



New Testament Attacks

6

Key Theme

- The Bible is inspired by God.

Key Passages

- John 14:26; Hebrews 1:1–4

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe why we can trust that the New Testament is reliable.
- Identify false gospels based on their features.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Are there other books that belong in the New Testament?”



Studying God’s Word

The New Testament is God’s Word. There were also false writings that appeared soon after the close of the New Testament canon, but these were recognized as not being consistent with the other writings, and were thus rejected by the early church.

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



Activity: Why 27? Video

Students will watch a presentation by Pastor Brian Edwards on the formation of the New Testament canon.

- Why 27? Video from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Why 27? Video Notes from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student
- Pencils
- Computer and monitor or projector



Activity: Other Gospels?

Students will evaluate sections from several pseudepigraphal (false) writings to get a sense of the types of errors that made these writings easy to spot as not belonging to the New Testament canon.

- Other Gospels? worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

In previous lessons we have talked about how we can trust the New Testament and the four Gospels in particular. Having a firm grasp on the inspiration of the Scriptures is a very important part of our faith in God. What we know about God is primarily through what He has chosen to reveal about Himself in the Bible. In Hebrews 1:1–4 we read

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

The revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament is all that God has given to us. We need to trust that revelation or we really cannot know who Christ is and what He has done for us. As discussed previously, Jesus promised the apostles that “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). The events recorded in the Gospels were written down under the direction of the Holy Spirit, not merely from the fallible memories of those who experienced those things.

This point is obvious when we consider the events surrounding the trial of Jesus before Pilate. In Matthew 27 we see details of what occurred “behind the scenes” on the day of the Crucifixion. In verse 19, we learn that Pilate’s wife sent a note to him about a dream she had. Matthew had no access to Pilate’s court, so the only way we can know about this note and its contents is through the omniscient Holy Spirit revealing those

things to Matthew as he wrote the inspired original autograph of his Gospel. Likewise, we often “hear” the thoughts of people when Jesus interacts with the Pharisees and others (e.g., Matthew 9:1–8). To accept these things, we must acknowledge the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit in revealing these things to the writers. Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and the Holy Spirit is God, what is revealed by the Spirit is truth.

Another very important aspect of trusting the New Testament relates to how we live our lives. Beyond the Gospels, the New Testament contains many doctrinal truths that we use as a guide in our daily lives. In his epistles, Paul offers some very practical applications of doctrines as he seeks to guide the saints in Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, and other places. His guidance for them gives us an anchor for living a life that is pleasing to God. But what if Paul didn’t write those things? Or what if Paul was just giving his opinions on those issues? Paul relates his authority as an apostle many times, so we can trust that what he tells us is authoritative and from the Lord.

These and other claims made by many people who want to discredit the New Testament are false. As we acknowledge the doctrines of the inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture, we set our feet firmly on the truth of God’s Word. If we look to any other source, we have a foundation of sinking sand. If God has been pleased to reveal these truths through the apostles and others nearly 2,000 years ago, we can be sure that He has providentially preserved it for us today. We can trust the New Testament, and the attacks against it will continue to fail because God is faithful.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

As people have attacked the New Testament through the millennia, there have been many different motives and tactics. Some of the earliest attacks came as false teachers tried to edit out certain portions of the Gospels. For example, in the second century Marcion insisted that his edited version of Luke and ten of Paul’s epistles were the only authoritative writings, but he was denounced as a heretic for that and other theological reasons. Others

later began writing false gospels and attempted to pass them off as parallel accounts of the life of Jesus.

These false writings, or pseudepigrapha, were threats to the pure doctrine that had been recorded through the apostles of Jesus and represented a false authority. Another major influence came from the Gnostics who claimed to have special knowledge about God. (The Geek word *gnosis* means “to know.” Our word “agnostic” means that you don’t know or can’t know about something, especially in reference to the things of God.) Some of these Gnostic distortions appeared in the form of letters that claimed to be from the apostles and “gospels” that filled in the gaps of the true Gospel accounts. As you can imagine, the writings that were not inspired by the Holy Spirit contain clear contradictions, historical inaccuracies, and some truly fanciful claims about Jesus.

All of these false writings and attempts to overthrow the pure doctrine with “missing” knowledge or knowledge obtained in special ways were attacks on the good news of Jesus Christ. The early church had to guard against these false ideas so that these corrupt teachings did not lead the flock of God astray to another gospel or another Jesus (Galatians 1:6–10). As the true writings were circulated among the churches and those writings were collected, there was general agreement as to those writings that were authoritative. To our regret, the early churches didn’t keep lists of the books they looked to as their canon. We have partial lists like the Muratorian Canon list which show us that the core of the New Testament was recognized and affirmed as early as the second century AD. Contrary to the claims of many skeptics, the Bible was not written or assembled at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Additionally, the New Testament quotes preserved in the writings of the early Church Fathers (the Ante-Nicene Fathers) show what they viewed as authoritative Scripture.

Throughout the history of the church, there were other attempts to discredit and silence the teaching of the New Testament. During certain periods, the Roman Catholic Church, which controlled most of Europe politically and religiously, forbid the reading and translation of the Bible in the languages of the people. During the Reformation, the Bible was translated into German and English outside the false author-

ity of Rome and there were attempts, ultimately in vain, to destroy those Bibles. Men like Luther, Wycliffe, and Tyndale faced much peril to put God’s Word into the hands of His people.

Later, the attacks came from intellectual liberals who sought to overthrow the authority of Scripture by discrediting the transmission of the text and turning much of Scripture into allegory rather than historical truth. Using rationalism and an anti-supernatural bias, these critics, many working from Germany, suggested the Gospels weren’t really written by the apostles. Some extracted the miracles and even the existence of Jesus as a historical figure, let alone the Son of God.

Throughout all of these attacks, a faithful remnant has guarded the treasure found in the Word of God—the 66 books of the Bible. The message of the hope found in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ remains intact. Through God’s providence in protecting His revelation to us and the faithful work of many through the centuries who have fought to preserve the truth, we have an absolutely reliable copy of the writings originally inspired by the Holy Spirit. You can trust the writings we have today and the message written in them.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Jesus, living Word, my Savior—John said he beheld your glory, and you were full of grace and truth. Thank you for your grace, so undeserved, and your gift of truth—that I continue to learn from. I am confident in the Gospels and the way you worked in the four different authors you ordained to write down everything we need to know about your life, death, Resurrection, and ascension. As I teach, help me inspire great confidence in your Word. And may my students walk away from this lesson better equipped to answer their friends’ questions about you and your Word. In all we do, may we glorify you!

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Over the last five lessons we have looked at different aspects of the New Testament. After working through some of those initial ideas, we are going to pause today to talk more about how we can know that the New Testament we have today is the reliable and complete Word of God.

? **Who can give a short synopsis of why we have four Gospels?** *Each of the Gospels was written by one of four different authors with a slightly different angle and audience in mind. Even with the differences, these four accounts all give an accurate representation of Jesus. Together they give us the fullness of the revelation of the work of Jesus while on earth.*

God's sovereignty is evident in these different perspectives on the life of Jesus. Additionally, we have the other 23 books of the New Testament as further revelation about what it means to live as a Christian, trusting in Jesus alone for salvation.

Today we are going to continue looking at the veracity of the New Testament before we move on to a more detailed study of the life of Jesus. However, our lesson today is not going to draw directly from the Bible. We are going to listen to teaching from Pastor Brian Edwards on the reliability of the New Testament.



Why 27? Video

MATERIALS

- Why 27? video from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Why 27? Video Notes for each student
- Pencils
- Computer and monitor or projector

INSTRUCTIONS

You will be showing a 35-minute video taken from a longer video, "Why 66?" The video clip for this activity starts where Pastor Edwards begins speaking about the New Testament text. The video file is on the Resource DVD-ROM in both mp4 and wmv file formats.

Pass out the Why 27? Video Notes to each student. We are going to watch a segment of a video. The first part of the video covered the Old Testament, and we are beginning with the discussion of the New Testament. You can

jot down some notes on this worksheet as we watch. *Show the video.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

What we just heard is a really short explanation of how the New Testament has withstood the attacks from many different directions. We have an absolutely reliable copy of the Scriptures in our hands.

? **What was the most important thing you learned in this video?** *Discuss various answers with the students.*

? **What idea do you want to learn more about after watching this video?** *Discuss various answers and offer students direction as to where they might find more information. Remember that more resources are available online at the Online Resource Page.*





Studying God's Word

Start this lesson by viewing the Why 27? video. Then proceed with the section below.

► Write on the board, "Are there other books that belong in the New Testament?"

READ THE WORD

Let's read Hebrews 1:1–4 together before we move on to one more activity. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Hebrews 1:1–4

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? Who is the focus of this passage? *Jesus, the Son, is the focus.*
- ? How is Jesus described in this passage? *He is the Creator of all things, the heir of all things, He is the sustainer of all things, He is the image of God reflecting all His glory, and He is sitting at the right hand of the Father having completed His work of redemption.*
- ? What does verse 2 tell us about how the Father has revealed Himself to us in these last days? *He has spoken to us through His Son.*

SOVEREIGN

Discover the Truth

That is a lot of information about the person and work of Jesus packed into a few verses.

- ? What attributes of God are displayed in this passage? *Many different attributes could be drawn out of this short passage. God's sovereignty and power are surely displayed, along with other aspects.*

OMNIPOTENT

ETERNAL

WISE

Connecting this to John 14:26, a passage we talked about a few lessons ago, Jesus passed His authority to communicate the message of the gospel to His disciples. And just before He ascended to heaven, He sent them to the world with the message of the gospel.

John 14:26





Other Gospels?

MATERIALS

- Other Gospels? worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students examine the two samples from the false gospels and discuss them.

Not long after Jesus had ascended, people began to distort the truth. As the gospel was spreading outward from Jerusalem, there was conflict. Some of those attacks were in the form of false writings as Pastor Edwards described in the video. So let's look at a couple of examples, and see if you can tell the difference between the false and the true.

On this worksheet there is an activity titled Other Gospels? Read over the two examples and answer the questions in small groups. Then we will discuss them in a few minutes. *Have the students examine the examples in small groups.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's talk about what you concluded about these two texts.

1. What did your group conclude about the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*: truthful or pseudepigraphal? *Discuss the conclusions.*

2. What passages of Scripture would you use to refute this false writing about Jesus? *While there are many passages that could be used, the most important concept to point to is the sinless life Jesus lived. If Jesus had sinned by killing a boy who pushed Him,*

He could not be the spotless Lamb who was sacrificed in our place. One of the key passages would be 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 2:18–25, and it's allusion to Isaiah 53 are also helpful in demonstrating the sinless Savior.

It seems that this was a very early writing since Irenaeus mentions it in his book *Against Heresies* in AD 185. But it contradicts what we know about Jesus from the Bible. It was recognized as false very early and would never have been considered as part of the canon despite its claim to be written by the Apostle Thomas.

3. What about the *Gospel of Judas*. Is it legitimate? *Discuss the conclusions.*

4. What passages of Scripture would you use to refute this false writing about Jesus?

Jesus is never recorded as laughing at the disciples regarding prayer (Luke 11); the disciples would not have been blaspheming Jesus in their hearts (Mark 8:29–30); phrases like "your God" just don't ring true coming from the mouth of Jesus (Matthew 6:1–6); Judas becomes the hero in this story when he was the traitor of Jesus (Luke 22:47–48); and Jesus is not from the immortal realm of Barbelo, but He is the eternal Creator God (Hebrews 1:1–4). Barbelo is the Gnostic female "god" who was one of the emanations of the forces of their Gnostic view of the creator god.

This book was also mentioned by Irenaeus, so it has a very early origin as well. It is this type of writing that many skeptics believe was excluded from the Bible improperly when the canon was "formalized" by the Council of Nicaea. I hope you can see how silly this accusation is. These writings have no authority, and we can dismiss them as the frauds that they are.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God's Word has been under attack since Satan first questioned what God said to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan's attacks on the Word continue today in the form of attacks on the New Testament writings. The early attacks by the Gnostics and other false teachers are being used today to continue the attack. All of these are part of the spiritual battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. When we know that we are on the side of the King of kings, we know that we can trust Him to win the battle. As we confront those who spread falsehoods and try to discredit God's Word in various ways, we can be confident that God has given us His Word, and we can trust it.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? It seems like every year there are new documentaries, movies, or major magazine articles that introduce some challenge to the truthfulness of the New Testament. How do you typically respond to those types of claims when you hear them? *Discuss various answers, and allow students to express any doubts or past experiences.*
- ? In what areas do you still have questions about the accuracy or transmission of the New Testament? *Take this opportunity to allow students to ask questions so that real answers can be sought. Many people suppress their questions because they don't want to be seen as doubting the Bible. This can lead to real doubts in the future that can have dreadful consequences. Be willing to draw out ideas and help find answers to the questions the students have. Talk about different resources that can be helpful in answering these questions.*
- ? Movies and books like *The Da Vinci Code* become very popular in our culture, and people take them as truth. But these are almost always based on false ideas that get presented as fact. How can we use these types of books and films as springboards for sharing the gospel? *Even if we have not seen the films or read the books, we can ask questions about them and draw out the main ideas. These questions will likely expose many false ideas that can then be compared to the Bible or to an actual study of the sources used.*
- ? Now that you have read a few small portions of some of the false gospels, how does that influence your confidence in the Bible as the Word of God? *Discuss various answers.*





MEMORY VERSE

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Have students say the memory verse aloud for the class. Next week you will begin learning a new memory verse.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

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

- Thank God for preserving and guarding His Word for us.
- Praise God for His faithfulness to man through the centuries.
- Ask God for boldness and wisdom in sharing the truth of the gospel with those who doubt.