

WORKGROUP



BACK TO THE BIBLE

Translation Dutch letter no 27, Kampen 15th March 2005

Dear brothers, sisters, pastors and elders,

In our last letter, no 25 from November 2002, we shared with you that the workgroup would not send out any more publications. We had decided to minimise the work, answer questions, to send out earlier articles and to be present if necessary to consider false teachings in some situations or in general. And that is what we have been doing. A number of people have made use of it. With joy we can tell you the health of Rien van de Kraats has improved in such a way that he can resume his task in the workgroup. Also his wife, Dik van the Kraats is doing much better. We are thankful to God for this improvement and are putting our trust in Him for the future. So we started to consider a restart of the work. We prayed sincerely about this, talked about it with other Christians, and decided to start again. The publications will not have exactly the same character as those we did the last seven years. The subjects will be more related to “present-day” deviations from the Bible in the Netherlands and Belgium. To make our meaning clear we wrote the following publication: “The blood of Jesus”. In this article we want to study again the impact of Good Friday and Easter. Sometimes we evangelical Christians are so much taken up by our church-activities, we nearly loose sight of the essence of our faith. Another threat is loosing our interest in the dogmas of the Bible and being swept of our feet by spiritual experiences. But we can’t live with the one without the other. Teaching without experience is dead, but experience without teaching means we are floating. Experience based on teaching, teaching we find in the Bible, is the soundest way of living. Biblical teaching forms the pillars of our experiences.

THE BLOOD OF JEZUS.

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Introduction.

In theology several expressions have settled in, but they have lost meaning, because of much using. These expressions have been worn out. One example is: the blood of Jesus. So easily we use the term, without realising the essence of what we are saying. When we need protection against the evil one, we ask to be covered with the blood of Jesus. If we feel weak, we like to sing: There is power in the blood of Jesus. When we have sinned, we ask God to cleanse us by the blood of Jesus. Because the expression is used so often, it is useful to spend time to study this subject. While studying we will come against some misunderstandings. We will study them also.

First we draw attention to this fact: In the Bible the blood of Christ is interchangeable with the cross of Christ. Both refer to the death of Christ and speak about being saved. See: Rev.1:5 “ *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,...* ” and Gal.6:14: “ *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,...* ” We have taken the liberty to write the last part of this article as a story, so as to make this intensive subject more accessible. The stories, except for a few details, correspond to the four gospel stories.

Literal meaning.

God created man with a blood circulation. Every minute about five litres of blood is pumped round by the heart. There are different kinds of blood, not everybody has the same blood group. But as far as it concerns our subject, it is possible to say that every person has the same blood. The blood of president Bush, queen Beatrix, your blood and mine, it is all the same. If somebody is of noble birth, we in Holland say that his /her blood is blue. But that blood also has the common red colour. When the Son of God came to earth and became human, He got human blood via his mother Mary. So the blood of Jesus was literally the same as yours and mine. But as time went by, by means of legends and extra biblical teaching, the literal meaning has been extended.

Miracle working meaning.

3.1 The blood of Jesus is supposed to have more value than normal blood. Certainly we will not speak with disdain about the blood of Jesus. He is our saviour, the Son of God and He deserves our deepest respect. We hope that respect will show right through this article. Is nevertheless the blood of Jesus different from the blood of normal people? Many in the past have thought so. After all, Jesus was the Holy One, the Perfect One, the Sinless One, and the Son of God. Would his blood not contain something special?

3.2 A few ages after the Church originated, Christians started to collect remains of holy persons. They brought these in the church, where they were admired and venerated as relics. Especially objects, that had been in touch with Jesus, during his death on the cross, were very valuable. Divers Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches keep pieces of wood and nails, that they take to have been part of the cross. The origin of these relics is dubious and finds its roots mostly in legends. We mention two well-known legends.

3.3 The cloth of Veronica. During the crossway of Jesus, a believing woman pushed her way through the people and reached Jesus. She gave Him a cloth to wipe away the blood on his face, caused by the thorny crown. Afterwards, at home, she unfolded the cloth and discovered the face of Jesus printed on the cloth. As soon as she met Mary, she gave her the cloth. It is said, that via the apostles, the cloth was brought into the Vatican.

3.4 The holy shroud of Turin. After Jesus was taken from the cross, his body was wrapped in a sheet and laid down in the grave. When, after the resurrection, Mary found the sheet, she saw the whole body of Jesus printed on the sheet. There were even traces of blood, caused by the wounds in his side and by the nails in his hands and his feet. This cloth too is owned by

the Vatican and is kept as a relic in the Cathedral of Turin. Throughout the ages, believing and unbelieving scientists have been interested in the shroud. In 1988 the Vatican allowed them to examine the cloth with the so-called C14 method. They came to the conclusion that the fabric had been woven in the fourteenth century. This corresponded to the fact, that the shroud and its legend appeared in about 1340 in France. Also the scientists showed that the blood traces held traces of red ochre paint.

3.5 Conclusion. The cloth and the image on the sheet must be considered false. Except the legends, no material has been found that attributes special magical powers to the blood of Jesus. The New Testament contains the authentic story of Jesus' death, but no magical powers are mentioned. Luke was a well-known medical doctor, but nothing in his Gospel, nor in the Acts is written down. The writers Matthew, Marc, John, Peter, James and Jude, who witnessed the crucifixion, do not tell anything about the miracle working power of the blood of Jesus. So we may conclude that this power did not exist. They have their roots in the world of imagination.

Blood in the Old Testament.

In Genesis we find the story of Abel, murdered by Cain. God seems to be shocked, when He asks: *"The Lord said, What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."* Gen. 4:10. Ages after that, immediately after the Flood, God renews His assignment to Noah: to rule over the earth. God also gives a warning for special sins. Both sins are connected with blood. *"But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it."* Gen. 9:4. Already in the times of the Old Testament blood was seen as the bearer of life. It demanded respect, even awe. Moses made use of this rule, when the Law was written. About the blood of man, God says in the same section *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."* Gen. 9:6. We may draw the conclusion, that God highly estimates the life of the people on earth. Many murderers, both in the past as well as in the present time, will be judged severely. But Jesus can forgive even the sin of murder. A clear example is the murderer on the cross next to Jesus. Murder means in fact: a person who destroys the created image of God. It seems contradictory, that God thought it necessary that a human being should die, in order to save humanity. *"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."* Heb.9:22.

For forgiveness of sins blood had to flow.

5.1 The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is pointing here to the inauguration of the tabernacle in the desert. *"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life"* Lev.17:11 All parts had to be cleansed first by sprinkling with the blood of the burned offerings. God had given this assignment to Moses on Mount Sinai. This act was a picture of the future cleansing of sin by the blood of Gods Son. In the Old Testament there was only one way to receive forgiveness of sin. One had to bring a burned offering to the priest. After the guilty person had laid his hands on the animal, the priest slaughtered it and then the blood was brought to the altar. Once every year, on the Day of Atonement, a burned offering was brought for the sin of the whole people of Israel. The blood then was taken by the High Priest to the Holy of Holiest. There, behind the big curtain, the Vail, he sprinkled the blood, on the lid, the Mercy Seat of the Arc. Till and during Jesus' life on earth this ritual took place. When in 70 A D , the Temple was destructed, in all possibility this ritual disappeared also.

5.2 This is, in a bird' s eye view the history of forgiveness of sin, the sin Israel committed against God. For the other inhabitants of the earth there was no way to get rid of their sin. These inhabitants, the heathen people, as the Jews called them, had their idols. To pacify these idols, they made offerings of fruit, animals and even baby's. But these rituals did not bring forgiveness from God, the creator of heaven and earth.(see also Romans. 1;18-32,

New Vision about forgiveness of sins.

6.1 The coming of Jesus brought about a substantial difference in the theology of forgiveness of sins. Jesus started to teach that in fact the blood of an animal was not able to work out forgiveness of sin. The Old Testament mostly speaks about offering of animals for sin. But there are indications, a change was about to come. In psalm 40:6 David says : *“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.”* In Psalm 51:16 is written: *“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.”* The prophet Hosea writes in 6:6: *“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

6.2 Isaiah prophecies about the coming of the Servant. He only needs fifteen verses to proclaim the Gospel in every aspect. *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He who was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* Isaiah 53:5-7 . He does not speak about animals that have to be slaughtered, to take away the sins. He speaks about the Servant, who will be brought to death for the transgressions of the people.

6.3 Jesus always emphasised the fact that the Scriptures testified about Him and He agreed with these texts. Not the death of animals, only the death of a perfectly sinless man could bring about reconciliation. This train of thought was very revolutionary. Especially, when He said that only His own death was sufficient. When the Jewish listeners heard this, their reaction was: *“He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”* John 10:17-21. Now John the Baptist, who had to prepare the way for Jesus, had already announced in public this new teaching. When he saw Jesus coming to the Jordan, he did not say; Here comes the long awaited Messiah. No, John said: *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* John 1:29. The Jews knew the expression: the Lamb of God. It meant an offer lamb. Did the people understand, what Jesus meant? Probably not. No reaction is given in the Bible. But it was clearly said and John wrote it down in his gospel.

Change of victim.

7.1 To change the blood of an animal for the blood of a human was for the Jews an insurmountable obstacle. People were used to the offering of an animal, but a person dying for the sin of humanity, that was inhuman indeed. Had it been left to us to prepare a plan for salvation, certainly we would have not brought in the death of a human being. But it happened in Gods plan.

7.2 The necessity of offering the blood of the God-man for the sin of man, certainly is a mystery. And so the biggest part of the people does not believe it. Even part of the Christians cannot and will not believe this. They belong to the liberal part of Christianity. Though most of them believe that Jesus has been alive. He was special, a wonderful example, that we must try to follow. But the theology about his blood they reject. Some of them even do not believe his Divinity. In their eyes He was a special person, no more than that. It is important to know how Jesus brought this message to his hearers. It had to be clear, because the story of his death, his resurrection, and his ascension would be passed on by those left behind.

The explanation of Jesus.

8.1 John is the only evangelist who described at great length the necessity of Jesus' death for the saving of humanity. John 6:22-69. The crowd asked for a sign. But Jesus told them they did not want a sign, but free bread. It was the day after of feeding the five thousand. Jesus said: *“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the*

Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” 27. The bystanders started a discussion and said : “Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” 31. Jesus answered and said, that this happened in the time of Moses. But now the Father gives the true bread from Heaven, the bread of God, that gives life to the world. They wanted that bread, but Jesus said: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.” 35. Now the Jews started to grumble. Jesus, the son of Joseph, what conceit! How dare he say: “For I have come down from heaven” 38. Jesus keeps to his standpoint, even keeps repeating his statement. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” 52-56.

8.2 In the last part of his sentence Jesus makes the difficult comparison between the eating of bread and the eating of his flesh. To start with: Jesus uses the words bread and flesh metaphorically. He does not mean the eating of his body, that would be cannibalism! The same metaphors are used for the Last Supper. The Jews got confused and once again started a discussion. Many of his hearers thought these words of Jesus too difficult and did not to listen any more. “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” 66. Jesus looks at his disciples and asks if they want to go too. But no one is leaving. Peter puts the question: “Lord, to whom shall we go?” 68.

8.3 Matthew explains in 16:13-24 that Peter, despite his declaration, did not really understand the necessity of Jesus' death. After Peter's confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus tells Peter, he is a blessed man and He will build his church on this revelation. But when Jesus starts to predict his suffering and death, Peter takes Him aside and starts to criticise his Master! “Never, Lord!...This shall never happen to you! Jesus turned and said to Peter, Get behind me satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man.” 22 and 23.

8.4 Jesus does not find a listening ear, nor a sympathising heart with his disciples when He speaks about his imminent death. It is quite different, when He speaks about the Kingdom of Heaven. Then they start to argue with one another about who would be the most important person. Then Jesus repeats very patiently: “Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” Matth. 20: 26-28. In conclusion: on earth, Jesus did not find much understanding for the teaching that suffering is necessary to wipe away the sins of the world. But He got a special encouragement from Heaven.

The transfiguration on the mountain.

9.1 Peter was first praised by Jesus, then called satan! About eight days after this happened, Jesus takes the disciples Peter, James and John up to a mountain to pray. Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-32. While praying, his face starts to shine like the sun and his clothes become as white as the light. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appear in glorious splendour and speak with Him. About what do the three men speak? About only one important subject. In Luke it says: “Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.” 31.

9.2 What happens here, is a succession of miracles. Jesus changes into a shining person and two men, who lived hundreds of years ago, are standing there as living persons. These men have resounding names and belong to the most well known persons of Jewish history. Elijah, the prophet, who worked many miracles. Also the prophet, who resisted strongly the idolatry of the baals in his time. Malachi mentions him as the prophet who will come to prepare the

coming of the Messiah. Mal.4:5-6. Many Jews are still waiting for his coming. That is why, when Seder is celebrated, they put an empty chair at the table and pour out an extra glass of wine. The Seder evening is celebrated at the beginning of Pesach, the Jewish "Easter" and during that evening the Easter lam is eaten in remembrance of the exodus out of Egypt.

9.3 Now we go back to the miracles during the transfiguration on the mountain. There they stand: Jesus the Messiah, Elijah the long awaited prophet and Moses who brought Israel out of Egypt. They speak together about the departure of Jesus that He was about to bring to fulfilment in Jerusalem. It is no coincidence, that God choose Moses for this conversation with Jesus. Moses was the great leader from the past, the one who instituted the complete ceremony of sacrifice for Israel. God had showed him the example on mount Sinai. God gave him the assignment to sacrifice animals for the sin of the people. The Jews have practised this kind of sacrifice for ages till the coming of Jesus. This Jesus now reveals, that no longer the blood of animals, but only the blood of a man, his own blood, can take away sin. It is a pity no more details are known about this discussion on the Mount between Jesus, Elijah and Moses. But it is clear, they spoke about the coming death of Jesus on the cross. Respectful Luke uses the word departure.

9.4 Apparently, the conversation took some time. The disciples fell asleep. But luckily Jesus woke them up in time, so they could witness the departure of Moses and Elijah. This miracle was the last one during the transfiguration on the mountain. A cloud enveloped them and then the voice of God the Father was heard: *"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."* Luke 9:35 In Matthew it says: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* 17:6. The voice of his Father, that Jesus knew so well, must have given Him great comfort. After speaking with Moses and Elijah about his coming suffering and death, these words must have been balm for his soul.

Was the death of Jesus really necessary?

10.1 Many people, among them may theologians, have given this matter much attention. As, when Jesus walked the earth, hardly anyone believed this, so many contemporary theologians find it difficult to accept. The source of this problem is found in the character of God. If God is love, how can He demand the death of his own Son? 1John. 4-8. God is love, that suits us better than: God punishes sin. Most people do not mind sin very much. They suppose, God is of the same mind. He is love and will surely turn a blind eye to their sins. Of course, that does not count for bad sins, like murder, rape, etc. For these matters we make use of the administration of justice and the criminals are punished by human judges. There is nothing wrong with this, if and when honest jurisdiction takes place. Still in this way we are passing by the standards of God, the deeper results of sin.

10.2 Why did God not turn a blind eye to the sin of Adam and Eve? Was in not just the first time they made a mistake? Weren't they innocent and didn't they have such a good relationship with God? Every night God came to them and walked with them in the cool garden, the garden of Eden, the beautiful paradise. Why ruin all that happiness, after only one offence? Why not let it go, just for once? Of course, He had warned them. *"But God did say, You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."* Gen. 3:3. Still, from a human standpoint, it seems very strict. Considering the punishment, the words God is love, sound like a paradox.

Let us for a moment go out of the garden of Eden, to another garden, to the place called Gethsemane.

10.3 After eating the last supper with his disciples, Jesus withdraws Himself into the garden of Gethsemane. Here He goes through probably the most difficult hours of his life on earth. Sweat falls like drops of blood from his face, because He is very anguished. Luke 22-44. He struggles in prayer and calls out to his Father. Matthew 22:36-46. *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* 39. But still He can't find rest for his soul. He goes back and prays: *"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."* 42b. But sorrow and fear

still torment his soul. He goes back to the place of prayer and calls out the same words for the third time. Then, when He is back with his disciples, He knows the answer of God. He says: *“Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”* 45b. After that, Jesus is taken prisoner. Peter tries to prevent that with his sword and Jesus says to Him: *“Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”* John 18:11.

10.4. Which cup is Jesus talking about? It is not a normal beaker, He has just been drinking, when He used supper with his disciples. In the Bible metaphors are often used, when a spiritual principle is meant. The drinking of the cup is an often used expression in biblical times. In many cases the situation was an unfavourable one. In the Old Testament we find expressions like: *“the goblet of my wrath”* Isaiah 51:22 *“the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria”* Ezech. 23:33.

In the New Testament, cups mentioned in Revelation, are well-known: *“the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath”* Rev. 14:10 *“She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.”* Rev. 17:4. The reaction of our Lord Jesus reveals to us, that the cup He had to drink was a dismal, a wretched one. The contents of the cup were excruciating and so terrible, that He asked his Father urgently could He let it pass.

10.5 Many Christians think that the contents of the cup had to do with the suffering on the cross, that Jesus had to undergo. They suppose He was worried about it. But this assumption is not a very logical one. It does not correspond with the words and attitude of Jesus, that He used with his disciples and also against his enemies. Up till now He has never shown fear and He warned his disciples, they also would be persecuted and killed. And now, when it comes to the crunch, would He be so afraid of the imprisonment, the whipping, the judging and at last the death on the cross itself? We are human beings and inclined to shrink back from these things. They very difficult to undergo, but we must be careful, that because of our emotional feelings, we do not assess rightly the factual situation.

10.6 Much emphasis has been given to the suffering of Jesus. Is that the right approach? We tread softly here, because we will not lessen the impact of the suffering of Christ. The death on the cross was a terrible one, often used by the Romans. Many criminals died in this way. Later also many Christians died on the cross.

10.7 In church history much attention is going to the suffering of Jesus. In the Middle Ages the Passions were well known. In these plays the story of the suffering was dramatised. Later on composers did the same in their oratoria with beautiful music. In 1725 Johan Sebastian Bach composed the Johannes Passion (German) and in 1729 his Mattheus Passion (German) reached the public. In these marvellous pieces of music much attention is given to the suffering of Jesus. In the period before Easter many choirs and soloists are singing this music. Hollywood star Mel Gibson directed the production of a film called: The Passion of the Christ. During three hours the suffering of Christ is acted out on the white screen.

10.8 Still, the suffering of Christ is not the essence of the gospel, the essence is the death of Christ. We have to be careful. We must not be led astray by the terrible things that are happening and foster the wrong kind of pity. In the well known chapter 53, Isaiah prophesies nearly everything that would happen to Jesus. *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lam to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.....Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hands. After the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him*

a portion among the great; and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” In this prophesy we often read the word suffering. The death of the servant is mentioned several times, as well as the reason why He had to die.

10.9 *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him....The Lord makes his life a guilt offering.”* In this prophecy it is made very clear, the servant had to die because of the transgressions, because of the iniquities of the readers of the prophecy. Isaiah uses the personal pronoun us to emphasise this. In other places in the Old Testament, and also in the New Testament the word sin is used instead of iniquities or transgressions. Joseph wants to separate from Mary, to whom he is engaged. But in a dream he meets an angel who stops him doing so. The angel says: *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* Matthew 1:21 As we wrote before, John the Baptist declared when he saw Jesus coming: *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* John 1:29 You and we are part of a world that is lost in sin. On the cross these sins were laid upon Jesus. He carried our lies, our thefts, our love for power, our self will, laziness, egoism, hypocriticism, our being sneaky, our love for gossip, our jealousy. For some He carried murder, for many even genocide, violence, abuse of women. Everything we know to be terrible sins, was laid on Him. And everything we do not know, that has happened between God and men, fell on Him. If anyone dares to claim that the sins of the people do not amount to much, he commits the worst sin.

10.10 Now we come to a very important point in this article about the blood of Jesus. The question is: Was the death of Jesus necessary? The liberal branch of the Christians gives no for an answer. The reason for his death is found in his fanatic attitude when confronting the Jews. The conventional branch (and we belong to these people) says : yes, it was absolutely necessary, that Jesus died. The choice we make, hinges on sin. If a person is not convinced of the problem of sin in humanity and the sinful nature of man, he/she will not think it necessary that Jesus died. As we wrote before, the liberals think the love of God surmounts everything. God does not ask for a sin offering, certainly not by means of the death of his Son. But on the contrary God Himself thinks it necessary, that a guiltless man has to die for the sin of men .What is written in the Bible about it, points that way, which is very special. God the father choose his own Son, to take upon Him this task. All initiative to save humanity from sin, actually comes from the side of God. From the sin in the garden till the coming of Jesus on the earth, only few persons were seriously bothered about their sins. Psalm 51. The offer rituals of the Jews were just an exception amongst the people who lived on earth. In this article we will not enlarge on "why" somebody had to die for the sins. Neither on the fact it had to be his Son. Neither why God's claims in paradise were of such a high standard. Many books have been written about these subjects, many well known theologians have debated about them. We will go back to the garden of Gethsemane and consider the cup that Jesus had to drink.

10.11 Why was this so terribly difficult? As we have seen before, probably not because of the physical suffering that was waiting for Him. Could it be the burden of sin that was laid upon Him, was He realising the heaviness of it? A certain number of theologians shares this opinion and so do we. Because this is what God was going to do. At a certain moment God would lay the sins of all humanity on one person, his own Son Jesus Christ. *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”* Colossians 2:13,14. This struggle in prayer was in Gethsemane probably heralding the period that He had to carry the full burden of sin. Jesus took the cup out of the hand of his Father and drank the horrible contents. This He did all on his own. During the period of darkness, that lasted for three hours, Jesus cried from the cross: *“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”*

Matthew 27:46. Jesus experienced that even his father had turned away from Him. Jesus had become a curse and was laden with sins, even your and our sins. God could do nothing else but averting his head.

What happened after the death of Jesus.

11.1 At the end of the period of darkness Jesus died and He said: *"It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."* John 19:30. And God the Father took the curtain in the temple and tore it in two, from top to bottom. For ages this curtain had been the separation between Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple. Behind the curtain stood the Arc, with the Atonement Cover and the Cherubs. For the Jews this was the place, where God lived between the people on earth. The Atonement Cover and the two Cherubs were considered to be the throne of God on the earth. *"The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake."* Ps.99:1. It was absolutely forbidden to see anything at all of the Most Holy Place. To enter this place was unthinkable. Only on the Day of Atonement the High Priest was allowed to enter this place. He then had a dish with blood and sprinkled that on the Atonement Cover to make atonement. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two by God the Father. By doing so He made clear that the access to his throne was now no longer forbidden. *"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."* Hebrews 10:20-23

11.2 To the unbelieving, hostile Jews the crucifixion of Christ must have caused great relief. But that relief did not last long, because now they were confronted with a new problem: the torn curtain in the temple! The same council that sentenced Jesus to death, now had to decide what should happen to the torn curtain. The curtain could not be left in this state, no doubt about that. In the Law of Moses was written: *"Place the arc of the Testimony in it and shield the arc with the curtain. Then he brought the arc into the tabernacle and hung the shielding curtain and shielded the arc of the Testimony, as the Lord commanded him."* Exodus 40:3 and 21. And they had to answer the next question: Who had done this? To tear a curtain ten meters wide and five meters high, from top to bottom, certainly was no little thing! Surely a few ladders had been necessary to build a scaffolding. A man could not have done it on his own. Could these men have passed the guards, without them noticing? Had they trespassed and entered the Holy Place? Plenty reasons to be troubled and problems to discuss. God the Father was having his say in the matter, but that did not dawn on them. Neither did they know yet there were more surprises waiting for them.

11.3 Then they remembered the words of Jesus: After three days I will rise again. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees made the tomb very secure, by putting a seal on the tomb. And Pilate gave them a special Roman guard, to secure even more safety. No more troubles now. But God the Father caused a violent earthquake and Jesus arose from the death. The guards just stood there and watched what happened. They could do nothing to prevent it. They became like dead men. Some of them fled to the City and told the Chief Priests their story. It was early in the morning. Even now the priests did not understand who was acting here. It was God the Father. The story, told by the soldiers, was an eyewitness report, it was not made up! These experienced men knew their lives were at stake. Their report about what happened at the grave, had to be watertight. If not, they would have failed and they would lose their lives. The man of the Sanhedrin knew that too. This report spread amongst the people, a terrifying thought. That should never happen! There was only one way to prevent this: give them money, much money, to make them tell a pack of lies. They themselves promised to speak to Pilate and make an arrangement. In this way the Jewish leaders let go another chance to make things right with God and to recognise the hand of God in the person Jesus Christ. They took on themselves even more guilt. Because of these lies many Jews

were and are restrained from believing the truth about the tomb and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now we leave the Jewish Council and their problems and will give our attention to the "believing" disciples. What did they believe after the death of their Master?

The unbelief and the belief of the disciples.

12.1 The members of the Jewish Council were up early on this first day of the week, so were a few followers of Jesus. It was still dark, when Mary Magdalene and two other women arrived at the tomb. The stone was rolled back from the tomb, she could see that. She became very frightened and ran back to tell the disciples Peter and John. *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"* John 20:1,2. Mary Magdalene probably thought of the hostile Jews, had they committed this sin, stolen the body? Peter and John ran to the garden, where Jesus had been laid. Yes, Mary was right. The tomb was open and the body of Jesus was gone. Only the strips of linen and the burial cloth for his head were there. Full of doubts and suspicion the disciples came outside. *"They still did not understand from the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."* John 20:9. In the mean time Mary Magdalene arrived at the grave. She wept, overwhelmed with sadness. Now on top of everything, it seemed clear they had stolen the body. Suddenly there is a voice behind her back. *"Woman, he said, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."* John 20:15. Something wonderful happens. It dawns on her, she knows that voice. Up till now she has not looked Him in the face, being so busy crying. She turn around and looks in the well known and beloved face of her Master. She cries out: Rabboni, that means Teacher. Spontaneously she tries to touch Him, but Jesus says: *"Do not hold on to me,....., go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."* John 20:17. For the second time that early morning Mary Magdalene runs through the streets of Jerusalem. No more frustration, no more tears, now she is a woman with a message. Softly, because she is afraid to be heard, she repeats the words she has to tell the disciples: I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Yes, that she had to say. She herself had heard Him say those words.

12.2 The reaction of the disciples was very negative: *"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."* Luke 24:11. To be quite certain Peter went to the garden a second time, but found nothing but an empty grave and the strips of linen. There was nobody in the garden and he wondered whatever had happened. Had Mary Magdalene made it all up? But she was so sure about the fact she had seen the Lord. They had even spoken together. And who then had taken the body of Jesus? One thing was certain, the tomb was empty, he had been there twice. When he came back to the other disciples he had nothing to tell. In the mean time they had locked the doors, because they feared the Jewish leaders. John 20:19

Then suddenly, it is evening already, Jesus stands in their midst and says: peace be with you! He shows his hands and his side. Then at last the truth dawns on them. The story told by Mary Magdalene was true. The Lord Jesus lives, they recognise the scars. Those scars bring back terrible memories of what happened on Golgotha. But the wounds in his hands and his side are healed. Jesus is standing there, He is sound and healthy. They were overwhelmed with joy, with one exception: Thomas, who came too late.

12.3 The disciples told him the Master had just visited them, but Thomas looked at them with pity and unbelief in his eyes. Impossible! When a person has lain for three days in a tomb, he cannot arise and be seen. Especially not somebody who has been crucified. Such a one has been badly knocked about, nobody can survive such a treatment. The disciples try to convince Thomas, but to no avail: *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."* John 20:25. The unbelief of Thomas is remarkable, because twice he had seen a person being resurrected from the dead. Once Jesus stopped a funeral procession outside the city of Nain and told the dead person to get up from the litter. The dead man sat up and began to talk and everybody

was filled with awe and joy. Luke 7:11-16. The second time the end of Jesus' stay on earth was getting near. Jesus got the message his friend Lazarus was seriously ill. When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has died already and his body has been in the tomb for four days. But Jesus makes the people to open up the grave and He calls his friend to come outside. And Lazarus rose from the dead. This fact became known everywhere. It meant Jesus could not move about freely any more. The hostile Jews had no idea what to do about it. At both resurrections, in Nain and in Bethany, the disciples, Thomas included, were present. But even so, he could not believe Jesus Himself could raise from the dead. But Jesus takes action to help him. Eight days later, the disciples and also Thomas were in the same house in Jerusalem. The doors were locked, just like before. Suddenly Jesus stands in their midst. He specially came to see Thomas: *"Peace be with you! Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here: see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God! Then Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* John 20:26-29 From that time on we use the term unbelieving Thomas for someone who either cannot or will not believe. Now we must not think too "badly" of Thomas, for since that night he really believed. His faith did not waver again and he proclaimed the gospel to lands in the Far East, like Persia. There are some indications, he even visited India. While he was serving as a missionary, he died the death of a martyr.

12.4 Many stories about the resurrection of Jesus were told, many others not written down. Jesus appears, then He disappears. He moves through open doors and then tides over the distance between Jerusalem and Galilee without any problem. His disciples had to do that by foot. Is Jesus playing a game? He shows Himself to one person, then to two or more. He is even seen by five hundred people simultaneously. This is not a game, Jesus had to fulfil a very important task before going to his Father. In the beginning of the Acts Luke writes: *"In my former book Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he shows himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."* Acts 1:1-3. Very patiently, step by step, Jesus explains everything to his followers. For forty days He taught his disciples. Partly this was repeating former truths, because Jesus already had taught them a lot. Now He explains the things that happened after He had fulfilled his mission on earth. Some uneasiness must have crept in into the hearts of the disciples. Imagine: you are partaking in a seminar, the teacher does not enter by the door, but through the wall. Moreover, you know He can disappear at any moment, without using the stairs. It is difficult to imagine, but it happened. The Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified, died and rose again, instructed his disciples for forty days. And Jesus did not speak about one thing only, but about everything concerning the Kingdom of God, as it says in Luke. With the two who were on their way to Emmaus, He spoke about the necessity of his suffering: *"He said to them, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."* Luke 24:25-27. We could become jealous of the two who were on their way to Emmaus. Jesus taught them in person and did so text for text from the Old Testament. Jesus, now in his new body, his resurrection body, again draws attention to the necessity of his death for sin. So our mind is fixed again on the subject of our article.

The triumph of the resurrection of Jesus.

13.1 Listening to the Johannes-Passion and the Mattheus-Passion, we notice the end of both is in minor. The music, the solo's and the hymn singing by the choirs are compelling, but Bach ends with the body in the grave. In the last hymn of the Mattheus-Passion they sing: *"Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder und rufen dir im Grabe zu: Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh!"* The last hymn of the Mattheus-Passion is more positive: *"Christe, du Lamm Gottes, Der du tragst die sünde der Welt, Gib uns dein 'n Frieden. Amen"*. This Hymn also is preceded by the choir: *"Ruht, ihr heiligen Gebeine, die Ich nun weiter nicht beweine. Ruht wohl und bringt auch mich*

zu Ruh!” In these marvellous pieces of music nothing is said about the resurrection, that is regrettable! The same happens in the movie of Mel Gibson, the Passion of the Christ. When we watch it or listen to it, we are left with the impression that after the death of Jesus the only thing left is sadness and this is the end of the life of Jesus. But there has been another composer, who has been putting the life of Jesus on music, George Frideric Handel. In his oratorium, the Messiah (English), he uses bible texts nearly all the time. The Hallelujah choir is one of the best known hymns. It is one of the most triumphant pieces of music ever composed. First the words of Isaiah 53 are set to music and then the Hallelujah Choir is sung. We could end this article now, listening to the Hallelujah choir. We will not do so, but keep it in mind and use it as background music to the end of our story in Matthew 28:1-3.

13.2 It is quiet in the garden of Arimathea. From time to time one of the Roman soldiers, who had to secure the grave, makes a remark. The men have lighted a fire to keep warm and the flames lighten up their faces. It is an easy job, this order given them by Pilate. Who on earth now will get the idea to steal the body of this miracle worker? Certainly not those cowards of disciples. They fled even before their master was taken a prisoner. No, they had to be careful not to fall asleep. They would be severely punished, were they controlled. Suddenly they are roughly disturbed in their daydreaming. The silence is broken by a loud rumbling. The earth starts to tremble. An earthquake, shouts one of the soldiers, while the tremors get increasingly stronger. And that terrible blinding light, where does that come from? Their eyes are used to the faint light of the fire, but this is completely different. When they take for a moment their hands from their eyes, they see the source of the blinding light. It is a figure (a person?) he walks and sends out blazes of light. His clothes are dazzlingly white, like newly fallen snow. An angel, they call out, in their bewilderment. They are in shock, barely able to see what the angel is doing. He goes to the tomb and rolls back the stone. You can't do that, one of them calls out, the stone is sealed! But he does not dare to intervene. And then the lightning angel has the cheek to sit down on top of the stone. In the tomb is a sound of rustling, like somebody putting on clothes. That is too much, they cannot bear it any longer. They run off to the city, to tell the priests everything that has happened. In the meantime the greatest, most marvellous miracle in the world history takes place in the tomb. God the Father has given his Son a new body. The Son takes off his strips of linen, puts on new clothes and steps outside. He is still Jesus of Nazareth. His voice is the same voice and the wounds of the crucifixion are still visible. They are completely healed, only the scars are visible. We put up the sound of the Hallelujah choir by Handel, but these sounds are shut out by the sound of a much bigger choir.

13.3 When Jesus' birth was announced in Bethlehem, there was a choir of angels present. Outside the little city, in the fields of Efrata, the shepherds were surprised by an angel, who brought good news of great joy. To put more emphasis on this happening, God sent a great choir of angels, that sang for the shepherds. *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."* Luke 2: 13-14. In the garden of Arimathea an angel was present, but no big choir Had it been left to us, perhaps we would have arranged it differently. But, as the prophet Isaiah said, God has his own ways. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."* Isaiah 55:8. Instead of sending a great choir to the earth, God prepared choir singing in heaven. When invited to climb up to heaven, John receives the contents of the book Revelation and then testifies to everything he sees. He is very impressed by what he sees, but none the less writes it down. God the Father sits on a magnificent throne and his Son stands next to Him. Jesus no longer stands in the garden or somewhere else on earth, but He is ascended to heaven. There in the presence of God the Father He is received with great honour. He stands there, not in the form of a person, but of a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, in the midst of the angels, the elders and the four living creatures. And all present fall down before Him and they sing a new song: *"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open the seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."*

Revelations 5:9-10. This is the biggest choir ever in the whole universe. It numbers thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. Written down in numbers, this gives: 1000x1000 and 10000x10000. It is not possible to figure out, nor to imagine how many choir members that makes. No wonder this choir did not come to earth, when Jesus was resurrected. It certainly did not fit in the garden of Arimathea. And we, who live two thousand years later, have to content ourselves with the Hallelujah choir by Handel. When we too are allowed to climb up to heaven, we will see Jesus Christ looking like a Lamb that has been slain. He, who has been slain of his own free will and has bought us free from our sin, will welcome us. Then, in the big choir, there will also be a place for us ,who are believers.

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