



The week that changed the world



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CITY BIBLE FORUM

The week that changed the world is the initiative of City Bible Forum, produced in partnership with Bible Society Australia. We would like to gratefully acknowledge the work of Claire O'Neill in producing the pilot version of this booklet in Adelaide in 2011.

City Bible Forum seeks to offer workers in the central business districts of Australia the opportunity to thoughtfully engage with Christianity and the Bible.

To contact our team in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth or Sydney, please visit our website at www.citybibleforum.org or email us at info@citybibleforum.org

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Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

Luke chapter 18, verses 31-34

Why Easter?

In Jesus' 33 years there were countless events to speak about but the four people who wrote biographies on his life all chose Jesus' death and resurrection, the Easter story, as the most significant. One follower of Jesus later wrote that, if the resurrection didn't happen, then Christianity is a total farce and Christians should be the most pitied for believing a lie. Why is the Easter story that important?

How to use this guide

This booklet is designed to walk you through the last week of Jesus' life, the week that changed the world. It contains the events leading up to and including the Easter story from Luke's biography as well as reflections from workers around Australia. These men and women come from a variety of professions and backgrounds but all share one thing in common – they have each come to a mature understanding of the significance for them of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

Whether you consider yourself an atheist, agnostic or believer, we invite you to read the Easter story first hand. You could read it on the bus or train on the way to work. You could read it at home with your children as a way of understanding and celebrating Easter. You could read it with some friends as a book club.

Our aim in publishing this guide mirrors the aim Luke had in mind when writing his biography of Jesus. His purpose was for his readers to "know the certainty" of the events of Jesus' life (see Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4). This is too important to rely on hearsay.

If you'd like to read and discuss this with someone please don't hesitate to get in contact with us (our details are at the end of this booklet).

Happy Easter!

City Bible Forum Team

Jesus on trial



John Scholes

Financial accountant, Brisbane

I always thought of myself as a Christian, believing there was a God and that Jesus had ‘died for my sins’. But I didn’t have any idea what that meant. It didn’t matter that much to me. I was young; there was no rush. Sure, I knew being Christian meant more than ticking a box on a form but Christianity could just sit on my ‘to do’ list.

But in my mid-twenties I started thinking about how I would die one day and that scared me. I knew I would hang my head in shame when I came before God. In God’s kindness, I started to become friends with a Christian girl from work. The Bible verses stuck on her desk told me she was a Christian. But it was more than that. It was who she was that gave it away. She invited me to church and encouraged me as I explored Christianity. A turning point was reading Luke’s gospel. It had a huge impact on me. Jesus’ words expressed the feelings I had inside of me but struggled to get out. He knew me like no one else. It was not long after that I truly became a Christian.

What jumps out at you from this reading?

What really jumps out at me is the reaction of the religious leaders of the day. They were intent on persecuting Jesus and would not stop until they saw Him punished even though both Pilate and Herod found no charge against Him. In contrast to this is the reaction of Jesus. He did not open His mouth when all the accusations were made against him.

What questions does this reading raise for you?

Why are the religious leaders of the day so afraid of Jesus and why would Jesus not defend himself? It also makes me think of what I would do if I was in a situation where I had people falsely accusing me.

What do you think the writer is urging his readers to believe or do?

The writer is urging us to put our trust in God. Jesus was falsely accused, ridiculed and mocked and yet he did not open his mouth. He knew what his mission was, he knew he was to die on the cross and so he endured the persecution of the crowd and the religious leaders.

What in this reading would you talk about with a friend and why?

I would talk to a friend about the suffering Jesus went through and how this fits with the good news of Christianity. I would talk to them about how everything in life is part of God’s plan even though it may not seem that way at the time.

Luke 23:1-25

¹Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

³So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

⁴Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

⁵But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

⁶On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From

what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹²That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

¹³Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.

¹⁵Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

¹⁸But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!”

¹⁹(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

²²For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” ²³But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.



Pontius Pilate inscription discovered in Caesarea. Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

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On the Cross



Frederick Lo

Investment accountant, Sydney

I grew up learning that only effort earns success in life. Through better research and understanding, we can achieve better health and a secure life. However, many situations in life are not as predictable as we want. God gives and takes. Time is in His hand. He's a sovereign and almighty God. The only way to find eternal lasting hope is trusting Jesus. That's the lesson I have discovered in the last 12 months. Only through him can we be with our Father. Jesus said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me".

The journey with Christ is not easy. However, Jesus came to this world and demonstrated the way we should live and treat others. He washed the disciples' feet and cured the man with leprosy. Truly he came to serve not to be served. Also, he has compassion for sinners, as we can read in the example of the adulterous woman. He said "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her". Like those stories in the Bible, I am one of the living testimonies of God's amazing grace. Not only did he forgive and wash away my sins, he also showed me how to live a life that pleases him.

Thank you Jesus!

What jumps out at you from this reading?

A criminal can be with God in paradise.

What questions does this reading raise for you?

How can God forgive so easily a criminal like the 'good thief'? Doesn't he need to work harder to enter into God's paradise?

What do you think the writer is urging his readers to believe or do?

All of us have committed sins in our past. As long as we acknowledge them and repent, Jesus will offer forgiveness and welcome us to his kingdom.

What part would you talk about with a friend and why?

Sometimes we might think that it's not fair to give up so much following Christ. Why don't we repent at the last minute before we die?

As we put our trust and faith on him, living becomes easier and better. He gives us joy, peace and contentment as we live our life with him. There's a guaranteed inheritance at the end of the tunnel.

Luke 23:26-49

²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

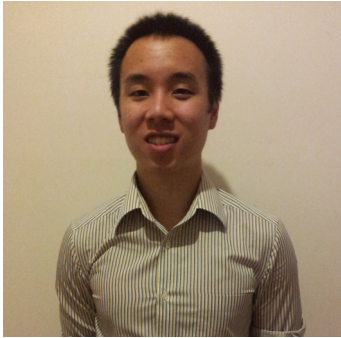
³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" ⁴⁸ and all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.



*Deposition from the Cross -
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio*

First sightings



Marcus Yong

Telstra, Melbourne

A high school friend invited me to hang out with her Christian friends and I really thought they were different and very genuine. I really wanted to learn from them and understand why they were so kind and interested in my life. We continued to talk about our views on God, and one day she gave me a Bible and asked me to read the biography of Luke and John. As I read them, I was in awe of how good Jesus was, and I realised that I was not the good person I

thought I was. While I had a lot of questions about whether or not I could trust the testimony of these biographies, I understood that if the Bible is true, then I have no choice but to trust in Jesus as my God and savior. I studied the Bible and was convinced by the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah who would die and rise to forgive his people.

What jumps out at you from this reading?

Everyone in this passage knew that Jesus was dead; there was no other option because they had previously witnessed the execution. We see this with the women taking the spices to anoint the body, and the apostles being completely dejected and hopeless. They didn't even want to check that the women's testimony was true about Jesus' body being gone.

What questions does this reading raise for you?

What were Jesus' disciples thinking when Jesus previously spoke about his death and resurrection? They surely would have known the Old Testament as Jews – if they knew Jesus was the Messiah they were looking for why didn't they ever equate Jesus with the prophesied 'suffering Servant' (Isaiah 52 & 53)?

How would I have responded if I was the one who saw the empty tomb and the messengers of God? Would I have doubted or believed as the women did?

What do you think the writer is urging his readers to believe or do?

To read the prophecies (written hundreds of years prior to the gospels) and Jesus' words for ourselves, and to see if they do actually predict that Jesus would die and rise from the grave.

What part would you talk about with a friend and why?

I would talk about how amazing and trustworthy the Bible is – that it accurately predicts the future of the coming of a King from eternity who would die to take away our crimes against God, and rise to never die again.

Luke 24:1-12

¹But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” ⁸And they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marvelling at what had happened.



Photo: John Dixon

Early third or late second century mosaic in a prayer hall in Kefar Othnay (Megiddo, Israel), pictured with historian John Dickson. The inscription reads 'Akeptous, lover of God, dedicated this (communion) table in memorial of God Jesus Christ'.



Dr Greg Clarke
Bible Society Australia CEO

If you took the story of Easter away from Western art, the walls of our galleries would be full of empty canvasses.

One of the central motifs of Western art, literature and music is Passion Week — the events leading up to Jesus' trial, his crucifixion and burial, and his resurrection from the tomb. From the famous European Renaissance depictions of Christ hanging on the cross, to the moving scenes of Christ's burial (The Deposition) to the wonderfully colourful resurrection abstracts of Australia's John Coburn, the events of Easter seem to be perennially inspiring to artists.

Why is Easter imagery so potent? Why, of all the subject matter available to a painter, does he or she keep returning to this particular week in history? Surely it is because Easter deals with the most spine-tingling topic possible: death, judgement, and the possibility of surviving them both. The Easter story, in which Christ carries the burden of sin on his crucified shoulders before his death-conquering resurrection to new life, reaches into the deepest fears and desires of the human psyche. To see Christ hanging on the cross is to imagine ourselves suffering for our sin; to see him risen from the dead is to imagine our salvation and the hope of eternity.

There are few subjects as moving as the death and resurrection of Christ, and wonderful reminders of it can be seen all around us, in frames, calendars, monuments and church windows, if only we will look.



Edwin Judge
Emeritus Professor of History,
Macquarie University

Luke's preface signals the work as a systematic professional enquiry. Not an eye-witness, he has carefully checked the accounts of those who were. (He does not mind noting the frailty of some.) To the extraordinary events he brings matter-of-fact reporting, arranged and selected in the light of a powerful interpretation. One generation on, he is in a strong position to get to the heart of the matter. Any historian would recognize and envy this advantage.

As with the other three gospels, this one was kept because of its authentic quality, a commitment to truthfulness both in detail and in meaning. The tradition was later embellished with the imaginative reflections of those who like ourselves wish to know what the disciples did not (How is Jesus supposed to have got out of the tomb?), or simply want to air the human interest (What did Jesus ordinarily look like anyway?). That is how the saga might drift into myth or legend. But Luke presents a disarmingly plain history for events of such momentous consequence.



Peter Kaldor
Managing Director
City Bible Forum

Having understood the significance of Easter for the first time at the tail end of uni, I entered the fast paced world of merchant banking. I soon discovered how my new found Christian faith had enormous relevance for how I worked and related to my colleagues, clients and other associates. Doing deals is no doubt a huge adrenalin rush, but putting my trust in Jesus gave me a whole new perspective on life and what I should value.

Since working with City Bible Forum, I have met literally thousands of men and women who have gone through the same experiences as me. From corporate board rooms to cleaners, from the mail room to managing partner, the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection cuts across all divides.

If reading and reflecting on Easter in this booklet is your first serious, adult engagement with the Bible, then you are in very good company (including mine, of course!). Every year the City Bible Forum team meet city workers who are reading the Bible for the first time. This can be daunting at first, but with a little help from someone is often surprisingly simple. Contact us or seek out a Christian friend and ask to read the Bible with them. They will be very happy to help you, as was my friend Paul who first helped me.



Dr. John Dickson
Senior Research Fellow, Department of Ancient History,
Macquarie University
Founding Director, Centre for Public Christianity

The great tragedy at the heart of Easter, the crucifixion of Jesus as a claimed king or messiah, is attested by Christian and non-Christian sources of the ancient world and is regarded as 'beyond reasonable doubt' by all reputable historians today. The gospels themselves, and Luke in particular, were written within living memory of Jesus and have a style recognisable to modern specialists as first-century biography, not myth or metaphor. Only a dogmatic kind of scepticism can dodge the conclusion that Easter faith is grounded in historical realities.

To find out more please visit www.citybibleforum/theweek

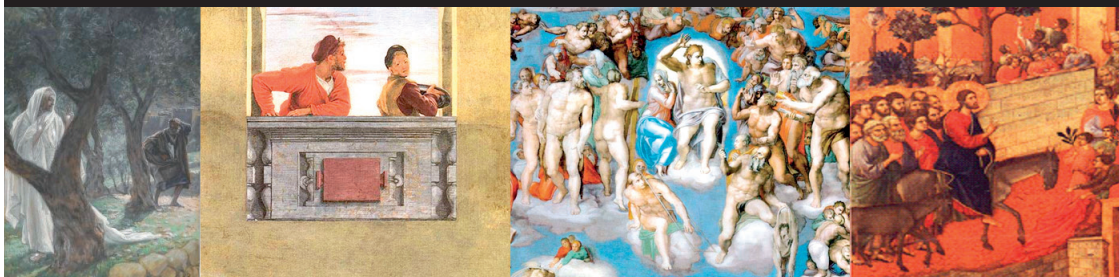
At the special website - www.citybibleforum.org/theweek - we have put together an interesting collection of free podcasts, videos, articles and a copy of Luke's complete biography on Jesus for you. You may also like to visit the website of Bible Society Australia to find out more about reading the Bible, www.biblesociety.org.au. We also recommend the website of the Centre for Public Christianity which engages prominent thinkers from around Australia and overseas on a wide range of topics suitable for anyone skeptical about Christianity, www.publicchristianity.org.

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Why is Easter so potent? Surely it is because Easter deals with the most spine-tingling topic possible: death, judgement, and the possibility of surviving them both.

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