



6

Don't Change God's Word

Key Themes

- The Bible is the only inspired revelation from God.
- God's Word must be the absolute authority.

Key Passages

- Deuteronomy 18:20–22; Revelation 22:18–19; Galatians 1:6–9

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Differentiate between those who speak for God and those who are false prophets.
- Provide examples of religions that have added to or taken away from the Bible.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "How do you know whether or not the Book of Mormon is a revelation from God?"



Studying God's Word

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Despite claims of many modern prophets, the 66 books of the Bible remain the only written words that have come from God. The Bible must be the absolute authority to compare every thought against.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: A Different Gospel

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Students will compare statements from false prophets to the Bible.

- Print one A Different Gospel worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.
- Pencils



Optional Activity: Review Crossword Puzzle

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Students will complete a crossword puzzle to review many of the terms and ideas from Lessons 1–6.

- Print one Review Crossword Puzzle from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field . . . And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). Just as Satan cast doubt on God’s Word in the very beginning, the Word of God has been questioned, denied, changed, added to, and misinterpreted throughout history.

As you prepare to teach this week, meditate on the passages below. We are called to search the Scriptures to discover the truth—to be Bereans (see Acts 17:10–11). Your confidence and trust in God’s Word as your final authority will instill the same confidence in the students you teach.

Deuteronomy 4:2—“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”

Deuteronomy 12:32—“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

Deuteronomy 18:20–22—“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

Galatians 1:6–9—“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

And as we reach the Bible’s final chapter, we are given God’s assurance that it is complete as He warns that it must not be changed in any way.

Revelation 22:18–19—“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Tolerance—it’s a word we often hear in this culture. The attitude today is to be open-minded, accept everyone, be careful not to offend anyone, and accept all religions as equally true. If it works for you—it works! This is not an accurate understanding of tolerance, but a twisted view that comes from the post-modern mindset where people can construct their own truth. Real tolerance involves understanding the positions of others, knowing why you disagree, living alongside them, and confronting their false ideas with biblical truth. If we are not convinced that someone is wrong, why would we need to tolerate their different views?

As Christians, we are called to follow the example of Jesus Christ, who was not tolerant of false religions, but stood on the truth of God’s Word (e.g., John 3:34, 14:6, 17:3).

Is the Bible the only Word of God? Be assured, God’s Word needs no proof. God begins with the presumption that He exists (Genesis 1:1) and follows up with many texts that authenticate His Word (e.g., Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 119:160; John 17:17). He does, however, warn us against succumbing to empty deceit, traditions of men, and the principles of the world that are not of Christ (Colossians 2:8).

With this in mind let’s take a look at how some false religions blatantly deny the truth of God and the work of Jesus Christ.

We need to be very aware that there are many false teachings in the world today. And only God’s Word provides us with the information we need to reveal them for what they are. The Bible is the only Word of God.

View of Origins

Bible

God created all things in six, 24-hour days, about 6,000 years ago. All creatures, including man, were kinds. Sin, disease, sickness, and death were not part of this creation; they came as a result of the Fall.

Islam

The Koran teaches that Allah created all things, but it contradicts itself on the number of days. It also teaches that the first man and woman were created in Paradise but were later banished to earth after the fall into sin.

Mormonism

God created man physically after He created the earth. However, we had a pre-earth life, in which we existed as God’s “spirit children.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Watchtower Society teaches that each of the six creative days of God in Genesis 1 was 7,000 years long, and that the universe is billions of years old.

	Bible	Islam	Mormonism	Jehovah's Witnesses
View of Christ	Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, who became man to live a perfect life, to be mankind's substitute on the Cross, and to rise from the dead, defeating death.	Allah (God) created Jesus and appointed him to be a messenger to the Jewish people. The Koran does teach that Jesus was sinless but He was not God, and He did not die on the Cross.	Jesus is the spirit-brother to every man, and even Satan. Jesus is one of an endless number of gods and is a being separate from the Heavenly Father.	Jesus is the Son of God, but is a created being. Christ existed in a pre-human state as the Archangel Michael. Jesus died at his crucifixion and was resurrected as an invisible, non-material, glorious, spirit creature.
Sin and Salvation	Every person has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and His redeeming work on the Cross.	Salvation is possible after adherence to the Koran, as well as performing the five pillars of the Islamic faith. But even then, salvation is not guaranteed.	Sin was part of God's plan because without it mankind could not progress to become like God, know joy, or have children. Salvation is a combination of faith and works.	Human nature is universally sinful, because all humans inherit the original sin of Adam and Eve. Salvation comes by placing faith in Christ's sacrifice, being baptized as a Witness, and doing good works.
Life After Death	Mankind will live forever either in heaven or in hell. The only way for us to get to heaven is through faith in Christ.	Allah sends both righteous and unrighteous to hell unless they die in a holy war. But if their good works outweigh their bad, they should be admitted into Paradise. Paradise is only guaranteed to those who die in jihad (holy war).	Even after death, everyone has an opportunity to respond to the gospel. Heaven has three levels, and those who attain the highest level become gods, ruling and populating their own world.	There is no eternal hell; this is a false concept created by Satan to turn people away from belief in Jehovah. Unbelievers cease to exist at death (annihilation), while believers remain in death until the resurrection. Only 144,000 will go to heaven, while the rest will live in an earthly paradise.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

God presumed His existence and felt no need to prove it. His Word commences with, "In the beginning, God . . ." (Genesis 1:1), and that is how our history started.

Believers who have gone before us have demonstrated how much the Bible meant to them. They were willing to go to great sacrifices in order to spread the Word throughout the world in common languages because they knew it to be the only Word of God.

Consider John Wycliffe who was born in England in 1324. In those days, church leaders purposely kept ordinary people from the Scriptures. John Wycliffe declared that God's Word is for all people and he began a quest to produce the Scriptures in common English—handwritten from the Latin translations then available. These translations had to be read in secret and Wycliffe suffered persecution all of his life for his efforts.

John Huss, born in 1369 in Scotland, was another of God's servants. John Huss was intent on maintaining the Word of God as the authority over Christian doctrine, and he spoke boldly and courageously against the compromises he saw in the church such as altering the Lord's Supper and selling indulgences. As a result, he was burned at the stake—giving his life so the Word of God might remain the pure standard for the church.

German believers experienced similar persecution. When Martin Luther was born in 1483, the Bible was a very rare book and practically unknown. As he grew, so did his love for the Bible, God, and truth. Luther was aware that there were grave and unbiblical injustices in the church and God stirred his soul to action. On October 31, 1517, he posted his complaints against the church authori-

ties—jeopardizing his life to defend the Bible as the only Word of God.

At the time Luther was translating God's Word into German, God also stirred William Tyndale (1483–1536) to desire that the Word be available in the English language. This was a terrible time in England, and Tyndale's spirit, boldness, and faithfulness to God's Word put his life in constant danger. Yet he pursued his God-given vocation and eventually did complete a translation of the New Testament—the first translation into English from the original Greek. Ultimately, God's will was for Tyndale's life to end in a martyr's death.

These are but a few of the saints who have gone before us to preserve, protect, and provide the Word of God. It is the only Word of God—and around the world people are still giving up their lives to honor its integrity.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Father, thank you for preserving your Word and allowing it to be so available. Please keep me alert to those people around me who have been led astray by false teachings and guard me against their influence. Guide me to be ready always to give an answer for the hope and knowledge that I have in Christ Jesus as I have learned from your Word. Speak through me to guide my students to that same hope.

Review

Last week we talked about the collection of books we know as the New Testament and how it came to be.

? Who remembers the common thread that tied the New Testament authors together?

They were all recording eyewitness accounts.

? What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of the New Testament? *The Spirit brought to remembrance the words and deeds of Christ so that these men could record the inspired texts that were collected as the New Testament.*

? Does anyone remember the approximate date of the final New Testament writings?

Most of the books were completed before AD 70, but the Gospel of John and Revelation were likely written around AD 90.

? Why was it necessary to make a list of the New Testament canon? *False teachers were*

presenting their own writings as Scripture and editing the accepted Scriptures to their own benefit. Organizing a canon was necessary to respond to these false ideas.

? What claims about the New Testament do we need to be prepared to respond to in order to defend the faith? *Skeptics often claim that the books were chosen by the church councils to represent their views and give them the authority over the people. They also claim that there were many books that should have been included but were not, or that the books and letters were written hundreds of years after their actual recording. There are many manuscript supports that demonstrate these claims to be false.*

? Did making a list of the books of the Bible make them Scripture? *No! These writings were Scripture and carried their own authority. It was their*

authority that demanded they be included in the list, not the other way around.



➤ As students arrive, provide slips of paper to mark Deuteronomy 18:20–22; Galatians 1:6–9; Revelation 22:18–19.

➤ Write on the board, “How do you know whether or not the Book of Mormon is a revelation from God?”

Deuteronomy 18:20–22



Studying God's Word

Our lesson today is going to extend our discussion of what belongs in the canon of Scripture into the modern era. There are many who claim that the Bible is not enough and that more revelation has come to mankind from God. Knowing how to test the claims of these self-described prophets is the goal of our lesson today, and we will examine several of them to practice our biblical discernment.

READ THE WORD

? We are going to start back in the Old Testament and look at how God told the Israelites to judge the prophets. Who would like to read Deuteronomy 18:20–22? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now, let's ask some questions of the text to make sure we look at all of the important facets.

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

- ? **Who is speaking in this passage?** *God.*
- ? **Who is the audience?** *God is speaking to Moses who is recording the statements for the children of Israel.*
- ? **What identifies a prophet according to this passage?** *A prophet speaks on behalf of God.*
- ? **How are the people to know if what the prophet has spoken is from God?** *If the prophecy does not come to pass, it is a false prophecy.*
- ? **In what other name can a prophet speak?** *In the name of other gods.*
- ? **What should happen to a prophet who speaks on his own authority but claims he is speaking for God?** *He should be put to death.*
- ? **What word is repeated in verses 20 and 22?** *Presumes/presumptuously.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *Prophets who claim to speak on behalf of God, but are shown to be false, are to be put to death.*
- ? **What does the passage tell us about God?** *He is serious about the words that He gives to His prophets.*
- ? **Are there other passages in Scripture that relate to this passage?** *Deuteronomy 13:1–5 speaks of the same sentence for anyone who tries to draw anyone away from serving God alone. Jeremiah 23:25–34 also carries a similar message. There are many other passages that might be mentioned by the students.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let's talk about the main idea of knowing who is indeed speaking for God.

- ? **Based on this passage, how do we know if a prophet is truly speaking on behalf of God?** *What he speaks in the name of God will come to pass or be demonstrated to be true.*
- ? **This definition of prophecy seems to focus on future-telling. Is the role of a prophet always to tell the future?** *No; a prophet's role is to speak the words of God. This could be a calling to repentance, forecasting of events, providing new information about God, or doing other specific roles.*
- ? **Is there anything about the language in this passage that makes it hard to understand, such as figures of speech, difficult words, or other difficulties?** *The passage is very straightforward and leaves little room for questioning the intent of the passage.*
- ? **Why does God demand such a strict punishment for false prophets?** *His Word reflects His character. If someone speaks presumptuously on God's behalf, he is speaking against God's character. Leading people astray is also a serious concern here.*

Since God takes this offense seriously, we should take it seriously as well. It is a very serious matter when someone claims to have special revelation from God. We need to have a clear understanding of who is speaking for God and who is not; those who make false predictions are false prophets.

If time allows, you could give some specific examples of false predictions made by cult leaders and false prophets.



READ THE WORD

Revelation 22:18–19

Last week we looked at Revelation 22:18–19 in our discussion on the closing of the canon. Continuing from that discussion, we are going to look at some of the modern prophets who claim to have spoken on behalf of God. Let's read that passage together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is speaking?** *God is speaking through the Apostle John.*
- ? **What two things are prohibited in this passage?** *Adding to or taking from the words.*
- ? **What are the two consequences mentioned?** *Receiving the plagues and being removed from the Book of Life.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *Don't add to or take away from God's words.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let's look at how we interpret this in light of some modern claims of revelation from God.

- ? **Who can think of some writings that many believe are equal to or greater than the 66 books of the Bible?** *Mormons regard the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants as revelation equivalent to the Bible. Muslims believe the Koran is revealed from Allah through Mohammed. Jehovah's Witnesses have the New World Translation of the Bible. Seventh Day Adventists traditionally held to the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White (but that attitude is changing within some churches identifying as SDA). Roman Catholics set certain pronouncements from the Popes as equivalent to Scripture. Many other cults have various writings and prophets that are set equal to or above the Bible.*

? Is it always easy to tell that a prophet or a writing is not from God? *The doctrinal differences are often very subtle and that is why so many are drawn into false religions. They often use the Bible as support or use biblical language, but with different meanings.*

As we discuss these ideas, please keep in mind that we are not trying to put down any individual, but to directly challenge ideas that go against the clear teachings of the Bible. These books are all examples of ideas that have been added to Scripture, or teachings that have ignored and set aside the clear truths in the Bible. This is another mark of false prophets and their teachings.

The Watchtower Society—most of you know them as Jehovah’s Witnesses—is a group that has rewritten the Bible to fit their own doctrines. One of the classic changes comes in John 1:1 where they have changed the text to read “. . . and the Word was a God.” This denies the deity of Christ by adding to God’s Word. Along with adding to Scripture, their prophets predicted the end of the world and the Second Coming in 1914, 1925, and 1975. These individuals must be identified as false prophets, because their predictions did not come true.

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, also revised the Bible—rewriting many sections to fit his twisted doctrines. So he is guilty of both adding to the canon and taking away from what God had revealed. In Mormonism, and most other cults, additional revelation by a charismatic leader is very common.

The Koran was recorded by scribes after they heard the teachings of Mohammed. Mohammed claimed to have received the messages from the angel Gabriel who was delivering the very words of Allah. We must understand the Koran, written in the seventh century, was an attempt to “correct” the Bible by adding additional written revelation from a false prophet.

Any teacher who suggests that what is contained in the Bible is not enough or needs to be corrected is a false prophet. The Bible is sufficient, and any claims to the contrary are attacks on the very character of God.





A Different Gospel

MATERIALS

- A Different Gospel worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

The students will be comparing the truth found in God's Word to some statements from false prophets to demonstrate that their words are not inspired by God.

We have used Hebrews 6:18 and Titus 1:2 to demonstrate that God cannot lie. We have also established that the Holy Spirit inspired the written text of Scripture and the words spoken by the prophets. If the prophets were speaking the very words of God, and God cannot lie, then the words of the prophets must be true—the prophets cannot lie when under the inspiration of the Spirit. This gives us a third way to test the truthfulness of claims from modern prophets: if anything that a prophet says contradicts the Bible, then that prophet cannot be speaking on behalf of God.

With that, let's look at some statements from those who have claimed to be providing new revelation from God, and test their ideas against Scripture—our ultimate authority. We could pick lots of different examples, but for this lesson we are looking at three main false religions: Islam, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In Galatians 1:6–9, Paul rebukes the church in Galatia for following after a false gospel. The purity of the gospel is the core of the

Christian faith. If anyone teaches against the gospel, even an angel, they are to be accursed. Contradicting the clear words of Scripture is a mark of a false prophet or teacher. Any attacks on the person and work of Christ are attacks on the gospel. This worksheet contains statements from three sources that claim to be prophetic. Compare those statements to the Bible passages given, and we will discuss the conclusions in a few minutes. *Organize the students into small groups and discuss the answers as they finish.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? **How did these allegedly prophetic claims stand up when compared to the Bible?** *The quote from the Koran calls it blasphemy to believe that Jesus is God—while the passage in Colossians affirms the deity of Christ. The quote from the Book of Mormon says that salvation comes from a mix of grace and works—while Ephesians 2 makes it clear that salvation has nothing to do with works. The quote from the JW's says that Christ did not have a physical body after His Resurrection—while the Bible makes it clear that His resurrected body was gone from the tomb, handled by the disciples, and a key component of the pure gospel. We can easily conclude that all of these are false prophets; as is anyone who claims to speak for God, but contradicts His truth.*

I hope that you can see how it is important to compare the claims of those who would call themselves prophets to what the Bible actually says. A true prophet of God cannot speak what is against the clearly revealed Word of God.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We have examined three ways to test the claims of the various writings that have been produced through the centuries. These tests allow us to clearly distinguish between those that are the Word of God and those that are not.

- Does it make false predictions?
- Does it add to or take away from the 66 books of the Bible?
- Does it make statements that contradict the Bible?

Have the students fill in the blanks on the bottom of their A Different Gospel worksheets.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Making claims that the Bible is the only book that is from God is a very unpopular and dangerous thing in our society. Most people would tell you that all of the religious books contain truth, and we can take all of the good things out of them and combine them in a way that is meaningful to us. They may believe that Jesus, Mohammed, Gandhi, Buddha, and the like are all good teachers, but none of them were totally right. This belief that "all paths lead to God" flies in the face of the biblical worldview. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30). And Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He claimed to be the **only** way to the Father, **not** one of many. God is the exclusive God, and He holds the exclusive claim to truth.

If you were having a discussion with someone, and you steered the conversation toward the gospel, you would need to point to the Bible as the only true source of truth.

- ? How would you respond if someone says that they follow a different prophet who has heard from God, and that the Bible needs to be reinterpreted correctly for us to understand it (e.g., Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses)? *Ultimately, this comes down to an issue of authority; false predictions and internal contradictions can be used. Looking for internal inconsistencies will be addressed in Lesson 7.*
- ? Many religious people use biblical words, like atonement and forgiveness, but they apply unbiblical definitions to these words. Which of the three categories of error, or tests of discernment, does this fit into and why is it so dangerous? *Refer to worksheet. This would fall under adding to or taking away from God's Word. Scripture is used to interpret Scripture, so we must derive our definitions from the Bible. Changing the definitions has the effect of changing the actual meaning of the Bible. This is so dangerous because people can be talking about how important the atonement is to them, but*

they have an unbiblical understanding of who Jesus is and what He accomplished on the Cross. It is said that the best lies are full of truth.

- ? **How do we guard against being influenced by language that sounds biblical but carries different definitions?** *Asking probing questions is important to get to the heart of what the other person is saying and what they really mean.*
- ? **If a prophet claims to be speaking for God but is found to be a false prophet, what/who is the source of the prophecies?** *If not from God, then these prophecies must be coming from other gods (Deuteronomy 18:20). 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 points to Satan who transforms himself into an angel of light to deceive people. His ministers, the demons, are the power behind the false gods that promote these false prophecies.*
- ? **Why is it important to be able to discern who false prophets are?** *For the sake of the purity of the gospel and the acclaim of Christ, we must prevent ourselves, and others, from being swayed by false teachers. Ultimately, the eternal state of men and women is at stake, and we must do this out of compassion for their souls and for the glory of God.*



Review Crossword Puzzle (Optional)

MATERIALS

- Review Crossword Puzzle for each student
- Review Crossword Puzzle answer key

INSTRUCTIONS

Let's review some of the concepts we have learned over the last six weeks. The answers

for this crossword puzzle come from **Scriptures and concepts we have been learning.** *Distribute Review Crossword Puzzles. Have students work either with a partner or by themselves. When most students have finished, go over the answers. If there is not time in class for this activity, send it home with the students and encourage them to bring it back completed next week.*



MEMORY VERSE

Psalms 19:7–11 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God that He has given us His Word that we might know who speaks on His behalf.
- Pray that each person will examine the things they hear against the Bible's clear testimony.