



Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture



Use “The Scene” to introduce *Young Teen Bible school Lesson 5*.

The *New York Times* called her story a “remarkable book . . . [bearing] witness to the life in the ’hood that she escaped.” The newspaper raved, “Ms. Jones’s portraits of her family and friends are so sympathetic and unsentimental, so raw and tender and tough-minded, that it’s clear to the reader that whatever detachment she learned as a child did not impair her capacity for caring.” A week later the same publication called *Love and Consequences* “a complete fabrication.”

Love and Consequences was released as a nonfiction title. The book was supposed to be a memoir by Margaret P. Jones who described growing up as a half-white, half-Native-American foster child in gang-plagued Los Angeles. A few days later the truth was revealed. Margaret B. Jones is really Margaret “Peggy” Seltzer. Seltzer is not a former gang member of Native-American heritage. She did not grow up ducking bullets in South Central Los Angeles, getting her education on the streets. Rather, Seltzer grew up in suburban, solidly middle-class Sherman Oaks, California, and attended a private school.

This is not the first time fiction has masqueraded as nonfiction. In 1997, *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years* hit the bookshelves. The book claimed to be a true story of a Jewish refugee who escaped from the Nazis and was adopted by a pack of friendly wolves. The author, it was discovered, was not a refugee and not even Jewish. And there were no wolves.

In 1996, fiction writer Jeremiah “Terminator” LeRoy appeared on the literary scene. Although LeRoy wrote fiction, he claimed that his books revealed the truth of his life as an HIV-infected, homeless drug addict and male prostitute. Nearly a decade later, LeRoy turned out to be Laura Albert, a healthy, well-to-do middle-aged mother. A friend of Albert, fashion designer Savannah Knoop, played the part of LeRoy by wearing an elaborate disguise during public appearances.

So why does this happen? How have phony tales of the dark side of society been passed off as truth? Television writer David Mills (*Homicide, The Corner, ER, The Wire*) suggests that the blame lies with book editors. Mills argues that the largely white, upper-middle-class editors responsible for acquiring books for publication are nearly illiterate when it comes to life on the mean streets.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above news story to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

What have you heard about this controversial book? Why do you believe so many people who should know better are fooled like this?

What are some examples of false stories being passed off as the real thing? (Consider supermarket tabloids and Internet rumors, for example.) What are some ways we can discover whether or not such claims are true?

We are continually sorting through what we are told, deciding what is trustworthy and what is dubious at best. That includes questions about God and faith. Many religions make truth claims that are no more reliable than those of Margaret Seltzer. Today we will examine one of the most important accounts in Scripture—the crucifixion of Christ. How can we know whether or not this narrative is truly history, as it claims to be?