

What makes this series so valuable is that each Bible event leads the reader or the group to discover the deepest truths of the Bible for themselves. This is done through insightful multiple choice questions which draw the readers to enter into the story and find for themselves its meanings and implications which they then can apply to their own lives.

The series is best “taught” by persons who encourage the group to do most of the talking and thinking. The teacher best acts as a leader in which the group discovers its way through the Scriptural events. The teacher may help the group when he or she believes that valuable truths have been overlooked, but the first discoverers should be members of the group itself. This stirs tremendous interest on the part of the group. This also relieves the teacher of the responsibility, under older systems of teaching, to carefully master all the truths of the text and present them in a way that would hopefully interest and “teach” the group.

Almost all teachers report that their classes or groups show much more interest than before and that teaching this series is much easier than it was under the older systems of teaching.

Individuals who use these lessons for their own personal study find this investigative method interesting and meaningful. The reader is invited to sense the drama of each story in his or her own Bible and be led to discern the spiritual truths that are packed into each story.



Belief that Opens the **DOORS OF HEAVEN**

From the “Bible Events” Series

NATIONAL BIBLE READING CAMPAIGN



“Every Community on Earth Deserves a New Testament Church”



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National Bible Reading Campaign

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Belief

That Opens the Doors of Heaven

Every religion, Christian or otherwise, emphasizes the need for belief. Even atheists, denying the existence of God, may speak of the need of belief though they may speak of belief in one's self, belief in a certain cause or belief in the power of belief itself. In summary, "belief" is an honored word in our world and common to all people.

The question then arises: Is all belief good? Is all belief the same? In today's world of violence, there are many who believe that the highest purpose in life is to destroy nations and people who do not believe as they do. This is belief that leads to death.

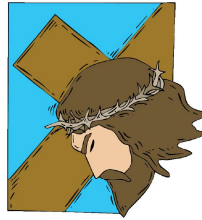
In this same world of violence, there are men and women who dedicate their lives for the sake of those who are their enemies. The great difference between the assassins and the martyrs is their beliefs.

In the world we might call "Christian," there are many different and conflicting beliefs, even about the matter of how to please God and how gain entrance to heaven. If there is any belief we should be sure about, it is the belief that will either open or shut to us the doors of heaven. This is not basically a question of what church we go to but where our eternal confidence is placed. The following six Bible events should help each student to be sure about his or her faith.

First Bible Event

JESUS FULFILLS THE PROPHECIES

Mark 15:1-20



Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah spoke of Jesus' trial, leading to his crucifixion. Isaiah said, **"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 53:7) Mark tells us that this is exactly what happened the day Christ was crucified. Isaiah explained why it happened: "All we 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." (Isaiah 53:6) Let Mark describe the scene.

Read Mark 15:1-5

1. Opinions: What do you think amazed Pilate the most about Jesus?

- That he would admit to being the king of the Jews, something that would prejudice Pilate against him.
- That he refused to answer any of the many charges his enemies had made.
- That he seemed so willing to suffer condemnation and a terrible death.
- That he did not denounce or curse his enemies or plead for his life.

Read Mark 15:6-11

2. Opinions: Why do you think it occurred to Pilate to offer a choice of freedom to Barabbas or to Jesus?

- All knew that Barabbas was a evil man, but Jesus was an innocent doer of many wonderful deeds.
- Pilate thought such an offer would lead the Jews to be fair and just, freeing Jesus but condemning Barabbas.
- Pilate was trying to get himself off the hook, not having to condemn an innocent and holy man to a terrible death.
- Pilate was playing with the Jewish priests who were pressuring him, trying to make them look bad in the eyes of the people.
- Pilate feared being in any way responsible for the death of such a holy man as Jesus.

3. Opinions: What is the saddest aspect of this whole event?

- To see the irrational hatred and rejection of Jesus by the very people he had come to save.
- To witness the cowardice of the Roman ruler, who knew Jesus was innocent.
- To see Barabbas turned loose to continue his criminal deeds instead of freeing Jesus to continue to bless and heal the people.
- To imagine the flogging of Jesus and the pain and sorrow he felt because of the rejection of his people.

Read Mark 15:16-20

4. Opinions: Best explain the great cruelty of the Roman soldiers.

- They probably hated the Jews, and took out their hate on Jesus.
- Their own sinful lives led them to hate the one whose life showed compassion and love.
- They were simply carrying out their orders.
- The crucifixion relieved their boredom.
- They lived in an era of cruelty and were simply a part of it.
- As men of war, they were hardened to the pain and suffering of others.

5. Opinions: Why do think there was such a murderous hatred of Jesus by those who took him to the cross?

- Jesus had been a great sinner, harming the people and the nation.
- Jesus' holiness and love showed up the shallowness of the religious leaders.
- It was either a matter of submitting to him as Lord or doing whatever was necessary to get rid of him.
- There is something in the human heart that resists surrendering to the rule of Christ.

6. Personal Testimony: Mark the answer the best describes your relationship with Jesus Christ.

- My life is my own. I wish Jesus did not even exist.
- I used to be far from him, but feel more and more drawn to him.
- I am tired of my life apart from Christ, and want him to be my Lord and Savior.
- I know and love Christ, and want to share him with others.
- Other: _____



Second Bible Event

RESOLVING DOUBTS ABOUT JESUS*John 20:24-31*

For some, saving faith in Jesus comes easily. This is often true for children whose trustfulness and humility help them spiritually. Perhaps this is why Jesus said we must become like little children if we would enter the Kingdom of God. Others are held back by doubts or fears that must somehow be overcome. This has always been true, and it was true of Jesus' own followers. We jokingly speak of a "doubting Thomas," but many of us are or have been like him. However, Thomas was not a lost cause nor is amidst, saying "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Then he showed them his wounded hands and side and they rejoiced greatly when they fully realized that it was really him, victorious over death. But one of the eleven, Thomas, was not there.

Read John 20:24-25

1. Why do you suppose Thomas was absent when Jesus came to the other Apostles?

- Jesus' death had deeply depressed him and he just wanted to be alone.
- He seemed to be a loner.
- It just happened that way.
- His absence was God's plan, so we might learn how Jesus deals with doubters.

2. Opinions: What led Thomas to say he would only believe if he personally saw and felt the wounds of Jesus?

- He thought the others had imagined everything.
- He had a sour personality and didn't believe good news when he heard it.
- He was so disappointed in Christ's death that he could not believe the good news of his resurrection.
- He was a person who had to see things for himself.

Read John 20:26-28

3. How did Jesus deal with Thomas a week later?

- He spoke first of all to Thomas, inviting him to feel his wounds.
- He told Thomas that he was condemned for doubting.
- He urged Thomas not to doubt, but to believe.
- He showed compassion for Thomas in spite of his doubts.

4. How did Thomas respond to Jesus, on seeing him?

- He carefully examined Jesus' wounds.
- He continued to doubt Jesus.
- He accepted Jesus as his Lord and as his God.

Read John 20:29-31

5. Opinions: What did Jesus mean when he said "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed?"

- Faith in him as living Lord is the source of salvation, the greatest blessing.
- Few would see him in the flesh as did Thomas, but many would believe.
- Jesus spoke of the multitudes who would believe because of the written testimony about Jesus.
- Jesus was emphasizing the supreme importance of faith in him.

6. Why did John say he wrote this book, the "Gospel of John?"

- John felt compelled to tell about the many miracles he saw that persuaded him that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- He hoped the book would be a "best seller" and entertain its readers.
- He wrote that his readers might, by his testimony, have faith in Christ and have eternal life through Christ's power.

7. What has most helped you in your faith in Christ?

- To seriously study the written testimony of the Apostles in the Bible, and to "see" Jesus through these experiences.
- To see how Christ has miraculously changed the lives of others whom I know.
- To sense the inspiring work of Christ's Holy Spirit in my own heart.
- My response to great Christian music.
- To feel the reality of Christ in messages I have heard preached.
- To realize how many of my life experiences have pointed me to Christ.
- Other: _____

Third Bible Event

THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND BIRTH*John 3:1-19*

To be very religious can be an admirable thing. However, there is a real difference between being religious and having salvation. The question is if one has been born just one time or two. The mystery of two births was revealed in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, an admirable leader of the Jewish faith in the days of Jesus.

Read John 3:1-3

1. What seems most remarkable to you about the beginning of this event?

- To see the sincere admiration of Jesus by a Pharisee leader, whose companions feared and hated Jesus.
- To recognize how Jesus' wonder-works inspired curiosity about him.
- To see how Jesus went straight to the matter of a second birth.
- To realize that the only way to enter God's Kingdom is through a second birth.
- To imagine the religious leader's surprise that his religion was not enough to enter God's kingdom.

Read John 3:4-7

2. What seemed to give Nicodemus the most trouble in understanding Jesus?

- He could only think how ridiculous it would be to be born twice from the body of one's mother.
- He could not imagine such a thing as a spiritual birth.
- He thought he was too old for all of this.

3. What do you understand about Jesus' teaching about the second birth?

- That one must be born physically (of water, a Jewish expression referring to the breaking of the water of the womb) and also of God's Spirit.
- That flesh gives birth only to flesh, spiritual birth must come from the Spirit.
- That spiritual birth like physical birth is a one-time beginning of a new life.
- That spiritual birth is as important to one's spiritual existence as physical birth is to one's physical existence.
- That Jesus was talking about something far greater than religious practice.

Read John 3:8-15

4. What do you think Jesus was saying when he spoke of the wind?

- The wind is real. You can feel it although you cannot see it.
- Wind is beyond our control. We do not know where it comes from or to where it will go.
- Wind is powerful, touching all the earth. So, also, is God's Spirit.

5. When the rebellious people of Israel were stricken by a plague of poisonous snakes, God commanded Moses to raise a bronze serpent upon a pole and all who looked at it with faith would be saved from death. What did that experience have to do with Nicodemus or with us?

- Like the bronze serpent, Jesus would be raised on the wooden pole of the cross.
- Our spiritual birth and salvation depends on our personal faith in Christ even as the Jews' physical salvation depended on their looking at the serpent.
- There is no clear connection between us and what happened to the rebellious Jews.
- Like those Jews, we have been rebellious and need God's way to be saved.
- Everyone who believes in Christ for forgiveness and salvation will have eternal life.

Read John 3:16-19

6. Mark the statements you understand to be true:

- Jesus is the only Son of God, and he is God's love gift to us.
- Jesus death on the cross was only a drama. It did not cost God nor His Son anything.
- God gives eternal life to everybody.
- Jesus came to condemn all sinners.
- Eternal life is given only to those who personally believe in Christ as Lord and Savior.
- To believe in Christ is simply to believe what the Bible says about him.
- To believe in Christ is to turn from darkness, from our evil ways, and let Jesus have control of our lives.

7. Personal Evaluations (Read aloud your answers only if you wish to.)

- I realize that I am a sinner and deserve God's condemnation.
- I thank God for sending His Son to suffer for my sins.
- I now trust only in Christ for my forgiveness and new birth, wanting to live for him.
- I believe I am good enough, religious enough, not to need a spiritual birth through faith in Christ and surrender to him.
- Other: _____



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Fourth Bible Event

STARTING LIFE OVER

Luke 19:1-10



Jesus spoke plainly about the need for a second birth, a transforming spiritual birth, resulting from faith in him. But what is this like? What examples do we have of such a birth? There are many examples in the New Testament, one of the most dramatic being of a self-made man, a rebel, a man disliked by almost everyone in his city. Zacchaeus is our teacher.

Read Luke 19:1-4

1. What can we reasonably believe about Zacchaeus from this brief description?

- We can know very little about him from just 4 verses.
- As a tax collector, he had "sold out" to the Roman conquerors of his people, and was therefore disliked by almost everybody.
- He was good at what he did, becoming a wealthy chief tax collector.
- He obviously lived for money, for which he had sacrificed his good name.
- The crowd felt no obligation to let him, as a small man, move forward to where he could see Jesus.
- He had a great curiosity to see Jesus, even willing to climb a tree in his fancy clothes.
- Hecklers might have made fun of him up in the tree, but he was accustomed to hearing unkind comments.
- He was a man of determination and astute, finding a way to see Jesus.

Read Luke 19:5-7

2. What do you think surprised Zacchaeus the most about Jesus?

- Jesus stopped, looked up in the tree and called Zacchaeus by name.
- Jesus told Zacchaeus that of all the houses in town, it was necessary for him to stay at his home.
- Jesus gladly suffered the reproach of the crowd in expressing his friendship toward Zacchaeus and his confidence in him.

3. Opinions: What do you think led Jesus to reach out to Zacchaeus?

- Jesus was always careful not to upset the people or their leaders.
- Jesus always had the courage to go against popular opinion whenever he felt that people were wrong in their values.
- Jesus' greatest concern was for persons who realized they needed him.
- Jesus was always moved by his love for needy people.
- Jesus was never turned off by those whose lives were messed up.

We do not know what happened in the home of Zacchaeus or what Jesus said to him. Luke goes straight to the change that happened in Zacchaeus as a result.

Read Luke 19:8

4. Which of the following phrases best describe what happened to Zacchaeus?

- Zacchaeus was probably lying to Jesus about what he would do.
- Zacchaeus tried to convince Jesus that he was a good and honorable man.
- Zacchaeus accepted Jesus as his Lord, experiencing a spiritual second birth.
- Zacchaeus seems to have lost his grasping love for money when he enthusiastically decided to give half his possessions to the poor.
- Zacchaeus wanted to make things right with any he might have cheated, paying back four times as much as he might have taken.
- Zacchaeus demonstrated what it is to be "born again."
- Zacchaeus was described as a "son of Abraham," who was the father of all who have a living faith in God.

Read Luke 19:9-10

5. What do you think most impressed Jesus' disciples by what had happened?

- They probably felt ashamed about going to the house of a despised man.
- They were amazed by the transformation of what had been an ugly man.
- They were beginning to understand Jesus' love for those others called "sinners."
- They could now better understand Jesus' mission in life.

6. In scarcely a week, Jesus would hang on the cross. How did Jesus describe his mission on earth?

- He said that he came to please self-righteous people.
- He said that he came to look for people who were lost.
- He said that he came to save people who were lost.

7. Opinions: All the people of Jericho, in the sight of God, were sinners needing to be saved. Why do you think Jesus picked out Zacchaeus to go to his home and lead him to salvation? Why do you think Zacchaeus was so happy to receive him?



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Fifth Bible Event

COMING HOME TO GOD**Luke 15:11-24**

The ancient prophet said it this way: **“All we like sheep have gone astray.” (Isaiah 53:6).** Few if any of us would deny that this describes our experience with God. Even the most faithful would confess to serious lapses. The important question is, How can we come back to God? Jesus answered this question with a sad but beautiful story of a young man who went his own foolish way but then came home to God. Jesus was really talking about each one of us, and the Hero of the story, the “father,” is God Himself.

Read Luke 15:11-12

1. Why do you think the Father gave to his youngest son his inheritance?

- He was obliged by the law to do it.
- He would not hold the son to himself if he chose otherwise.
- He respected the son's free will to do right or to do wrong.

2. Discussion: How do you think the Father felt when the son took his part of the family wealth and left home for good? How do you think the son felt?

Read Luke 15:13-16

3. How did the son use his money? Your opinion: How does this compare to any life lived far from God?

4. What does the “far country” most clearly represent in your mind?

- It was far from the ideals, values and practices seen in the Father's house.
- It was a place where people knew little or nothing of the Father.
- It was a place that took the son some time to get that far from his Father.

5. Opinions: What do you think about the Son's bad turn of events?

- It is what he expected from the beginning.
- It is what the Father sorrowfully expected from the beginning.
- It was the natural result of a wasteful and foolish lifestyle.
- It had nothing to do with the son's earlier decisions in life.
- It might get him to thinking about his bad choices in life.

6. Opinions: What do you think caused the lad's greatest grief?

- As a Jewish boy, to live with pigs.
- To see how his bar “friends” were no friends at all.
- To suffer hunger and not be able to even eat the pig food.
- To realize how wrong had been his choices in life.
- To realize that the country far from his Father was the last place he wanted to live.

Read Luke 15:17-21

7. Mark the statements that are true with a letter T.

- The son “came to himself” and realized what he needed to do.
- He would go home, defend his decisions and claim his rights.
- He would go home, confess his sins and ask only for a job.

Read Luke 15:21-24

8. Opinions: What two things do you think most surprised the boy when his father came to him?

- The Father seemed to be waiting for him.
- The Father had no words of reproach for him, the boy's self-reproach was enough.
- The Father immediately called for the best robe, a ring, and shoes for the ragged, barefoot, smelly lad.
- The Father received him with joy as a full member of the family.
- The Father immediately announced a big party for the son who was dead and was now alive, was lost but was now found.

9. Opinions: What do you think were Jesus purposes in telling this story?

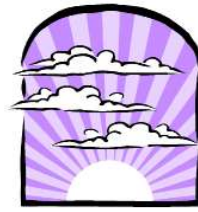
- God gives every person freedom to live far from God and live any way the person chooses.
- There are terrible consequences to selfish life decisions, but the painful results may lead one to come to God.
- There is hope for anyone, no matter how far he or she got from God.
- Jesus was just trying to entertain his listeners with a good story.
- To experience forgiveness and come home to God, one must “come to himself,” and confess to God the wrong committed.
- God waits for us to come to Him, joyfully ready to give us the treasures of His house in spite of anything we have done.

10. Where are you in the story?

- Wishing I could start “living it up.”
- Happy to be spending my inheritance as I want.
- Feeling pain and hunger in the far country.
- Heading home to God.
- At home and enjoying the party.



Sixth Bible Event

FINDING LIFE THAT IS ETERNAL*Matthew 16:13-27*

For three years, Jesus walked with his disciples, letting them discover for themselves who he was and for what reason he had come to the world. Like most Jews, his disciples thought that Jesus, as the Messiah, would take over the throne of Israel and dominate the nations as a worldly dictator. Many Jews saw Jesus as nothing more than a holy man, a prophet. Neither the world nor the disciples realized the secret spiritual mission on which the Father had sent him. None realized that Jesus' victory over the world's sin, rebellion and fleshly power would be through his death and resurrection. To this day, even most Christians do not experience the great power given to those who "die to self." The following verses of the Bible take us to holy ground.

Read Matthew 16:13-20

1. What is, in your opinion, the most remarkable thing about Peter's answer?

- He didn't settle for any of the popular opinions of the people that Jesus was only another prophet of God.
- He comprehended that Jesus is nothing less than the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One of God), the very Son of the Living God.
- His answer was not his own. It was revealed by the Father in Heaven.

Different interpretations of Jesus' words to Peter (Greek: "petros" little stone) and this Rock ("petra" great rock) divide Christian scholars. All should be encouraged that Jesus himself will build his Church, his gathered people, and the gates of hades will not win over it. As his own death approached, this was a lesson the Apostles needed urgently to learn.

Read Matthew 16:21-23

2. What impresses you most about the timing of Jesus' prophecy about his death and resurrection?

- He said nothing about it until the Apostles understood that he truly was the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
- From this time on, he repeated the same message to the Apostles.
- He spoke of it after assuring the disciples that the gates of hell itself would not prevail over him or his people.

3. Peter tried to encourage Jesus, telling him that he would not die. What was Jesus' reaction to this?

- He thanked Peter for his encouraging words.
- He said that the Father had also inspired these words of Peter.
- He said that Peter was speaking now for Satan and not for God.
- He said that Satan's words through Peter were a stumbling block for him.
- He said that Peter's words were according to the thoughts of men and not of God.

Read Matthew 16:24-26

4. Opinions: How do you interpret Jesus' words about self-denial?

- Even as he denied his own self interests, so will his followers.
- To follow Jesus, then, is to deny one's own interests.
- He spoke of our cross as being our need to deny our self interests and follow Jesus in his call and his example.
- He tried to convince his followers to wear ornamental crosses.
- He said that to really find life is to lose one's self for God.
- He said that it would be foolish to struggle and get all the wealth of the world, losing one's soul in doing so.
- He was letting us know that to believe in Jesus is not simply a mental or sentimental experience it is to turn one's life over to God in faith.

Read Matthew 16:27

5. How would you explain this verse to other people?

- Jesus contrasts all our ordinary days of earthly life with the great Day in which Jesus will come in glory and power.
- Jesus says that when he comes, our real wealth or poverty will be plainly seen.
- Jesus promises that all people will be glad to see him come.
- The reality of our faith will be seen by what we actually have done.
- Jesus speaks of eternal rewards he will bring us for our faith and resulting selfless service to God and to others.

6. Course Evaluation: How do you evaluate this course in regard to your own faith and life?

- I am afraid most of the lessons went over my head.
- I now understand much that is new. I pray that my life might reflect what I have learned.
- I understand much better what it is to "believe in Christ."
- I commit my life to Him who saved me and is coming for me.
- I now seek to "lose my life" for Christ's sake
- Other: _____

