

March 7
Lesson 1 (NIV)

PROPHET OF DELIVERANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 77:11–20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 12:28–50;
Deuteronomy 18:15–22

Deuteronomy 18:15–22

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”

¹⁷ The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

²¹ You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” ²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a mes-

sage the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.



KEY VERSE

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.
—Deuteronomy 18:15

PROPHETS FAITHFUL TO GOD'S COVENANT

Unit 1: Faithful Prophets

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what God said about the prophet and message to come.
2. Explain how Moses' words were intended to guide Israel as God's covenant

people.

3. Prepare a set of guidelines for distinguishing true from false teaching today.

Torah *Tor-uh.*

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Time to Step Aside

B. Lesson Context

I. Authority (Deuteronomy 18:15–18)

A. Raised Up by the Lord (v. 15)

What Can and Can't Change

B. Requested by the People (vv. 16–18)

II. Accountability (Deuteronomy 18:19–22)

A. To Listen and Obey (v. 19)

B. To Punish False Prophets (v. 20)
Deadly Prophets

C. To Test Any Claim (vv. 21–22)

Conclusion

A. Plan for the Future

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Asherah *Uh-she-ruh.*

Baal *Bay-ul.*

Balaam *Bay-lum.*

Balak *Bay-lack.*

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.*

Horeb *Ho-reb.*

Moabites *Mo-ub-ites.*

Pentateuch *Pen-ta-teuk.*

Septuagint *Sep-too-ih-jent.*

Sinai *Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.*

Introduction

A. Time to Step Aside

In January 2019, fans of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team received a shock: Marty Brennaman, the popular radio voice of the Reds, announced that he was retiring from broadcasting following the 2019 season. That season marked the 46th year that Brennaman brought the play-by-play action of the Reds to countless fans.

Brennaman became somewhat emotional as he announced his retirement. And who wouldn't understand that? To be at *any* job for 46 years is an admirable accomplishment. Brennaman had seen the Reds at their best (watching “the Big Red Machine” in the 1970s) and at their weaker moments (the 1980s, when the team did not make it to the post season).

He expressed his gratitude to the fans for their support through the years, acknowledging that he could never have achieved what he had without their backing. At the time of Brennaman's announcement, it was not yet clear who would succeed him as the primary radio voice of the Reds. But there was no doubt that the individual would have some extremely large shoes to fill.

Moses had led the children of Israel for 40 years, guiding them through such triumphant moments as the parting of the Red Sea. But he also led as he wandered with them in the wilderness as he shared their

consequence (but not their guilt, except for the incident described in [Deuteronomy 32:51](#)) of unbelief and failure to trust God. Then it was time for a transition in leadership. What respective roles would God and the people have in this transition?

B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson begins a new quarter of studies titled "Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant." Often when people think of the prophets, they think of prophetic books of the Old Testament. These are frequently divided into Major Prophets (5 books) and Minor Prophets (12 books), based on the length of these books (except Lamentations, which is "major" by association with the prophet Jeremiah).

There were, however, many other prophets besides those who wrote books that are part of the Bible. Today's study comes from the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of what is often called the Pentateuch, the Torah, or the five books of Law. (See the Lesson Context of lesson 2 for a discussion of the 5-12-5-5-12 arrangement of the Old Testament books. Moses spoke the contents of the book ([Deuteronomy 1:1](#)) and recorded it ([31:9](#), [22](#), [24](#)). This same book concludes with the declaration that since the book's writing, "no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" ([34:10](#)). Thus Moses was a prophet of the Lord as well as the lawgiver to God's covenant people.

The title "Deuteronomy" comes from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of

the Old Testament. It means "second [giving of the] law." This is fitting because the book witnesses to Moses' farewell speech to the second generation of Israelites. He was preparing them to cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land, and they needed to hear the law for the context of their generation ([Deuteronomy 1:1–8](#)).

In its function as "second [giving of the] law," Deuteronomy repeats contents from previous instruction to the people (compare [Exodus 20:1–17](#); [Deuteronomy 5:1–21](#)). At the same time, some of the material had special relevance to those who were to enter the promised land and drive out its inhabitants (see chapter 20).

[Deuteronomy 18](#), from which today's lesson is drawn, is the climax of a series of instructions concerning various leadership positions that would offer guidance to God's people. Reading the directives for a king gives a sense of how different a king in Israel was to act compared to those who ruled other nations ([17:14–20](#)).

I. Authority

([DEUTERONOMY 18:15–18](#))

A. Raised Up by the Lord (v. 15)

15. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

While Moses did not specifically identify this *prophet*, he did offer some distinguishing characteristics. First, the prophet would

be *from among you, from your fellow Israelites*, a member of the covenant people. For this reason, the one to come could be expected to be faithful to God’s law and not attempt to lead the people into idolatry (see [Deuteronomy 18:20](#), below).

Second, the prophet would be *like* Moses in certain respects; this characterization is clarified later (see [Deuteronomy 18:18](#), below). The command *you must listen* implies the third characteristic: that the prophet would be someone who had authority (compare [Mark 1:22](#)), someone to whom the people needed to listen to and obey.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you improve guardrails in terms of whom you will listen to and whom you won’t?

Digging Deeper

How do passages such as [Jeremiah 27:9–15](#) and [2 Timothy 4:3–4](#) help you answer this?

Older versions of the Bible capitalize the word *prophet*. But that procedure is not reflected in the Hebrew text, which does not have separate upper- and lower-case letters. Even so, calling Moses a prophet reflects the fact that Moses’ words had not lost their significance by the time of Jesus. For instance, a question directed at John the Baptist was, “Are you the Prophet?” ([John 1:21](#)), which John promptly denied before pointing to Christ ([1:26–27](#); compare [1:24](#)). Peter and Stephen quoted [Deuteronomy 18:15](#) in [Acts 3:22](#) and [7:37](#), respectively, in declaring its

ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

An earlier fulfillment, closer at hand for Moses’ audience, was found in the man Joshua. He was the one who became the leader of Israel after Moses’ death ([Deuteronomy 3:28](#); [31:1–8](#)). When the people listened to him, things went well (example: [Joshua 6](#); see lesson 2). But when they trusted their own human nature, unpleasant consequences followed (example: [Joshua 7](#)). The names *Joshua* and *Jesus* both mean “the Lord is salvation” (see [Lesson Context](#) for lesson 2).

WHAT CAN AND CAN’T CHANGE

When I was a child, refrigerators and stoves were white. In the 1960s when my wife and I purchased appliances for our new house, avocado green and harvest gold were the favored colors. We chose harvest gold, then replaced them in the 1990s with a lighter shade called bisque.

In the current century, black and stainless steel are popular, along with a nostalgic resurgence of white. For the last few years, “slate”—gray, in other words—has been *the* color in home decorating, from floors to walls, cabinets, and now appliances. Regarding matters of cultural taste, change seems to be the only constant.

Cultural change affects the church. Changing leadership styles, worship formats, and architectural preferences are evidence of this. But what never changes is the word of God. To put it succinctly, methods change but the message doesn’t. Moses’

successor was to be like him in the sense that their messages from God would be 100 percent in unison. But the successor may or may not have a personal style like that of Moses. How can we do better in the church at distinguishing changeable methods from the unchangeable message? Perhaps [1 Corinthians 9:20–22](#); [2 Peter 2:1](#); and [1 John 4:1](#) are good places to start.

—C. R. B.

B. Requested by the People (vv. 16–18)

16. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”

This promise of a coming prophet was rooted in a request made by the Israelites when *God* spoke to them *at Horeb* (another name for Mount Sinai; compare [Exodus 19:11](#); [Malachi 4:4](#)). After God spoke, the people expressed extreme fear and trepidation at hearing *the voice of God* in that terrifying setting. They pleaded with Moses to speak to them instead of having the Lord do so, lest they die ([Exodus 20:19–21](#)).

They had good reasons to be afraid. God had commanded the people to gather at the foot of that mountain and had given strict commandments regarding how close they could get to it—with dire consequences for disobedience ([Exodus 19:12–13, 20–24](#)). The scene had been marked by a mighty display of thunder, lightning, *fire*, smoke, the deafening sound of a trumpet, and the shaking of the mountain itself ([19:16–18](#)). God then

spoke to the people what we call the Ten Commandments ([20:1–17](#)).

17. The LORD said to me: “What they say is good.

This further summarizes what the Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai ([Deuteronomy 5:27–28](#)). Because of the people’s legitimate fear of the Lord, Moses continued to serve as the mediator between God and the people.

18. “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.”

While this verse clearly anticipates Joshua’s role in Israel (see [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), above), the Lord also pointed to spiritual leadership beyond both Moses and Joshua. God would ensure that the people did not have an excuse to imitate the nations as those nations sought to divine God’s desires by forbidden means (see [18:9–14](#)). Prophets chosen by God would provide access to the *words* of the Lord.

All legitimate prophets spoke only what the Lord told them (example: [1 Kings 22:14](#); see lesson 9). They proclaimed the words of God boldly, often at the risk of their own lives. The Old Testament prophets foreshadowed the ultimate prophet, Jesus—the one who became “God with us” ([Matthew 1:22–23](#)). Jesus conveyed God’s words as none of Jesus’ predecessors ever could. And since John the Baptist was “more than a prophet” ([Luke 7:26](#)), how much greater in that sense was Jesus himself ([Matthew 21:11; 16:13–16](#)). Moses’ words foreshadowed the

many prophets God would send, leading ultimately to Jesus' own ministry.

What Do You Think?

What strategies can you implement to ensure that you speak words that have God's approval?

Digging Deeper

Which of [Job 42:7](#); [Luke 6:45](#); [Acts 19:13–17](#); and [Ephesians 4:29](#) motivates you most to do so?

II. Accountability ([DEUTERONOMY 18:19–22](#))

A. To Listen and Obey (v. 19)

19. “I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

To *listen* to the *words* God speaks through his appointed messengers implies obedience to those words. If obedience does not follow, then one has not truly listened. The price for rejecting the Lord's words is great: he will call the disobedient person to account. The most extreme example of God's judgment for failing to hear and obey came in the form of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (see lessons [8](#), [11](#)).

B. To Punish False Prophets (v. 20)

20a. “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded,

Anyone *who presumes to speak* for God

without being *commanded* to do so is a false prophet (compare [Matthew 7:15](#)). Moses gave God's people two tests to use in determining whether a person's claim to be a prophet of the Lord was legitimate.

The first criterion was to verify the content of the alleged prophet's message. Was it consistent with the previously revealed word of the Lord? If it did not square with that divine standard, then the prophet's teaching had to be rejected and the man himself judged as a false prophet. The prophet Isaiah later urged his audience to conduct this test ([Isaiah 8:19–20](#)).

Closely related to this criterion was the nature of a person's character. For example, the prophet who is “like” Moses ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#), above) will be characterized by humility ([Numbers 12:3](#)). Those who were arrogant and self-serving did not exhibit this trait (compare [Matthew 7:15–19](#)). The character of a prophet had to align with what God has revealed as good for his people (contrast [Jonah 1](#)). Thus we have two sides of the same coin: content of character had to match content of message.

20b. “or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

The second criterion is seen in the phrase *speaks in the name of other gods*. To do so constituted a clear violation of the first commandment ([Exodus 20:3](#)). This same test was outlined by Moses in [Deuteronomy 13:1–5](#). The test included the additional caution regarding an alleged prophet's ability to perform impressive signs or wonders. Such a person was to be rejected if those wonders

were accompanied by encouragement to worship other gods. Idolatry proved the person to be a false prophet, no matter how spectacular his sign or wonder may be. The direction of his leadership always trumped any kind of miraculous sign (compare [Exodus 7:11](#); [Matthew 24:24](#)).

This is not to say that only Israelite prophets were empowered to speak the truth. Balaam is an example of a foreign prophet who was also a true prophet (see [Numbers 22–24](#)). He was called by the Moabite king Balak to curse the people of Israel. However, Balaam insisted that he would only speak what the Lord revealed to him. Because of this, Balaam blessed Israel repeatedly instead of cursing them even once.

What Do You Think?

How do the cautions of [Matthew 24:4–5](#); [Ephesians 5:6](#); and/or [2 Timothy 3:13–16](#). help you heed the warning of [Deuteronomy 18:20](#)?

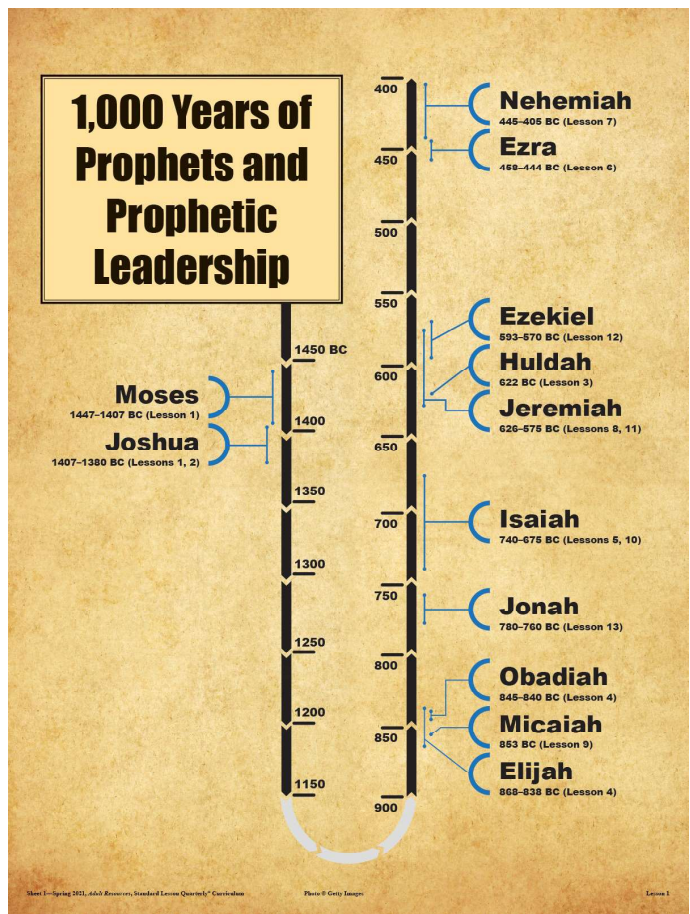
Digging Deeper

What other passages convict you in this regard?

How faithfully did Israel carry out the command to put false prophets to death? Apparently not very well since false prophets seem to have become more prevalent after the nation divided in 930 BC. Their number increased during the reign of wicked King Ahab of northern Israel (reigned 874–853 BC), who promoted the worship of the false god Baal and his consort

Asherah. The king encouraged prophets who claimed to speak for these deities, and so those prophets and their idolatry flourished. Elijah ordered those prophets put to death after the Lord’s triumph over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel ([1 Kings 18:19, 40](#)).

False prophets tried to counter the message of Micaiah ([1 Kings 22:5–28](#); see lesson 9) and stood in the way of prophets like Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 28](#)) and Micah ([Micah 3:5–8](#)). False prophets were allowed not only to live but were encouraged to advise! Their messages resulted in great damage to the spiritual welfare of God’s covenant people (compare [Matthew 24:11](#)).



Visual for Lesson 1. Keep this time line posted all quarter to orient your students to Old Testament chronology.

DEADLY PROPHETS

The Bible witnesses to many who spoke at the genuine direction of God. These prophets spoke the truth and offered a clarification call to repentance. On the other hand, many self-anointed prophets throughout history have been little more than cult leaders who led unwitting admirers astray.

An extreme example is Jim Jones of the so-called People's Temple. He led 918 of his followers to commit suicide in Guyana in 1978. Another example is David Koresh. He confused his followers with his grandiose messianic claims, telling them that only he could interpret the Bible correctly. He died with 75 followers in the fiery destruction of the Branch Davidian compound in 1993.

The followers of Jones and Koresh suffered greatly for having believed the instructions of their leaders. Neither of these false prophets had the best interests of their followers at heart.

Moses warned the people of Israel that they had to pay careful attention to what others would tell them. They were to discern whether what those purported prophets said was true. How do you guard yourself against falling prey to false teachers?

—C. R. B.

C. To Test Any Claim (vv. 21–22)

21. You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?”

The question posed here and the accompanying answer (see [Deuteronomy 18:22](#),

below) addressed predictive prophecies by an alleged prophet. Of course, God could have openly, visibly identified a false prophet when such a charlatan came among the people. God could then have put the deceiver to death himself as God's law required. But God has always desired that his people become spiritually mature and discerning. He wanted his people Israel to be able to “give the test” when necessary.

22. If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

Although it would take some time and patience, the people could *always* recognize a false prophet if *what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord did not come true*. It is important to add that just because an individual's prediction does come true does not in and of itself validate that person as a true prophet of the Lord. This issue was addressed earlier by Moses, in [Deuteronomy 13:1–5](#) (also see [18:20b](#), above).

In the matter of predictive prophecy, the problem of course is when a prediction will not come to pass for many years. If the prophecy fails to come true at the appointed time, the so-called prophet may have already died before his word could be judged. Thus he may have been able to gather a large following during life and to avoid judgment as a deceiver.

In that case, we can look at the alleged prophets' motives. [Micah 3:5](#), which notes such prophets declaring “peace” in one situa-

tion, then turning around and predicting “war”—whatever suits their agenda at the time. False prophets tend also to “go along with the crowd” in predicting what people want to hear (2 Kings 22:12–13; Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; etc.).

The verb for *be alarmed*/afraid occurs 10 times in the Old Testament. In 6 of those instances, it refers to fear of another human being (Numbers 22:3; Deuteronomy 1:17; 18:22; 32:27; 1 Samuel 18:15; Job 19:29); 1 time for fear shown by fictitious gods (Job 41:25); 1 time for fear on behalf of a calf-idol (Hosea 10:5); and 2 times as the reverence to be shown to the true God (Psalms 22:23; 33:8). It is somewhat paradoxical, but it is our fear (reverence) for the Lord that causes us not to fear (be terrified of) anything else—especially false prophets.

What Do You Think?

In what kinds of cases, if any, should you intercede on behalf of someone who has spoken for God presumptuously? Why?

Digging Deeper

Does 1 Samuel 25:23–27 help you answer that question? Why, or why not?

Conclusion

A. Plan for the Future

The retirement of a trusted leader can be a time of great stress. If succession plans are not put into place or are not carried out with wisdom and integrity, the organization expe-

riences undue stresses that can spell its demise. God did not want this for his people, and so Moses was given a word by which to reassure them that they would still be led by the Lord and his chosen prophets even after the 40-year tenure of Moses.

That leadership had spanned two generations. Moses had taught the Israelites what they needed to know in living as God’s covenant people. Moses wanted to make certain that the people would not engage in practices that would enslave them to the gods of the peoples around them. He wanted the people to be delivered from those influences and fully committed to the Lord as their only God.

This is no less true for Christians. The apostle John gave this warning in Revelation 22:18–19:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

Although “this scroll” signifies Revelation, it’s easy to imagine that the warning applies to the Bible’s 65 other books as well. The Scriptures provide the standard by which we are to evaluate any teaching we hear or read.

What Do You Think?

What boundaries do [Matthew 7:1–5, 15–20](#), and [1 John 4:1–6](#) establish for you in applying today's lesson?

Digging Deeper

Where are you weakest in that regard?

B. Prayer

Father, may we ever be grateful for Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of the prophet to follow Moses—and more! Empower us to remain faithful to him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God provides guidance for his people.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 238) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring 2021 Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 3629121 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Announce a 30-second silent brainstorming exercise: learners are individually to jot on paper some qualities of a good leader. After time is up, call for similar brainstorming regarding the qualities of an untrustworthy leader, again taking no more than 30 seconds. Compare and contrast results in whole-class discussion. Analyze whether certain attributes apply to leaders in a secular context but not in a church context and, vice versa.

Option or alternative. Before learners arrive, place at chairs copies of the “Significant Events, Surprising Leader” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Participants can begin working on this as they arrive.

After discussing either or both of these activities, make a transition by saying, “It is important to follow good leaders who guide us through possible and impossible situations.”

Into the Word

Distribute copies of the following closed-Bible pretest, one per participant. You may wish to reformat it or add to it. Say that you will collect the tests after learners score it themselves, but they are not to put their names on them.

Choices, Choices!

- ___ 1. Another name for Sinai is (a) Horeb; (b) Mizpah; (c) Egypt; (d) Goshen.

- ___ 2. The Lord promised to raise up a prophet like (a) Moses; (b) Isaiah; (c) Ezra; (d) Joel.
- ___ 3. The fate of a false prophet was to be (a) imprisoned; (b) beaten; (c) executed; (d) excommunicated.
- ___ 4. When encountering a false prophet, the people were *not* to react with (a) revenge; (b) fear; (c) cursing; (d) laughter.
- ___ 5. The voice of the Lord at Horeb had been associated with (a) wind; (b) rain; (c) fire; (d) an eclipse of the sun.
- ___ 6. At Horeb, the people had feared that, were they to hear the voice of the Lord again, they would (a) laugh; (b) die; (c) repent; (d) return to Egypt.

Have learners score their tests as you read today's lesson text aloud. (*Answers: 1–a; 2–a; 3–c; 4–b; 5–c; 6–b.*) After collecting the anonymous tests, write the numerals 1 through 6 on the board vertically. Tally the number of right and wrong responses for each; use this as an indicator of where to emphasize Bible study.

Option. Following study of the Bible text, erase the board and administer the same test again with the same instructions and procedures. Tally the results to determine improvements in Bible knowledge.

Into Life

Form small groups and give to each a handout (you prepare) printed with this question: *What are some ways to spot false teachers or false prophets in the church?* Include on the handout the following Scrip-

ture and other resources you deem relevant: [Zechariah 13:1–6](#); [Matthew 7:15](#); [24:24](#); [1 Corinthians 12:28–29](#); [1 Timothy 1:3–7](#); [2 Timothy 4:3](#); [1 John 4:1](#); [Jude 17–19](#); [Revelation 2:20](#); [22:14–15](#).

Have groups present conclusions in ensuing whole-class discussion. Do so by rotating in a one-text-per-group fashion until all passages are addressed. (*Option.* If time is short, give each group at the outset only three or four texts, making sure that all texts are covered.)

Wrap up by re-forming groups and challenging each to propose one or two guidelines for distinguishing true from false teaching today. Use the groups' suggestions to create a comprehensive list in ensuing whole-class discussion.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Prophet to Come, Prophet Who Came" exercise from the activity page for learners to complete as indicated. Close with prayer.