

**JSCYC 2026**

**Why We Believe**

**What We Believe**

**Theme Verse: 1 Peter 3:15**

# Introduction

Many young people grow up in Christian homes believing in God and the Bible simply because that is what their family believes. There is nothing wrong with the faith of a child. Jesus Himself said we must become like children to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3).

As students grow older and enter college classrooms, workplaces, and the relentless scroll of social media, they will encounter an environment where Christianity is regularly challenged, mocked, and dismissed. Their teachers and professors may speak of evolution and atheism as settled facts, beyond the reach of serious debate. Their friends may share content that treats belief in God as something only the uneducated or the fearful need. The culture and their peers around them increasingly pressures them to see their faith as a private feeling, something too fragile to be brought into the light of real questions. I've witnessed kids from good Christian homes who walked away from the faith in college and in life not because someone proved the Bible was wrong, but because nobody ever taught them how to answer the hard questions.

The entire theme of this week *Why We Believe What We Believe* is built on the recognition that Christianity is not merely a tradition to be inherited. It is a truth to be discovered and examined.

The apostle Peter wrote his first letter to Christians who were facing real pressure, suffering, and the threat of persecution. In 1 Peter 3:15, he did not say "hope for the best." He said to *always be ready to give a defense*. The Greek word is *apologia*, from which we get the word "apologetics." It literally means a reasoned, logical defense or answer. Peter was not asking Christians to be defensive or combative. He was asking them to be prepared to have thought through the reasons for their hope and to be able to articulate them to anyone who asks. The ability to explain why you believe what you believe is not a luxury reserved for preachers and professors. According to Peter, it is the responsibility of every Christian at every age, in every setting, at every moment.

One of the most damaging lies told about Christian faith is that it requires a person to abandon their intellect to believe without reason, to accept without evidence, and to check their brain at the door of the church building. The New Testament knows nothing of such a faith.

The book of Acts opens with Luke making a crucial point: Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many proofs" (Acts 1:3). That word "proofs" is significant. Jesus did not ask the apostles to simply trust Him after the resurrection without evidence. He offered "many infallible proofs" including appearances over forty days, meals eaten together, the display of His wounds, and encounters with more than 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). From the very beginning, Christianity has been a faith grounded in evidence that is open to examination.

The apostle Paul, when defending himself before Governor Festus, pointed out that the events of Jesus' life were not "done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). They were public, verifiable, and historically documented. When Paul preached before the intellectual elite of Athens on Mars Hill, he did not ask them to believe without reason. He pointed them to the resurrection as a publicly confirmed event by which God had given "assurance to all" (Acts 17:31). When Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees about His identity, He didn't simply demand their trust. He pointed to His works as evidence: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works" (John 10:37-38).

Our young people need to understand that when they stand up for what they believe, they are not asking others to make a blind leap. They are pointing to real, historical evidence that the God of the Bible exists, that the Bible is His Word, that Jesus is His Son, and that the Gospel is true.

Knowledge without courage is useless. Consider the story of a young woman who walked into a university classroom taught by an openly atheistic professor. When the professor asked Christians in the room to identify themselves, only she stood up despite knowing that many of the other students in the room attended the same congregation she did. She was prepared for the professor's attacks. What broke her heart was that fellow believers refused to stand beside her.

It is a fact that the more a person refuses to stand up for what they know to be true, the more they begin to doubt whether it is true at all. Cowardice has a spiritual cost. The Jewish leaders in Matthew 21 refused to answer Jesus' question about John's baptism. It wasn't because they didn't know the answer, but because the consequences frightened them. They made their decision based on fear rather than truth. There is a name for that: cowardice. Revelation 21:8 places "the cowardly" alongside murderers and idolaters in a sobering list. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing what is right no matter what the consequences may be.

This week is not just about giving young people information. It is about building in them the courage to do something with that information: to stand up for the faith, to speak up at a lunch table, to hold their ground when a friend challenges their faith.

This week is not about defeating people. There are approximately 70 million adults in the United States who identify as religiously unaffiliated. Many of the young people in these classes have friends, family members, and classmates in that category. The goal of apologetics is not to win arguments. Winning arguments without winning souls accomplishes nothing of eternal value. As Peter put it, we give our defense so that those who ask "a reason for the hope that is in us" might, through our good conduct, "glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 3:15; 2:12).

Jude urged Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). The word *contend* implies effort, struggle, and commitment. Faith that is never tested or examined tends to fade quietly. Faith that has been wrestled with and has stood face to face with the hard

questions and found solid answers becomes the kind of faith that can withstand a hostile professor, a skeptical friend, a difficult season of doubt, or a society that treats biblical Christianity as a relic of an uneducated past. That is the kind of faith this week is designed to build.

# Monday — We Believe in God

## Class A: God Made Everything

**Text:** Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 3:4; Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1

Before we talk about anything else this week, we need to settle the biggest question of all: Is there really a God, or are we here by accident? The question of whether God exists is the most important question any human being will ever face. Everything else, morality, purpose, life after death, the truth of the Bible, the identity of Jesus, depends on it. If God does not exist, then the universe is nothing but matter in motion, and human beings are complicated accidents with no ultimate meaning. If God does exist, then the universe has a Maker, life has a purpose, and every soul has an eternal destiny.

Three great arguments stand as pillars for the existence of God, each drawn directly from what nature itself reveals.

**The Cosmological Argument (Cause and Effect):** The Law of Cause and Effect is one of the most foundational principles in all of science. Nothing that begins to exist does so without a cause. Every student in the room intuitively knows this. If you drop a vase and it shatters, there was a cause. If you wake up and the kitchen is clean, someone cleaned it. The universe itself had a beginning. Modern science has virtually universally confirmed this through the evidence of cosmic expansion, background radiation, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the universe is running down, which means it had a beginning. That beginning required a cause. As the author of Hebrews wrote: "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4). Something cannot come from nothing. The universe came from something, and that something is God.

**The Law of Biogenesis (Life from Life):** In the 19th century, a debate raged in the scientific community about whether life could arise spontaneously from non-living matter. The French scientist Louis Pasteur finally settled the question through controlled experiments: life does not spontaneously generate from non-life. This became the Law of Biogenesis. Science has never observed a single exception to it. And yet, atheistic evolution requires a single miraculous exception, the very first living cell must have somehow assembled itself from non-living chemicals without any intelligent guidance. This is not a scientific claim; it is a philosophical hope. Every honest observation of nature tells us that life comes only from pre-existing life. The first life in the universe demands a supernatural, living Creator, and that is exactly what Genesis 1:1 describes.

**The Design Argument (Design Demands a Designer):** The Earth is positioned in the universe with breathtaking precision. Its distance from the sun, the tilt of its axis, the composition of its atmosphere, the size of its moon, the presence of water, the magnetic field that shields life from radiation. Alter any one of these factors even slightly and life becomes impossible. Scientists have identified over 100 such "fine-tuned" parameters that must be exactly right for life to exist. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:20, God's "invisible attributes are clearly seen" through what He made, "so that they are without excuse." The

complexity and precision of the universe is not the fingerprint of random chance; it is the fingerprint of an infinitely intelligent Creator. The existence of complex, functional design in nature logically demands an ultimate designer. By definition, designs are preceded by deliberate, purposeful, inventive, intelligent planning, not unintelligent, random accidents. These arguments are not proofs in the mathematical sense. They are the kind of compelling, reasonable evidence that courts, scientists, historians, and everyday people use to draw confident conclusions about reality. The evidence for God's existence is more than sufficient for any honest person to believe.

### **Key Points:**

1. The Law of Cause and Effect: everything that exists was caused by something else. The universe had a beginning, so it had a cause. That cause is God.
2. The Law of Biogenesis: life only comes from pre-existing life. Louis Pasteur proved that life cannot spontaneously generate. So who made the first life? God.
3. Design demands a Designer: the Earth is precisely positioned at the exact right distance from the sun, with the exact right tilt and atmosphere. That kind of precision is not an accident.
4. Romans 1:20 says the evidence is so clear that no one has an excuse for rejecting it

**Illustration:** A birthday cake doesn't bake itself. A house doesn't build itself. The universe is far more complex than either, and it didn't build itself either. Think about Jackson and Smith Counties. Somebody designed their courthouses. Somebody planned those roads. Now look up at the sky on a clear night here in Kentucky. That's infinitely more precise than anything any person ever built.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- If you found a working watch on the ground, would you think it made itself? Why not?
- What does creation tell us about who God is?
- What is one thing in nature that convinces you God is real?
- Romans 1:20 says the evidence for God is so clear that no one has an excuse for rejecting it. Do you think most people who reject God do so because of a lack of evidence or for some other reason? What do you think that reason is?
- Scientists have identified over 100 precise conditions that must be exactly right for life to exist on Earth. What are the odds that all of those conditions lined up perfectly by accident? Does "chance" feel like a satisfying answer? (Answer: impossible)

## **Class B: If There's No God, Nothing Is Truly Wrong**

**Text:** Romans 2:14–15; Romans 1:20; Genesis 1:27; Matthew 22:37–40

One of the most powerful and often overlooked arguments for the existence of God comes not from the stars or the biology of cells, but from the human conscience. Every person in

every civilization throughout history has had a sense that some things are genuinely, objectively wrong, not merely unpopular, not merely against the law, but actually, truly evil. The murder of innocent children, the torture of the helpless, the betrayal of trust. All of these things strike human beings as wrong in a way that goes beyond personal preference or cultural opinion.

This presents a serious problem for atheism. If there is no God and human beings are nothing more than complex arrangements of molecules that arose by chance then there is no such thing as objective morality. As one prominent atheist philosopher, Richard Dawkins, has honestly admitted: "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference." In other words, if atheism is true, words like "evil," "wrong," and "ought" have no ultimate meaning. They are only expressions of personal or cultural preference. They are no different, at the deepest level, from preferring chocolate over vanilla.

But no one actually lives that way. When a student is cheated on a test, they do not say "I personally prefer honesty, though I acknowledge cheating is not objectively wrong." They say "That's not fair!" They appeal to a moral standard that they believe is real and binding, not just for themselves, but for everyone. When we condemn the Holocaust, we are not saying "that was against our cultural preferences." We are saying it was genuinely, actually, objectively wrong even if the entire German population approved of it at the time. That kind of moral knowledge cannot be explained by chemistry or evolutionary advantage. It requires a Moral Law Giver, a standard-setter who is outside of us and above us.

The Bible teaches that this moral awareness is written into every human being. "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these...show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Romans 2:14–15). The very word "conscience" means "with knowledge", an inner knowing of right and wrong that comes not from culture or upbringing alone, but from being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

### **Key Points:**

1. Every person has a built-in sense that some things are *truly* wrong. Not just unpopular, but actually evil
2. Atheistic evolution cannot explain morality. If we are just matter and chemicals, then murder, rape, and cruelty can never be called *objectively* wrong. They can only be "unpopular"
3. Even leading atheist philosophers have admitted that objective moral values exist. But if they exist, they require a Moral Law Giver, and that is God
4. The very fact that humans (and only humans) wrestle with right and wrong is one more fingerprint of God on creation

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why can't animals be put on trial for doing wrong things?
- If there is no God, who decides what is right and what is wrong?

- When someone cheats, steal, or lies to you, your immediate reaction is “that is not fair” Where does that reaction come from?
- How does knowing God created you change how you see yourself?
- Have you ever done something you knew was wrong even though nobody saw you and nobody would ever find out? What does that inner sense of guilt tell you about where your conscience comes from?

## Tuesday — We Believe the Bible is from God

### Class A: The Bible Predicted the Future Perfectly

**Text:** 2 Peter 1:20–21; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Isaiah 46:9–10; Jeremiah 28:9

Of all the arguments for the divine inspiration of the Bible, fulfilled prophecy is perhaps the most historically verifiable and objectively compelling. The Bible does not merely contain general spiritual wisdom that could apply in any era. It makes specific, detailed, and falsifiable predictions about future events that were written centuries before those events occurred, and that were then verified by secular historians and archaeologists.

God Himself makes this claim as a test of His own uniqueness: "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9–10). The ability to predict the future in specific, verifiable detail is something only an all-knowing God can do. No human being no matter how intelligent, intuitive, or informed can name a king who will be born 150 years in the future, describe his specific military campaign, and name the city he will conquer. Yet that is precisely what Isaiah did.

**The Prophecy About Cyrus:** In Isaiah 44:28–45:1, the prophet Isaiah named "Cyrus" as the king who would command the rebuilding of Jerusalem and issue the decree to release the Jewish captives from Babylon. This prophecy was written approximately 150 years before Cyrus the Great was born and even longer before his conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. Secular history confirms the fulfillment: Cyrus did conquer Babylon, and he did issue a decree releasing the Jewish captives (Ezra 1:1–4). No human being writes the name of an unborn king into a prophecy 150 years in advance, but God does.

**The Fall of Tyre:** The prophet Ezekiel wrote in detail about the destruction of the ancient coastal city of Tyre (Ezekiel 26:3–14). He predicted that many nations would come against it, that its stones and timber would be thrown into the sea, that it would become "a bare rock" where fishermen spread their nets, and that it would "never be rebuilt." These details were fulfilled over a span of centuries. First by Nebuchadnezzar and then, with startling precision, by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., who scraped the rubble of the mainland city into the sea to build a causeway to the island fortress. The site has never been rebuilt as a major city.

**Over 300 Messianic Prophecies:** Perhaps the most stunning body of predictive prophecy in all of Scripture is the network of over 300 predictions about the coming Messiah, all fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. His birthplace (Micah 5:2), the manner of His birth (Isaiah 7:14), His family line through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David, His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:13), the soldiers casting lots for His garments (Psalm 22:18), His burial in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9), and His resurrection (Psalm 16:10). All of these were written centuries before Jesus was born, and all were fulfilled in precise detail. The life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as depicted in the New Testament documents, fulfilled all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Many of these prophecies

describe events that Jesus could not possibly have arranged or manipulated such as where He was born, who His ancestors were, or how soldiers would behave at His crucifixion.

The manuscripts of the Old Testament, including the famous Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947, predate Jesus' birth by over a century making it impossible for the prophecies to have been written after the fact. The evidence from fulfilled prophecy alone is sufficient to conclude that the Bible was authored by a Being who exists outside of time.

### **Key Points:**

1. The Bible contains hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, events predicted centuries before they happened and then verified by secular history.
2. Ezekiel predicted the fall of the ancient city of Tyre, in precise detail, that it would be scraped bare, its stones thrown into the sea, and never rebuilt. Alexander the Great fulfilled every detail 250 years later.
3. Isaiah predicted by name that a man named *Cyrus* would conquer Babylon and release the Jewish captives 150 years before Cyrus was born.
4. The Bible contains over 300 Messianic prophecies, all fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

**Illustration:** Imagine someone in 1880 writing: 'A man named Donald Trump, born in New York, will be elected President of the United States in 2016, lose in 2020, and win again in 2024.' Written down. Sealed. That's what Isaiah did with Cyrus 150 years before the man was born.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How do we know the prophecies weren't written *after* the events happened?
- What would it take for a human writer to predict the future that accurately?
- What does fulfilled prophecy prove about who wrote the Bible?
- If the Bible were written by ordinary human beings, what we expect to find in it? Errors, failed predictions, contradictions. What do we actually find instead and what does that tell us?
- Has anyone tried to tell you that the Bible is just a book written by men? Based on what you learned today, how would you respond to that?

## **Class B: The Bible Is Historically and Scientifically Accurate**

**Text:** 2 Peter 1:16; Acts 1:3; Numbers 19:11–12; Leviticus 13:45–46

At some point, you're likely going to hear somebody say, a professor, a friend, a YouTube video, 'The Bible is just an old book full of myths.' A careful examination of the evidence, however, reveals the opposite. Everywhere the Bible's claims can be checked against archaeology, history, or science, they consistently prove to be accurate. As the late Nelson Glueck, one of the most distinguished biblical archaeologists of the 20th century, stated: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

Scientific Accuracy Centuries Before Modern Science: The Bible was not written as a science textbook. Its purpose is spiritual. But when it does address matters of the natural world, it speaks with accuracy that was far ahead of its time. Consider a few examples:

Moses commanded specific quarantine practices for those with infectious disease (Leviticus 13:45–46; Numbers 5:1–4) thousands of years before the germ theory of disease was developed. In the 1840s, Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis discovered that hand washing dramatically reduced patient deaths in hospitals. Moses had commanded hand washing for hygienic purposes nearly 3,400 years earlier. The "water of purification" described in Numbers 19 is a mixture involving ashes (producing lye), hyssop (which contains thymol, a natural antiseptic), and cedar wood (another natural antiseptic) that functioned essentially as an antibacterial compound millennia before chemistry could explain why.

The Bible also contains remarkable statements about cosmology. Isaiah wrote that God "sits above the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22) in a time when most surrounding cultures believed the earth was flat or resting on the back of an animal. The book of Job describes how God "hangs the earth on nothing" (Job 26:7). A remarkable statement in an ancient world filled with creation myths that placed the earth on the back of turtles or elephants. Ecclesiastes 1:7 accurately describes the water cycle of rivers running to the sea, water evaporating and returning as rain at a time when no one had a scientific framework to explain it.

Historical Reliability: The New Testament, particularly the book of Acts, has been subjected to intense historical scrutiny. Sir William Ramsay, a prominent 19th-century archaeologist who began his work expecting to disprove the historical accuracy of Acts, spent years retracing Paul's missionary journeys through the Mediterranean world. After examining the geographical, political, and cultural details in Luke's account, he reversed course entirely and concluded that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense." Luke mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, 95 individuals, and numerous titles of local government officials. All of which have been verified by archaeology and secular records.

The Bible writers themselves insist on their historical credibility. Peter wrote, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). John wrote, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...we declare to you" (1 John 1:1,3). These are not the words of mythmakers. They are the words of men who staked their lives on the truthfulness of what they witnessed.

The Bible has been attacked, doubted, and examined for centuries, and it has never been proven false. Every generation of skeptics has had to adjust their objections as more evidence emerges while the Bible stands unchanged.

**Key Points:**

1. The Bible was not written as a science textbook, but everywhere it touches science, it is correct.
2. Moses commanded quarantine for disease 3,000 years before doctors understood germs. In the 1840s, Dr. Semmelweis discovered that washing hands saved lives, but Moses already knew.
3. The "Water of Purification" in Numbers 19 was essentially an antibacterial soap recipe, containing lye (from ashes), hyssop (which contains antiseptic thymol), and cedar wood (a natural antiseptic).
4. Archaeologist Sir William Ramsay set out to disprove the book of Acts and after years of digging, concluded that Luke was one of the most accurate historians who ever lived.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How could Moses have known about germs thousands of years before scientists did?
- What does it mean to you that the Bible has never been proven wrong?
- If the Bible is accurate in history and science, what should that tell us about its spiritual claims?
- Luke mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, and 95 individuals in Acts. All of these have been verified by archaeology. If Luke was making things up, what would we expect to find when archaeologists start digging? What do we actually find?
- The Bible has been attacked and examined for centuries and has never been proven false. Every other ancient religious text has been shown to contain historical or scientific errors. What does the Bible's unique track record tell us about its origin?

## Wednesday — We Believe Jesus is the Son of God

### Class A: Jesus Was Predicted, Then He Showed Up

**Text:** Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; Psalm 22:18; Zechariah 11:13

The single greatest reason to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is exactly who He claimed to be as the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world is the extraordinary way in which His life fulfilled hundreds of specific predictions written in the Old Testament long before He was born.

Unlike other religious founders, Jesus arrived with a detailed "divine résumé" that had been composed over a period of more than 1,000 years by dozens of different writers across three continents. All of whom pointed the same person. From the very first prophecy in Genesis 3:15 that the "seed of woman" would crush the serpent's head to the specific details of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, the portrait of the coming Messiah becomes increasingly detailed and focused with every passing generation.

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) and fulfilled in the miraculous birth of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1 and Luke 1. He would be born in the small town of Bethlehem in Judea (Micah 5:2) and fulfilled when Caesar Augustus ordered a census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth (Luke 2:1-7). He would enter Jerusalem riding on the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9) and fulfilled on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11). He would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for exactly 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:13) and fulfilled when Judas struck his deal with the chief priests (Matthew 26:14-16). Soldiers would gamble for His garments (Psalm 22:18) and fulfilled at the crucifixion (John 19:23-24). He would be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9) and fulfilled when Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, donated his own tomb (Matthew 27:57-60). His body would not see decay (Psalm 16:10) and fulfilled in the resurrection.

Importantly, many of these prophecies describe circumstances that Jesus could not have arranged or controlled. He could not choose where He would be born. He could not control how soldiers would behave during His execution. He could not arrange whose tomb would be available for His burial. Critics who suggest that Jesus deliberately staged His life to appear to fulfill prophecy must contend with the fact that the most specific details were entirely beyond His control.

Beyond the prophecies, the historicity of Jesus is established by multiple ancient non-Christian sources. Roman historian Tacitus, writing around A.D. 115, described "Christus," who "had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus." Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Jewish historian Josephus all independently confirm that Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical figure who was crucified and whose followers believed He had risen from the dead. These hostile witnesses who had no reason to promote Christianity actually strengthen the case for Jesus' existence, because they confirm the facts without any bias in His favor.

Believing in Jesus is not a blind leap of faith. It is a reasonable conclusion drawn from a mountain of historical, prophetic, and documentary evidence.

### **Key Points:**

1. The Messiah's birth location (Bethlehem), family line (Abraham, David), manner of birth (virgin), and the circumstances of His death were all predicted in the Old Testament centuries before Jesus was born.
2. Jesus fulfilled over 300 Messianic prophecies. Many of which were physically impossible for a person to arrange (where they are born, who their ancestors are).
3. His betrayal for exactly 30 pieces of silver, burial in a rich man's tomb, and soldiers gambling for His clothing were all foretold and fulfilled.
4. Hostile non-Christian sources, such as Roman historians Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger, all confirm that Jesus of Nazareth existed and was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are the odds of one person fulfilling even 8 specific prophecies by chance?
- Why do enemies of Christianity actually help prove Jesus was real?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus' entire life was planned before He was born?
- Non-Christian sources Tacitus, Josephus, Suetonius, and Pliny all confirm that Jesus existed, was crucified, and that His followers believed He rose from the dead. If someone tells you Jesus never existed, what would you tell them?
- C.S. Lewis famously argued that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or exactly who He claimed to be. Based on the evidence of fulfilled prophecy and hostile historical witnesses, which of those three options is the most reasonable conclusion?

## **Class B: Only God Can Do What Jesus Did**

**Text:** Mark 2:5–12; John 10:30; John 20:28; Revelation 19:10; Acts 14:14–15

Many people today are willing to acknowledge that Jesus was a great teacher, a moral example, or even a remarkable spiritual leader while stopping short of accepting His claim to be the Son of God. But the evidence of Jesus' own life and words does not allow for that comfortable middle ground. C.S. Lewis put it plainly: a man who says what Jesus said is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. There is no fourth option of "nice moral teacher."

The proof of Jesus' divine identity comes from multiple converging lines of evidence. Things that only God can do, things that only God would accept, and things that Jesus consistently claimed for Himself that no sane human being would claim if they were false.

Jesus Claimed the Authority to Forgive Sins: In Mark 2, Jesus healed a paralyzed man but before healing him, He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The Jewish teachers in the room

immediately recognized the magnitude of that statement: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). They were right. Only the one who has been wronged can forgive a wrong. Only God can forgive sins committed against God. Jesus then healed the man as evidence that His claim of divine authority was real. He was not forgiving the man's sins against other people. He was forgiving sins against God, claiming the very authority of God to do so.

**Jesus Accepted Worship:** Throughout the New Testament, good men and even holy angels consistently refused worship when it was offered to them. When Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in worship, Peter said "Stand up; I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:25–26). When John fell at the feet of an angel in Revelation 19:10, the angel said, "Do not do that...Worship God." Yet Jesus on multiple occasions accepted worship without rebuke or correction. When the disciples worshiped Him after He walked on water (Matthew 14:33), He did not refuse. When Thomas, confronted with the risen Lord, declared "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), Jesus did not say "You are mistaken. I am only a man." Instead, He blessed Thomas for recognizing the truth. Jesus only accepts worship because He is, in fact, God.

**The Resurrection:** The most definitive proof of Jesus' divine nature is His resurrection from the dead. His own tomb was a few blocks away from where Peter preached the resurrection on Pentecost. If the body were there, the Jewish authorities needed only to produce it to destroy Christianity in its cradle. They could not. More than 500 witnesses saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5–8), many of whom Paul said were still alive at the time of his writing and available to be questioned. The disciples were transformed from terrified, hiding men into bold proclaimers of the resurrection who willingly died for their testimony. People die for what they believe to be true, but almost no one willingly dies for something they know to be a lie.

The miracles of Christ were varied and numerous and counted as evidence by Jesus himself to prove that He was, in fact, the Son of God as He claimed. The evidence does not invite us to admire Jesus from a distance. It demands a decision about who He is.

### **Key Points:**

1. Only God can forgive sins. When Jesus forgave the paralyzed man in Mark 2, the Jewish leaders said, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*". Jesus then healed the man to prove His authority was real.
2. Only wicked people accept worship. Good men and even angels refuse it (Acts 14:14–15; Revelation 19:10). Jesus repeatedly *accepted* worship and never corrected those who gave it.
3. Jesus claimed equality with God ("I and the Father are one" in John 10:30), and the crowd understood exactly what He meant. They picked up stones.
4. When Thomas saw the risen Jesus and said "*My Lord and my God!*", Jesus did not correct him.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why does it matter that Jesus accepted worship while good angels refused it?
- How did Jesus' miracles back up His claims about who He was?

- What do you say to someone who says Jesus was just a good teacher?
- When Jesus said "Your sins are forgiven" in Mark 2, the Jewish teachers immediately recognized that only God could say that. They were not wrong about the logic. They were only wrong about who Jesus was. What does their reaction tell us about what Jesus was actually claiming?
- More than 500 people saw the risen Jesus, and Paul noted that most of them were still alive and could be questioned at the time he was writing (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). If the resurrection were a lie, what would have been the easiest way to disprove it? Why was it never disproved?

## Thursday — We Believe the Gospel

### Class A: Salvation Is a Gift: But You Still Have to Receive It

**Text:** John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 6:23; Acts 2:37–38; James 2:17–24

The single most important and practical truth in all of Scripture is not abstract theology. It is the question of how a lost sinner receives the salvation that God freely offers through Jesus Christ. Understanding this correctly is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is a matter of eternal life and death.

The New Testament is absolutely clear on two things that, taken together, form the complete picture of salvation. First, salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace. No human being has ever been good enough, religious enough, or obedient enough to earn the right to stand before a holy God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Paul is unambiguous: salvation originates entirely in the love and mercy of God, given to those who do not deserve it. This is the very heart of the Gospel. Christ died "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8) not because we had earned it, but because God loved us.

Second, and this is where much of modern religious teaching has gone wrong, receiving a gift still requires action on the part of the one receiving it. The gift is free; the reception is not passive. Consider the Old Testament example of Israel receiving the land of Canaan. God repeatedly described Canaan as something He *gave* to the Israelites, a free gift, unmerited and unearned. Yet Israel still had to cross the Jordan River, march around Jericho, fight battles, and take possession of the land. Their effort was not the source of the gift; it was the means of receiving it. "The Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it" (Joshua 21:43). The land was God's gift. The taking was Israel's response.

The same principle governs salvation. God has extended the gift of eternal life to "whoever" will receive it (Revelation 22:17). But the New Testament is explicit about what receiving that gift looks like. It is not passive. It is not a matter of simply acknowledging in your mind that Jesus exists. The New Testament lists specific, sequential conditions:

- **Hear:** "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Salvation requires that a person understand the Gospel.
- **Believe:** "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). A sincere conviction that Jesus is the Son of God and the risen Savior is foundational to everything that follows.
- **Repent:** "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a genuine change of mind about sin, a turning away from the old life.
- **Confess:** "With the mouth confession is made to salvation" (Romans 10:10). A public declaration of faith in Jesus as Lord is part of receiving the gift.

- **Be Baptized:** "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Water baptism is the culminating, salvific act in which God applies the cleansing of Christ's blood.
- **Live Faithfully:** Romans 6:4 says we are raised from the water to "walk in newness of life", not to return to the old one. Salvation is received at baptism, but faithfulness is required every day that follows. As Jesus Himself said: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

None of these actions *earns* salvation. But together, they constitute the act of *receiving* it. James 2:24 makes a statement found nowhere else in the entire New Testament: "A man is justified by works, and not by faith only." This is the only place where the words "faith only" appear together, and the verse explicitly denies that faith alone is sufficient. Just as Noah's faith moved him to *build* the ark, just as the Israelites' faith caused them to *march around* Jericho, saving faith always expresses itself in obedience to God's commands.

### Key Points:

1. Salvation is a free gift from God. We cannot earn it or deserve it
2. But a gift still has to be *received*. God gave Israel the Promised Land as a gift, but they still had to cross the Jordan, march around Jericho, and fight
3. James 2:24 is the only place in the Bible where "faith only" appears together, and it says a man is *not* justified by faith only
4. The New Testament lists several conditions for receiving salvation: **Hear** the Gospel (Romans 10:17), **Believe** (John 8:24), **Repent** (Luke 13:3), **Confess** (Romans 10:10), **Be Baptized** (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16), **Live Faithfully** (Revelation 2:10)

**Illustration:** If a friend offers you \$1,000,000 but says you have to drive to his house and sign a check to pick it up, you haven't *earned* it. You simply received the gift the way it was offered.

### Discussion Questions:

- What is the difference between earning something and receiving it?
- Why do you think so many people leave out baptism when they talk about how to be saved?
- What are the steps the New Testament gives for receiving salvation?
- Noah believed God's warning about the flood. But if he had believed and never built the ark, would he have been saved? What does that tell us about what biblical faith actually looks like?
- The crowd on Pentecost asked "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). They already believed because Peter's sermon had convicted them. Why did Peter still tell them to repent and be baptized if belief alone was sufficient?
- Every single conversion account in the book of Acts follows the same pattern of hearing, believing, repenting, and being baptized. What does the consistency of that pattern across every account tell us about whether it was considered optional?

## Class B: What Is Baptism and Why Does It Matter?

**Text:** Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12

Many people have grown up around religion that teaches baptism as an "outward sign of an inward grace" already received, or as a public declaration of a salvation that occurred at the moment of a "sinner's prayer." The confusion about baptism in much of the religious world can be traced to a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes a "work of merit." Many have read Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 "not of works, lest anyone should boast" and concluded that baptism, as something a person does, must therefore be a work of human merit that earns salvation. But this reasoning proves too much. Faith is something a person does. It is, in fact, described as a "work" in John 6:29, where Jesus says "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Repentance is something a person does. Confession is something a person does. If the mere fact of human action disqualifies something from the plan of salvation, then faith, repentance, and confession must also be excluded, and that produces an absurd result that no one accepts.

The New Testament identifies four distinct categories of "works": works of the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:20), works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), works of merit by which a person earns salvation (Titus 3:4-5), and works of obedience to God (John 6:28-29, Hebrews 5:9). Baptism falls squarely in the fourth category. It is not a human invention designed to impress God. It is a command of God, given specifically for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul's very letters to the Romans and Galatians, the two books that most forcefully deny salvation by works of human merit, are the same books that specifically identify water baptism as the moment when a person is "baptized into Christ" (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). The same Paul who warns against salvation by works is the same Paul who describes baptism as the point of entry into Christ.

This is not a contradiction. Titus 3:5 makes the distinction plain: we are saved "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy...through the washing of regeneration." Baptism is not a work we devise. It is a work God commands, and when one rises from the water, Paul says it is "according to the working of God," not the working of man (Colossians 2:12). Belief, repentance, and confession must all precede it, but baptism is the final, culminating act at which God has chosen to apply the blood of Christ and grant forgiveness of sins. Peter told the crowd on Pentecost to "repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Paul was told to "arise and be baptized and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). Jesus Himself declared that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). The New Testament offers no alternative path, no shortcut, and no substitute.

The Greek language of the New Testament is decisive here. The preposition *eis* in Acts 2:38 "be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins" demonstrates that the overwhelming consensus of Greek scholarship is that *eis* with the accusative expresses purpose and direction: "in order to receive forgiveness." The phrase means baptism is performed *in order to obtain* forgiveness of sins, not *because of* forgiveness already received. Similarly, in Mark 16:16, both "believes" and "is baptized" are Greek aorist participles, which Greek grammar

requires to describe action *prior* to the action of the main verb "will be saved." In the words of Cambridge biblical scholar Henry Swete, "both the acceptance of the Gospel and the ministrations of baptism precede salvation."

What, then, is baptism? Romans 6:3–4 gives the most beautiful explanation: "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Baptism is a dramatic, physical re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In the moment of immersion, the old self dies. In the moment of being raised from the water, a new person is born. Paul wrote in Colossians 2:12 that in baptism we are "raised with Him through faith in the working of God." Note carefully: it is "the working of God" not the working of man that accomplishes the transformation. The person being baptized is passive. Someone else does the baptizing. The believer simply submits, in faith, to what God has commanded, and God does the forgiving.

Even Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation and the champion of "faith alone," was not willing to say baptism was unnecessary. He wrote in his Large Catechism: "I affirm that Baptism is no human trifle, but that it was established by God Himself. Moreover, He earnestly and solemnly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved." Luther's objection was not to baptism. It was to the Catholic Church's sale of indulgences and its requirement of human merit for forgiveness. He never taught that baptism was an optional formality.

### **Key Points:**

1. Baptism is not a "work of merit". It is a condition of receiving God's gift, just like the Israelites had to take action to receive Canaan.
2. Paul was met by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and yet was not saved until three days later when Ananias commanded him to "arise and be baptized and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16).
3. Baptism is the moment we are buried with Christ and raised to new life (Romans 6:3–4), it is one of the most meaningful and beautiful acts in the Christian life.
4. Martin Luther himself wrote: "*Baptism is no human trifle. God Himself established it... we must be baptized or we shall not be saved*"

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Paul saw the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. He believed. He didn't eat or drink for three days. And he was still told "arise and be baptized and wash away your sins." If believing was enough, why did Ananias still tell him to be baptized?
- Acts 2:38 says to be baptized "for the remission of sins" meaning *in order to receive* forgiveness, not *because you already have* forgiveness. Does that change the way you have always thought about baptism?
- Romans 6 says baptism is like being buried with Jesus and then raised back up with Him. What do you think is happening in that moment?

## Friday — We Believe. Now What?

### Class A: Defending Your Faith Without Being Defensive

**Text:** 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:24–25; Jude 3

The entire week of study has been building toward this moment. Everyone now have in their hands a set of arguments and evidences for the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, the identity of Jesus, and the plan of salvation. By today, the issue won't be whether we've heard the material. The issue will be whether we're actually ready to live it when somebody pushes back.

Peter's instruction in 1 Peter 3:15 contains three elements that belong together: (1) *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts*, make Jesus the undisputed center of your life; (2) *always be ready to give a defense*, prepare yourself intellectually and spiritually; and (3) *with meekness and fear*, do it with humility and reverence. These three elements are inseparable. Apologetics done without the first two elements, genuine holiness and proper humility, often does more harm than good.

Think about the danger of what happens when Christians attempt to defend the truth in an unkind or arrogant manner. A Roman Catholic priest once noted his observation of some in the church of Christ: "In general, Christian love seems deficient in the way they seek to promote truth. In general, they strike me as tending to be suspicious, rash and uncharitable in their judgments about other people's motives, prone to arrogance." Whether or not that assessment is fair or broadly accurate, it contains a warning worth heeding. The way we defend the truth matters. Paul's description of a servant of the Lord in 2 Timothy 2:24–25 does not describe a debater who crushes opponents. It describes someone who is "gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition."

We should understand several practical principles for engaging non-believers:

Courage is essential. The same evidence that is compelling and life-changing when presented by a courageous believer can be rendered useless by a coward who refuses to speak. The young woman who stood alone in her university class when the atheist professor asked Christians to identify themselves while other professing Christians sat silently illustrates what happens when fear replaces faith. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is doing the right thing despite the fear, because truth matters more than consequences.

"I don't know" is a valid and powerful answer. Students should not feel pressured to have an immediate answer for every challenge. The honest response "I don't know, but I'll find out" communicates intellectual integrity and invites continued conversation. It is far better than making up an answer or pretending to a confidence you do not have.

Your life is your most powerful argument. Long before any non-Christian will listen to a carefully constructed argument for the existence of God, they will watch how you treat

people, how you handle failure, how you forgive, and whether your Christianity makes any visible difference in your daily life. Peter explicitly connects the apologetics passage (1 Peter 3:15) with a call to holy living (1 Peter 3:16; 2:12). The most credible defense of the faith you will ever offer is the testimony of a life genuinely transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Key Points:**

1. Peter says to *always* be ready. That means apologetics is not just for preachers. It's for every Christian at every age.
2. The goal is not to win arguments but to win souls, so answer with *gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3:15).
3. You don't have to have all the answers. "I don't know, but I'll find out" is a powerful and honest response.
4. The most powerful apologetic is your life: how you treat people, how you handle pressure, how you love others.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is one question about Christianity you've been afraid to ask?
- What do you say when a friend tells you they don't believe in God?
- How does knowing the evidence change the way you live your faith?
- Peter says to give your defense with "meekness and fear." Why do you think the way you defend your faith matters just as much as what you say? Can you think of a time when someone argued for something true but in a way that made you not want to listen?
- What is the difference between defending the truth to win an argument and defending the truth to win a soul? How does that difference change the way you approach a conversation?
- "I don't know, but I'll find out" is described as a powerful and honest answer. Why is that better than making something up or pretending to have an answer you don't have? Have you ever been in a situation where you wished you had said that instead of something else?

**Class B: Putting It All Together: What Do You Believe and Why?**

**Text:** Acts 17:11; Isaiah 1:18; 2 Peter 1:5–8; Hebrews 11:1

This final session is both a review and an invitation. All week, we have been presented with reasons to believe in God, the Bible, Jesus, and the Gospel. Friday's closing class is the moment to ask: what will you do with what you now know?

The Bereans in Acts 17:11 provide a model worth emulating. They "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They listened carefully. They investigated honestly. They did not simply accept Paul's teaching because he was persuasive but neither did they dismiss it because it was unfamiliar. They brought their best thinking to the question and followed the evidence

where it led. And "many of them believed." The Berean spirit, open-hearted, intellectually serious, willing to follow the truth wherever it goes, is exactly the spirit this week has been designed to cultivate.

Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:5–8 that Christians are to add to their faith "virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love." Notice that knowledge is listed as something added *to* faith not something that replaces it. Strong faith is not ignorant faith. Strong faith is faith that has been informed, tested, and deepened by truth. Those who leave this week with a better understanding of why they believe will have a stronger foundation when life becomes difficult such as when they face a professor who mocks Christianity, a friend who walks away from the faith, or a personal tragedy that tempts them to doubt.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Note the word "evidence." Biblical faith is not believing something without reasons. It is trusting in something that has been established by sufficient evidence, even when you cannot see it fully. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be repeated in a laboratory. You cannot visit the empty tomb today. But the evidence that it happened, the testimony of eyewitnesses, the transformation of the disciples, the explosive growth of the early church, the failure of enemies to produce the body, is as compelling as the evidence for any other ancient historical event.

**Review & Application of the week:**

- God exists: creation, cause and effect, design, morality.
- The Bible is from God: prophecy, science, historical accuracy.
- Jesus is the Son of God: fulfilled prophecy, miracles, resurrection, accepted worship.
- Salvation is by grace through faith, received through hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized.

**Activity:** Give each student a notecard. Ask them to write:

1. One thing they learned this week that they didn't know before.
2. One question they still have.
3. One person they want to tell about what they learned.

# Alternative Material for Younger Campers

## Tuesday — We Believe the Bible is from God

### Class A: "3 Reasons the Bible Is From God"

**Text:** 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Isaiah 46:9–10

#### Key Points:

1. **Predictive Prophecy:** Ezekiel predicted the fall of Tyre in stunning detail: many nations, the stones thrown into the sea, it would never be rebuilt. All fulfilled 250+ years later by Alexander the Great.
2. **Scientific Accuracy:** The Bible mentions the water cycle (Ecclesiastes 1:7), innumerable stars (Jeremiah 33:22), and laws of thermodynamics (Isaiah 51:6) all written long before modern science discovered these things.
3. **Historical Accuracy:** Luke mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, and 95 people in Acts. Most verified by archaeology and history. The Bible has never been proven historically false.

#### Discussion Questions:

- What makes a book different from other books if it can predict the future accurately?
- What would it tell you about a person who knew what would happen 200 years from now?
- Why do you think God included these things in the Bible?

### Class B: "Can We Trust the Bible?"

**Text:** Psalm 119:160; John 17:17; 2 Peter 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16–17

#### Key Points:

1. 40+ writers, 3 languages, 3 continents, 1,600 years with one unified message. That's impossible by accident.
2. The Bible writers were not guessing. Peter said "we were eyewitnesses" (2 Peter 1:16). These were men who staked their lives on what they wrote.
3. Archaeology supports the Bible. The Hittites, King Ahab's ivory palace, and Hezekiah's water tunnel were all confirmed after skeptics said they couldn't be real.
4. Has the Bible ever been proven false? No. That matters.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Why is the unity of the Bible across 40 writers and 1,600 years remarkable?
- What does it mean that the Bible writers were eyewitnesses?
- Why should we read the Bible every day if it is truly from God?

# Thursday — We Believe the Gospel

## Class A: "What Is Sin and Why Does It Matter?"

**Text:** Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1-2; John 3:16; Romans 6:23

### Key Points:

1. Sin means doing what God said not to do, or not doing what He said to do.
2. Every person has sinned (Romans 3:23). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2).
3. Sin has a consequence: Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death." But God doesn't want that!
4. God loves us so much He sent Jesus to take the punishment we deserved (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

**Illustration:** Imagine you broke your neighbor's window with a baseball. Your dad goes to pay for it even though you did it. That is what Jesus did for us. He paid for something we did.

### Discussion Questions:

- What is sin? Can you give an example?
- Why can't God just "ignore" sin?
- How does knowing Jesus died for you make you feel?

## Class B: How Do We Become a Christian?

**Text:** Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 22:16

### Key Points:

1. God gives salvation as a gift, but gifts must be received (like opening a present).
2. What does God ask us to do?
  - **Hear:** Romans 10:17: Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.
  - **Believe:** Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6: Must believe Jesus is the Son of God.
  - **Repent:** Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3: Decide to turn away from sin.
  - **Confess:** Romans 10:9-10: Tell others you believe Jesus is Lord.
  - **Be Baptized:** Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16: Wash away sins in baptism.
  - **Live Faithfully:** Revelation 2:10. Follow God throughout your life.
3. The same plan is found every time someone became a Christian in Acts.

### Discussion Questions:

- How amazing is it that God loved us so much to give us a plan to become a Christian and be forgiven of our sins?

- Why is baptism important if salvation is a free gift?
- What does it mean to “live faithfully” after becoming a Christian? What do you think that looks like on a normal day?