

QUIET TIME

Theme: The fall into sin

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understood.

Day 1^{BS} Genesis 3:1-24
The fall into sin

Day 2 Genesis 4:1-12
The wages of sin is death

Day 3 Isaiah 59:1-2
Sin brings separation between man and God (cf. Psalm 66:18)

Day 4 Galatians 5:17-21
Sin causes struggle

Day 5 Romans 1:18-32
God already judges deliberate transgressors before they die

Day 6 Romans 2:1-16
After death comes God's final judgment day

Day 7 John 3:18-21 and 36
Without Jesus Christ man remains condemned and lost

Day 8 Romans 3:9-20
All people need salvation

Day 9 Psalm 32:1-11
If you refuse to confess your sins

Day 10 Romans 6:13-19
No longer offer the parts of your body to sin

- Think about Psalm 66:18. Sins which you hide or conceal are the cause that God does not hear your prayers.
- Pray every day for a clean heart.
- Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

STUDY

Theme: The problem of suffering

Read study 3 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

BIBLE STUDY

Theme: The fall into sin

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Genesis 3:1-24**

MEMORISATION

1. Motivation

Bible verses which you memorise will help you give God's answers to man's questions (Matthew 19:36; Luke 10:25-26).

2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

THE FALL INTO SIN

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23 (NIV)

3. Review

Review the first three memorised verses once every day.

4. Memorisation of the Bible books

The second half of the 12 historical books: 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

3. The problem of suffering

In the *first book* of the Bible we read about *the creation of the heavens and the earth*. After God had completed the creation, everything he had made was very good (Genesis 1:31)! The first people knew God personally and lived as bearers of his image in his presence.

In the *last book* of the Bible we read about (the *restoration* unto) the new heaven and new earth. Why is it necessary that a new heaven and new earth come? What has happened to God's original creation? If we look around us today everything has changed: there is injustice, hatred, terrorism, wars, selfishness and the lack of love everywhere.

How did this happen? The Bible reveals to us that there had been a fall into sin. This fall into sin affected all people and the whole creation! The fall seriously damaged and corrupted God's creation. That is why the whole creation suffers, especially people.

What does the Bible say about suffering? The Bible points to five different reasons: People suffer because:

- they are godless
- they are unrighteous and do wrong things
- they believe in lies
- they know that they will die
- they know that they stand under God's judgment

A. Suffering because of godlessness

What is godlessness?

A person is godless when he does not believe in the existence of God or when he does not reckon with the God who revealed himself in the Bible.

Godlessness means living as an atheist – a person who is his own god and does what is good in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Godlessness is to believe in a god made by human hands or devised by the human mind. Godlessness is also to believe in evil spirits or demonic powers. In short: *godlessness is the wrong or broken relationship with the God who revealed himself in the Bible.*

1. Why do people make idols or deny the existence of God?

Read Romans 1:18-23. People make or devise their own gods or deny the existence of God, because they want to determine their own life. Their own made gods allow them to live as they want to live and approve their behaviour, whatever it may be. Their gods never require them to change!

But people who honour and serve the true and living God cannot remain the same or continue to live as they like. The God of the Bible requires that they be transformed into people he intended them to become! That is why many people avoid the God of the Bible: they don't want to change (John 3:19-21)!

2. What are the consequences of godlessness?

Living without God affects the mind, heart and relationships of a person.

Godlessness brings the wrath of God to people

(Romans 1:18). Because man has turned his back on God he suffers under God's general judgements.

Godlessness causes ideas and plans to end in futility

(Romans 1:21b-22). Without God's truth and wisdom people live in a world of lies and deceit. They deceive one another so that they suffer themselves and cause others to suffer!

Godlessness causes immorality (Romans 1:23-24). Many

people cannot find in themselves the power to do what they would like to do. When man exchanges the glory of God for man-made gods, God gives him over to sexual immorality. So man suffers and causes others to suffer!

In short, people suffer because they deny the existence of the true and living God or because they exchange the living God for their dead idols.

B. Suffering because of wickedness

What is wickedness?

Read Romans 1:24-32. People devise all kinds of methods to do evil, draw other people into their evil life-style and even approve of those who practise evil. Verse 28-32 describes what wickedness in God's eyes is: sexual immorality and perversity, greed and envy, gossiping and slandering, arrogance, inventors of evil and disobedience of children to parents. It is no wonder that people who do these things to one another suffer! In short: *wickedness is the wrong or broken relationship with other people.*

Why do people do wickedness? And what are the consequences?

People do wickedness and are wicked because they do not want to serve other people, but instead serve their own sinful appetites. By nature people want to be independent and self-sufficient. They are selfish!

The relationship that people have with God determines the relationship they have with other people! When people exchange the true and living God for false gods or themselves, then God gives them over to their own shameful lusts, to their own (depraved) mind and to every kind of wickedness (Romans 1:26-28)! *Then God allows people to become what they themselves want to be!* Then God finally gives them over to their own evil behaviour and life-style. Then people suffer the consequences of their own evil desires (Galatians 6:7). Because they want to be godless, they are also wicked and taste what a life without God in reality is! Then people rush downwards on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

In short: people suffer because they themselves do evil, stimulate others to do evil and even approve of the evil in the world (Romans 1:32). So people harm one another and suffer.

C. Suffering because of lies

What is truth?

Read Romans 1:18 and 25.

People suppress the truth by their wickedness and exchange the truth for lies. First, 'the truth' is Jesus Christ (John 14:6). When man suppresses Jesus Christ or exchange Jesus Christ for another, it becomes a lie and he suffers. Secondly, 'the truth' is what the God of the Bible says and does (John 17:17), inclusive what he reveals about himself. *Read* what God says in the Bible to his people (and thus also to Christians) in Isaiah 43:1-4 and in Jeremiah 29:11.

The truth concerning 'feeling secure' is that a person who has submitted himself to God knows that God loves him unconditionally and accepts him completely.

The truth concerning 'being significant' is that he knows that what God asks him to be and do is important and meaningful.

When man changes or twists God's Word in the Bible, it becomes a lie and he suffers.

Why do people deny, suppress or exchange the truth? And what are the consequences?

People, who do not acknowledge the truth, also do not want to hear the truth and certainly do not want to live according to the truth. They develop false religious convictions, twisted moral values and all kinds of problems.

When they do not know or acknowledge the truth concerning security, or exchange it for a lie, they become insecure, lonely and anxious or develop a low self-esteem. And when they do not know or acknowledge the truth concerning significance, or exchange it for a lie, they lose their sense of the meaning of life and lack the will to live.

Thus, 'to suppress or exchange the truth (in the Bible) is a wrong or broken relationship with yourself.

In short: people without the true and living God are also people without the truth which God reveals! They do not know the truth about God and also do not know the truth about themselves. They do not really know who they are, where they come from, how they must live or where they are going! They suffer because they feel insecure and worthless are. They suffer because they cannot see the meaning of life and because they have given themselves over to a destructive life-style.

What is sin?

Due to the fall of man into sin he has by nature a wrong relationship to the God who has revealed himself in the Bible, an imperfect relationship to other people and a

wrongly developed relationship to themselves. Every natural man is godless, does wickedness and believes in lies. The Bible calls these three wrong relationships 'SIN'.

The cause (the root) of sin is a broken relationship with the true and living God. Sin is being independent from God and self-sufficient. Sin is missing God's goal for your life. Sin is falling short of God's perfect standard. Sin is transgressing God's moral laws. Sin is rebelling against God. Sin is twisting God's Word (the Bible).

The consequence (the fruit) of sin *is doing what God forbids and not doing what God commands.*

The definition of 'sin' is always in relationship to the God of the Bible!

Thus, the real reason why there is so much suffering and death in the world is SIN.

D. Suffering because of death

Read Romans 6:23a. Most people in the world fear 'death'. They do not even want to think or talk about it! Many people experience 'death' as the worst suffering in this world. They continually live in the fear of dying (Hebrews 2:15).

'Death' brings separation. Death separates you from your body (Ecclesiastes 12:7), from all your possessions and accomplishments in this world for which you have worked so hard (1 Timothy 6:7), from your family and friends (Luke 16:27-28) and from having a part in anything that happens on earth (Ecclesiastes 9:6). Death is a terror for those who remain behind. They must miss the departed person.

People who have no personal relationship to the true and living God do not know what awaits them after death. That is why death is their greatest enemy and fear. People suffer because they know that one day they will die!

What is the meaning of death?

The Bible says: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).

The word 'death' has three different meanings in the Bible:

Spiritual death.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Every human being consists of a body and a spirit (or soul). 'Spiritual death' means that the spirit of man is 'dead'. It is the condition in which the spirit of man is separated from God and from the life of God. His spirit only comes to life when the Spirit of God comes to live in him. Then he is able to personally know the true and living God!

Physical death.

Read Psalm 49:10-12; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6,10. 'Physical death' means that the body of man is 'dead'. It is the condition in which the body of man is separated from his spirit and also from life on the earth. When a man dies he leaves everything behind. And his body returns to the dust of the earth.

Eternal death.

Read Matthew 10:28; 25:46a; Luke 16:22-26; Revelation 20:14-15. 'Eternal death' means that man (in his body and his spirit) is forever separated from the presence and nearness of the true and living God. Man was originally created to live for God (Colossians 1:16). But when a man lives for himself right to the end and does not restore his relationship to God, thus continuing to miss God's purpose for his life, then the final judgment will reveal that this condition will not change. For such a man there is no place in heaven or on the new earth. He will be sent to a place that is shut out from the presence and care of God (hell) (2 Thessalonians 1:8b-9).

E. Suffering because of God's judgement

What is God's judgment?

The godlessness and wickedness of man brings God's wrath against him (Romans 1:18). God's 'wrath' is God's holy displeasure with sin and his righteous indignation against man's godlessness and wickedness. God's present judgments are his punishments for sin and his warnings for man to repent. Through his present judgments God intends to bring man back to himself and to his way of righteousness.

When a child is wicked, his father becomes angry. He punishes the child in order to bring the child back to its senses. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Likewise God does not accept that the evil condition in this world continues unabated. Therefore God condemns the godlessness and wickedness of man in different ways.

1. God's built-in judgments in his creation

Read Galatians 6:7-8a. Why does allow certain kinds of judgements on earth in the present time? God allows people to suffer for their own sins. God has built in laws or principles into his creation and man. "A man reaps what he sows". For example: whoever sows laziness will reap poverty. Whoever sows hatred will reap broken relationships. Whoever sows sexual immorality will reap venereal disease. People often suffer as a natural consequence of their own sins. Thus, whoever sows sins will reap God's judgment.

2. God's executed judgments in history

Read Ezekiel 14:21; Amos 4:6-12; Haggai 1:3-11. God reigns over the world and thus also over every event in history and every power in nature. When people disobey God or break their relationship with God, God withdraws his care and protection from them and brings punishment to them. In this way God uses wars, epidemics, earthquakes, floods, draughts and famine to show people his displeasure with their sins and at the same time warn them to repent (i.e. to change their mind and make a right about turn) (Acts 3:19; cf. Revelation 9:20-21).

The reason why God judges and punishes in the present time is that he is protecting people from his eternal judgment and punishment! The purpose of God's specific judgments is to motivate people to break with their godlessness and wickedness and instead begin to live holy and righteous lives for God (Hebrews 12:4-11). In this way people may escape the final and eternal condemnation to hell!

3. God's future final judgment. Why?

Read Hebrews 9:27. Life on earth is manifestly unjust (Read Psalm 73:2-20). The good people suffer, generous people are exploited, friendly people are terrorised and poor people are robbed. The opposite also happens! If we believe that God is good and almighty, then how can he allow such injustice in the world?

It is because God is good and almighty that he is going to restore righteousness in the universe! He will do this when he brings all people that have ever lived into the final judgment. God will punish the unbelief, unrighteousness and neglect in all its forms with the eternal fire of hell (Revelation 21:8). People suffer because they suspect that once they will be judged in the final judgment. In the last judgment God will announce publicly to all people that have ever lived why they are receiving eternal punishment or eternal life (Matthew 25:46).

The relationship between sin and suffering

Every human being is a part of a particular whole: he is part of a family, part of a society, part of a country and part of humanity. Therefore he suffers due to at least one of the following reasons:

- his own sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23a; Numbers 12:1-10)
- the sin of another person (2 Samuel 24:15-17; Romans 5:12)
- the sin of a nation (1 Samuel 5:1-6)
- the sin of the whole of humanity (Genesis 6:5-7);
- the attacks of Satan (Matthew 12:22; Luke 13:16);
- the good purpose or plan of God (John 9:1-3).

In short, human suffering is due to the spiritual degeneration of humanity, of which every man is a part.