers from damnation. The Creator literally cleaned house and swept all evil from the face of the earth. A new age dawned, the age of His Son, Jesus.

## Trust Him

Still, even Noah did not deserve to be saved. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He placed God in the centre of his life and responded to His love. He walked with God daily. This involved trust and obedience. Likewise, all those who trust and obey God today will experience His love and salvation. There is a sure and glorious future in store for all His obedient children!

# Praying is Easy

At first praying may seem difficult. Praying can only be done properly when you know what God wants you to pray. You must know His will, His power and His promises. Also, praying must above all show thankfulness. God has revealed Himself in the Bible, but we find it difficult to get to know Him. We are often groping for words when we want to pray. And yet, praying is easy.

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## You May Say "Father"

Praying is easy because God Himself makes it so. Through Jesus Christ God not only wants to be our Father, but he has miraculously become our Father again.

Nevertheless, not all human beings can call God "Father" since only some are "children of one Father". It is true that we all are descendants of Adam our earthly father. But through Adam's fall into sin we have all said "farewell" to God, our heavenly Father. Consequently, we were unable to pray to Him.

Yet God promised to send His Son, Jesus. God kept his promise and Jesus came giving "to those who believed in His name... the right to become children of God." (*John 1:12*)

After His resurrection, the Saviour said to the believers, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God." (*John 20:17*) Thus it is Jesus who allows the believers to address God as "Father". He even urges them to do so by teaching them the Lord's Prayer which starts with, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." (*Matt. 6:9*)

Please meditate on this word "Father". Isn't it incredible that as His child you can go to your Father when you are sad and in need of help. God is never far away. On the contrary, He is very near and always ready to help. You can read about this in the Gospel of Luke. (*Luke 11:11-13; 15:11-32*)

## Father is King

When Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray, He instructs them to address God as "Our Father". He also adds the phrase "Who art in heaven". This gives the impression that God is distant and unapproachable. However, this is not the case.

Rather these words are meant to remind us that our heavenly Father is far greater than all earthly fathers. In an ancient church document, the Heidelberg Catechism, the question is asked: "Why is there added: 'who art in heaven'?" And the answer is: "These words teach us not to think of God's majesty in an earthly manner, and to expect from His almighty power all things we need for body and soul." Thus we owe God our love, trust and awe. We should literally look up to our Father who is in the heavens, and who is King over all creation. We are mere servants of an almighty King.

Consequently, our praying must be done in a respectful manner, characterized by an attitude of childlike trust and fearlessness. Yet we must always realize that we are addressing a King and a Father. Whether you pray with your eyes closed or open, whether you stand, sit, or kneel, whether you fold your hands or lift them up, it must be done with reverence.

However, this does not mean you cannot address God any other way. You may also say, "Faithful heavenly Father...". In the New Testament Book of Acts you will find several examples of how to address God properly. Even if your prayer is just a single cry, it ought to reflect this childlike trust and reverence.

## Childlike Simplicity

Praying would be extremely difficult for most people if it had to be an exercise in skillful oratory. Fortunately we do not pray to show off our piety or vocabulary. Praying involves honouring, loving and, above all, trusting God. The fact that God is Our Father makes us feel secure, therefore we do not need to use many words. When our prayer does become showy, both God and those around us will be turned off by it.

Jesus deals with this in the gospel of Matthew. Let us listen attentively to it, not to judge others, but in order to improve our own prayer life.

"But when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. When you pray, go into your room, close the door and prayer to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (*Matt. 6:5,6*)

Naturally this does not mean you may never pray when other people are present. Your attitude towards God

and your relationship with Him is what is important. He knows the secrets of your heart. You may call on Him all night long, but remember that verbosity is senseless. Do not insist upon your own way but plead with God and persist in childlike reverence and trust.

In the Old Testament book of Kings you can find an example of coercive praying for selfish reasons. There the Baal priests were trying to force their god to do what they wanted by praying frantically, shouting and slashing themselves with swords. How Elijah mocked them! (*1 Kings 18:16-40*)

It is true that God wants to listen to us and give us what we ask of Him, but at the same time we cannot force God to fulfill our desires. Our Father knows our needs. He listens to His children, and He will always keep His promise that "I AM WHO I AM" (*Ex. 3:14*) He will always remain the same.

Therefore praying is easy. Praying means that you can count on God and trust Him wholeheartedly. His Word is sure. If you pray you will be delivered and will face a bright future, for God is faithful.

# Questions Lesson 4

## The Bible Is Authoritative

Please read *Acts 17:1 -4*.

1. How did the attitudes of the people in Thessalonica differ? (Compare v. 4 with v. 5-8)
2. How do the Bereans react? (v. 11,12)
3. Why don't the Thessalonians and the Bereans have the same reaction?

## Judgment and Salvation

1. Which natural phenomenon reminds us of God's promise to never flood the earth again? Read *Gen. 9:8-17*.
2. Why was Noah spared from God's judgment? (*Heb. 11:7*)
3. Read *2 Peter 3*. Peter speaks about a second judgment there. Try to describe what will happen in this future event.

## Praying Is Easy

Please read *Psalms 130*. This prayer consists of 4 parts.

1. Summarize verses 1 and 2.
2. What is the poet's topic in verses 3 and 4?
3. What does he say about himself in verses 5 and 6?
4. What does he say about Israel?