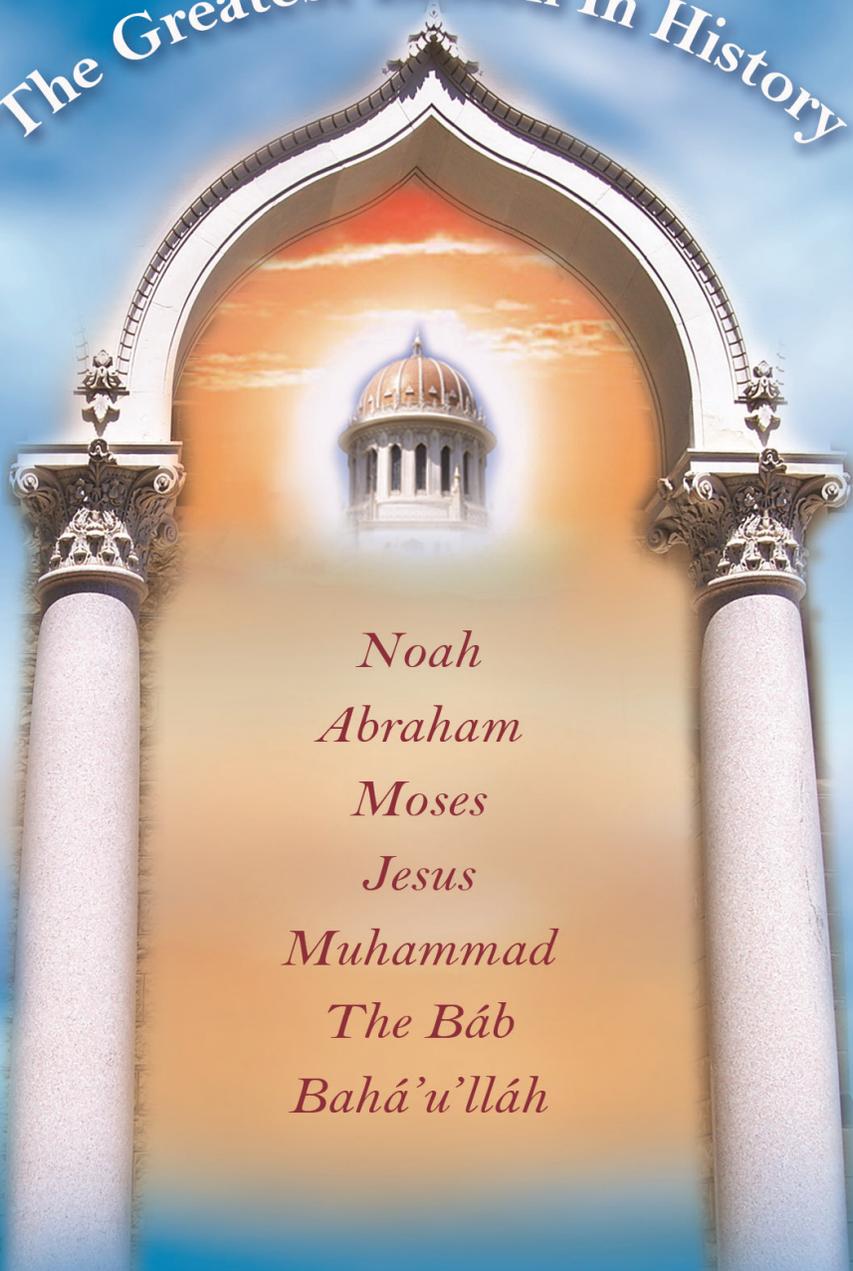


# The Greatest Lesson In History



*Noah*  
*Abraham*  
*Moses*  
*Jesus*  
*Muhammad*  
*The Báb*  
*Bahá'u'lláh*

Woe to you... you build tombs for the prophets...  
and you say, "If we had lived in the days of our  
forefathers, we would not have taken part with  
them in shedding the blood of the prophets."

*Christ (Matt. 23: 29-30)*

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***The Greatest Lesson of History***

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# **The Greatest and Most Astonishing Lesson of History**

*The greatest and most astonishing lesson of history is that people do not learn the lessons of history.*

History is a living laboratory in which we can see and learn life's critical lessons. The First Advent of Jesus is a perfect laboratory in which we can see and learn all the lessons needed for His Second Advent.

What is the most critical lesson we can learn not only from the First Advent of Jesus but also from the story of all God's great Teachers and Redeemers? That lesson is hidden in these questions: Why do people deny their Redeemers when they have only a *few* followers, and then welcome them when they have *many* followers? Why do they *first* persecute their Prophets and Saviors, and centuries *later* worship them?

*Woe to you...You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, "If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets."*

*Christ (Matt. 23:29-30)*

*Not one Prophet of God was made manifest Who did not fall a victim to the relentless hate, to the denunciation, denial, and execration of the clerics of His day!<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh*

What then is the lesson we must learn? What then should be our response to the repeated rejection of God's great Messengers

and Redeemers? Our response should be one of extreme vigilance. The recognition of this human weakness—initial denial and later acceptance—should serve as a warning to us to remain always alert and watchful. It should awaken us to this reality: At the dawn of the advent of great Messengers and Redeemers, it is easy to fall into the trap of negligence, unawareness, and denial. What happened to past generations can also happen to us.

*Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.*

*Job 32:7*

## ***A Trap That Will Snare All People***

In His prophecies, Jesus declares that the day of Lord will come as a trap to all the inhabitants of the earth. ***What happens when almost everyone is caught in a trap? The trap does not look like a trap anymore!*** The first and foremost requirement for liberating one's soul from a trap is an inner sense of awareness that one may already be *in* a trap. History shows that people always brush aside the possibility of being entrapped. When fishermen throw their net, the fish continue to swim unaware of the net—until it is too late.

Let us look at Jesus' most critical warnings and instructions about how *not* to miss Him the second time. The Olivet Discourse contains the most significant and emphatic instructions Jesus gave to His faithful followers to help them recognize Him at His second coming. The following is the last passage of that discourse. It can be considered His last will and testament to His followers:

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with ***carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life,*** and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For ***it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole***

*earth. Watch* therefore, and *pray* always that you may be counted worthy *to escape* all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:34-36)

Jesus offers three solutions for avoiding or escaping the spiritual trap that snares and captures the souls of *all* the peoples of the world:

- The *first* solution He offers is to avoid “*carousing*” or paying undue attention to worldly pleasures and a life of careless ease. Bahá’u’lláh frequently encourages us to watch for this trap:

*O OFFSPRING OF DUST!*

*Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself of everlasting rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the dust-heap of a mortal world.*<sup>2</sup>

*Bahá’u’lláh*

- Jesus’ *second* instruction—on how to escape or avoid the trap of denying Him on His return—is to watch for the invisible pit of “*drunkenness*.” This is a state of mind in which one is not simply unaware, but *is unaware of his unawareness*. Like a drunkard, he may even enjoy his clouded state of mind! Since everyone is in the trap, would anyone recognize that he is in the trap? This is why “*drunkenness*” prevents us from seeing the state of our soul, and vigilance and watchfulness are the only remedy for becoming aware of the trap.

We see men *drunken* in this Day, the Day in which men and angels have been gathered together.<sup>3</sup>

*Bahá’u’lláh*

Most of the people are bewildered in their *drunkenness*...<sup>4</sup>

*Bahá’u’lláh*

What is the remedy for drunkenness?

What I say to you, I say to everyone: “*Watch!*”

Christ (Mark 13:37)

A believer entangled in a trap can respond to the news of the coming of the Lord in many ways. He may investigate the Bahá'í Faith, but stop before reaching a conclusion. This may be called *the trap of negligence*. The word “*heedless*,” a synonym of negligence, appears frequently in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. *The Concordance to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in English* has 130 listings. Note the absolute authority with which Bahá'u'lláh speaks. Can anyone but God speak like this?:

***O YE THAT ARE LYING AS DEAD ON THE COUCH OF  
HEEDLESSNESS!***

*Ages have passed and your precious lives are well-nigh ended, yet not a single breath of purity hath reached Our court of holiness from you. Though immersed in the ocean of misbelief, yet with your lips ye profess the one true faith of God. Him whom I abhor ye have loved, and of My foe ye have made a friend. Notwithstanding, ye walk on My earth complacent and self-satisfied, heedless that My earth is weary of you and everything within it shunneth you. Were ye but to open your eyes, ye would, in truth, prefer a myriad griefs unto this joy, and would count death itself better than this life.<sup>5</sup>*

***O BOND SLAVE OF THE WORLD!***

*Many a dawn hath the breeze of My loving-kindness wafted over thee and found thee upon the bed of HEEDLESSNESS fast asleep. Bewailing then thy plight it returned whence it came.<sup>6</sup>*

***O MY FRIEND!***

*Thou art the day-star of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendor. Rend asunder the veil of HEEDLESSNESS, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.<sup>7</sup>*

Most people who hear about Bahá'u'lláh act as if they have learned about some local news, such as a wedding or the birth of a baby in their town. They live as if they have no accountability to investigate the greatest news in human history; no accountability to learn about the news of the coming of their supreme Savior and Redeemer, the One who has come to save them from “the fire” of remoteness from God; no accountability for the suffering of others. They act as if the sufferings of the twin Redeemers of our time—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—and the sacrifices of thousands of their followers for the sake of establishing God's Kingdom were all in vain. A failure to assume responsibility, a tendency to be *careless or negligent* is found in all aspects of human life. Consider the number of people who neglect to save for their old age, to pay attention to their health, or to write their will.

Many people rush to judgment without carefully studying the evidence for Bahá'u'lláh's claim that he fulfills the promise of the Second Advent, that He is the Return of Christ. They brush aside this awesome news with a careless word or phrase such as “I don't have time.” “I don't care.” “Not now, later.” Or “We are warned of false prophets.” They pass a quick and *careless* judgment. They ignore this warning:

...men will have to give account on the day of judgment for *every careless word* they have spoken.

Christ (Matt. 12:36)

As Jesus declares, the trap of spiritual “*drunkenness*,” *unawareness*, *negligence*, or *carelessness* is quite universal. It ensnares anyone who is inattentive. No wonder He emphasized and repeated the critical words “Watch!” and “Awake!”

*That is the day when I come like a thief! Happy the man who stays awake...*

*Rev. 16:15*

***Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch...do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you I say to everyone:***

**“Watch!”**

*Christ (Mark 13:33-37)*

- The third instruction Jesus offers to His faithful followers—on how to know Him on His return—is to watch for the tempting trap of “*the cares of this life.*” Most people do not take the time to read even a small book about Bahá’u’lláh. Their excuse: “I don’t have the time.” They seem to have time for everything except choosing their eternal spiritual destiny! The busy life—“the affairs of the world”—lulls their souls into negligence.

***Blessed is the man whom the affairs of the world have failed to deter from recognizing Him Who is the Lord of all things.***<sup>8</sup>

*Bahá’u’lláh*

***Consider how easy it is to fall in any or all of these traps.*** What then is the solution? To remain true to Word of Jesus, each of us should search our soul for hidden snares. First, we must recognize that ***a trap is always hidden from our sight.*** It can be concealed under multiple layers. Consider just this one layer: ***the trap of norms and numbers.*** What is ***normal*** is usually determined by ***numbers.*** When everyone is poor, poverty appears as the norm. When everyone is drunk, drunkenness becomes the norm. Numbers create norms and norms follow numbers. When a person sees that most of the people in his culture go to church, then for him going to church and hearing the name of Jesus Christ every Sunday becomes the norm. If he sees most of the believers in his culture go to a mosque every Friday, then for him going to a mosque and hearing the name of Muhammad becomes the norm. How does such a person judge a trap? By the standard of his or her religion and denomination.

***At the dawning of new Revelations from God, norms and numbers serve as the most attractive and powerful traps into which the unwary and complacent masses fall.*** We have several friends who come to our Bahá’í meetings, but they also

go to their church. On the average, we have about twelve people attending our Bahá'í “fireside.” In their church, they meet hundreds. They love the Bahá'í teachings, but they also love the numbers, although they are often critical of the sermons. The point is this: people are attracted, captivated, and held by numbers. It is absolutely essential to guard against this natural tendency, and not allow it to ensnare our soul. It was probably in regard to this weakness in human beings that Jesus uttered this warning:

***...wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

*Christ (Matt. 7:13-14)*

Bahá'u'lláh tears apart “the traps of norm and numbers” as a haven and hiding place. Note the divine authority with which He removes and destroys this safety net:

If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked: “Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] and turned away from My Self,” and if such a man should reply and say: “Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth, I, too, following their example, have grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal [Bahá'u'lláh],” ***such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.***<sup>9</sup>

Another trap we should watch for is the trap of convenience. We need to recognize that searching not only takes time and effort, but also ***courage***. Few people—***only the humblest***—acknowledge being in a trap. ***Still fewer are willing to search for it and find it.***

Each person harbors in his or her soul a variety of invisible attachments that entangle and stifle the spirit of the search for truth. No one can set us free from these fetters and traps except ourselves, who are the commanders of our own souls. ***As soon as we begin the mission of “seek” the angels of heaven rush to help us “find.”*** Their searchlights aid us in detecting the finest fetters and threads. They give us the wisdom and show us the way to disentangle our soul from the invisible attachments.

We all become used to our little fish bowls or the tiny cages in which we grow up. The invisible walls and wires are made of family influences, culture, convenience, habits, customs, traditions, norms, and numbers. If we do not taste the ocean, we will never know we are in a fish bowl. If we do not enjoy the freedom of flying and the fragrance of flowers, we will never know we are in a cage. Bahá'u'lláh asks us to burst through the confining cage and “even as a bird of the spirit” fly to our “holy and everlasting nest:”

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. ***Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder***, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. ***Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.***<sup>10</sup>

***Release yourselves***, O nightingales of God, ***from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor***. O My friends that dwell upon the dust! Haste forth unto your celestial habitation. Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: “He Who is the Best-Beloved is come!”<sup>11</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

At the end of His instructions and warnings, Jesus asks us to be watchful and always pray to ***escape*** all traps and attachments that entangle our hearts. Only ***then*** can we hope to be “counted ***worthy*** to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Bahá’u’lláh offers similar instructions. In fact, He uses the same word—“***worthy***”—as a prerequisite for receiving the grace of God and recognizing His Glory. At the outset of one of His most significant writings—*The Book of Certitude*—He cites these requirements for acquiring the grace of faith:

**IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD, THE EXALTED, THE MOST HIGH**  
No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be ***detached from all that is in heaven and on earth***. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you...

The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly - their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. ***Then will they be made WORTHY of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen...***<sup>12</sup>

## *The Countless Variety of Self-Imposed Traps*

The path of the search for truth has always been covered with countless snares and stumbling stones. Virtually all of them remain hidden in our own hearts. Look at the following traps to see if any one of them may be hiding in your heart. There is good news for you. The fact that you have read this far indicates that you are an exceptional person. Nevertheless self-examination is always helpful. See if you can find a trace of any one of these attachments, fetters, or threads in your soul:

- Being apathetic, having no interest in religion
- Being closed-minded, dogmatic, or prejudiced
- Following the majority, assuming that they are the best judges
- Depending on religious leaders who regard tradition as the truth
- Feeling reassured and content in your comfort zone
- Fearing the loss of your faith
- Not understanding the symbolism behind prophecies, being literal-minded, expecting earth-shaking or miraculous events
- Being too busy to devote time to your spiritual destiny
- Living by assumptions and loving illusions; not putting your beliefs to the test
- Being worldly and selfish; not looking beyond self-interest
- Not wishing to alienate friends or family members
- Being argumentative
- Lacking sincerity
- Fearing a loss of status

- Lacking faith
- Lacking self-confidence
- Being emotionally attached to your beliefs or traditions
- Being negligent, careless, inattentive, unmindful, and unwatchful
- Lacking humility, being “wise in your own eyes”
- Lacking knowledge; not hearing the new message.
- Failing to persist in your journey of the search for truth; giving up before arriving at a conclusion.

Just one of these traps can ensnare and stifle our soul, can prevent us from the honor of “standing before the Son of Man.” That is how dangerous a trap can be! There is also *a master trap* that conceals all the other traps, that prevents us from seeing any cords or fetters surrounding our souls. It is called *self-satisfaction*. It is saying, “Everything looks right in my eyes. I like where I am. Don’t bother me!”

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the spirits. Proverbs 16:2

Bahá’u’lláh asks us repeatedly to tear the veils and bonds that keep us entrapped in the clouds of illusions and the depths of selfish desires:

*Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision*, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, *scatter the idols of vain imitation*. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful.<sup>13</sup>

Note Bahá’u’lláh’s command to those who remain entrapped in a name—Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad—who think that only one name can save. Note also His authority in declaring Himself *the Creator of every name*:

*Tear ye asunder the veils of names* and cleave ye their kingdom. By My Beauty! *He Who is the Monarch of all*

*names is come, He at Whose bidding every single name hath, from the beginning that hath no beginning, been created, He Who shall continue to create them as He pleaseth. He, verily, is the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.*<sup>14</sup>

*O MY SERVANT!*

*Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more.*<sup>15</sup>

### ***Prayers for freedom:***

*Thou seest, O my Lord, how Thy servants are held captive by their own selves and desires. Redeem them from their bondage, O my God, by the power of Thy sovereignty and might, that they may turn towards Thee when He Who is the Revealer of Thy names and attributes is manifested unto men.*<sup>16</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

*Naked am I, O my God! Clothe me with the robe of Thy tender mercies. I am sore athirst; give me to drink of the oceans of Thy bountiful favor. I am a stranger; draw me nearer unto the source of Thy gifts. I am sick; sprinkle upon me the healing waters of Thy grace. I am a captive; rid me of my bondage, by the power of Thy might and through the force of Thy will, that I may soar on the wings of detachment towards the loftiest summits of Thy creation.*<sup>17</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

*I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders... Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the Lord, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done... **The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden**... Arise, O Lord, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.*

*Psalms 9:1, 10, 11, 15, 19*

Only with absolute humility and love for truth can we find the Lord. Humility requires from each of us to say, “Yes, without

knowing, I too may be like the generations who rejected their Redeemers.” For rejection rather than acceptance has always been the norm: “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?” (Acts 7:52).

***He is indeed a captive who hath not recognized the Supreme Redeemer, but hath suffered his soul to be bound, distressed and helpless, in the fetters of his desires.<sup>18</sup>***

*Bahá'u'lláh*

Each of us needs to say, in a spirit of humility, “Yes, without knowing, I too may be in the trap of denial. The only way I can avoid or escape the trap of denial is to obey the Word of my Master. The only remedy is to remain vigilant and watchful, and investigate, even as a full time detective, the news of the coming of ‘the Heavenly Thief’—the One who promised to come in the dark of the ‘night’ of unawareness. Without knowing, I too may act like the five maidens who did not carry enough “oil of wisdom” to find and follow the Bridegroom. I too may have missed Him. The cost of searching is a little investment of time. The cost of not searching is remaining outside the heavenly Banquet. ***Is the risk of ignoring the News worth taking?***”

Chapter 24 of Isaiah also refers to the pit and the snare that await the people of the earth. It portrays a stark contrast between those who remain in the trap and those who climb out of it. It offers both bad news and good news:

***The Bad News***

The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan. The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent... So will it be on the earth and among the nations... ***Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth.***

Isaiah 24:7-8,13,17

***The Good News*** They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty. Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One."  
Isaiah 24:14-16

## ***The Veil That Will Cover all People***

Consider and compare the following four prophecies. They have a universal message that pertains to and includes every person on our planet:

...the covering that covereth ***all*** peoples, and the veil that is spread over ***all*** nations. Isaiah 25:7

...the hour of trial which shall come upon ***the whole*** world, ***to test those who dwell on the earth.*** Revelation 3:10

For it [that day] will come as a snare on ***all*** those who dwell on the face of ***the whole*** earth. Luke 21:35

Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you, ***O inhabitants of the earth.*** Isaiah 24:17

The combined message of the four prophecies is as clear as the day:

- When Jesus comes, all the peoples of the earth, without any exception, will be caught in a trap. They will be under a veil that will not let them see.
- And they will all be put to the test.

Obviously, there is a connection between being entrapped and being tested. The purpose of the test is to see who escapes the trap, who tears apart the veil and gains the insight to see the

Master. The implication is clear; to tear apart the veil and liberate one's soul from the trap:

- The believer or seeker must first acknowledge at least the possibility of being entrapped or veiled.
- He must strive to discover the hidden trap or the veil that may cover his heart.
- Finally, he must tear apart the veil and escape the trap.

Bahá'u'lláh refers repeatedly to the global veils that are spread over all the peoples of the world:

*...the peoples of the world are wrapt in palpable veils.<sup>19</sup>*

*The most grievous veil hath shut out the peoples of the earth from His glory...<sup>20</sup>*

The following prophecy gives us further insight into the snare that, like a fishing net, has surrounded the souls of all humankind. The apostle Paul predicts 19 traits that will characterize the peoples of our time. Any one of them can serve as a trap:

*“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be:*

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| • lovers of themselves         | • slanderous   |
| • lovers of money              | • without self-control                               |
| • boastful                     | • brutal   |
| • proud                        | • not lovers of the good                             |
| • abusive                      | • treacherous  |
| • disobedient to their parents | • rash   |
| • ungrateful                   | • conceited  |
| • unholy                       | • lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God       |
| • without love                 | • having a form of godliness but denying its power.” |
| • unforgiving                  | II Tim. 3:1-5  |

St. Paul also predicted *the dire state of theology*—church *doctrine*—in our time:

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound *doctrine*. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. *They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* II Timothy 4:3-4

## ***The Day of Confusion***

Hebrew Scriptures also predict the dire state of theology in our time:

*In that day...O My people, your leaders cause you to err, and confuse (destroy and swallow up) the course of your paths.* Isaiah 3:7, 12

*...the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.* Isaiah 29:14

Confusion will reign everywhere:

It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. *It shall be one day which is known to the Lord; neither day nor night.* Zechariah 14:6-7

History shows that people have enormous powers of denial. Could anyone have convinced the Pharisees, at the time of Jesus, that they believed in myths, that they were entrapped? Could Jesus—who was endowed with supreme spiritual powers—tear apart their veils of illusions, unless He used His powers to crush their egos by force? The Pharisees believed *Jesus* was in the trap of self-deception, not they! No evidence could have moved their souls. Interview hundred theologians and see if you can find one who admits teaching or spreading myths, and not the truth. Then to whom does the prophecy

refer? What about ordinary people? They follow what their theologians tell them.

History is repeating itself in our time. Once again, virtually every church, every denomination, every theologian claims an exception to this predicted universal trap, yet as the prophecy says:

...it will come upon **all** those who live on the face of the **whole** earth. Christ (Luke 21:35)

People see what they like to see, and ignore or screen out what fails to fit their theories and assumptions:

How numerous the verses which have been revealed concerning ***the grievous tests ye shall experience on the Day of Judgment, yet it appeareth that ye have never perused them***; and how vast the number of revealed traditions regarding the ***trials*** which will overtake you on the Day of Our Return, and yet ye seem never to have set your eyes upon them.<sup>21</sup> The Báb

***...the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*** Christ (Rev. 3:10)

## ***As It Was in the Days of Noah***

Not only the examples of history, but the words of the Scriptures as well, should awaken us to our spiritual responsibility. For the prophecies indicate that Jesus will come again and leave again without being known or noticed by the masses of people:

The world cannot receive Him, because the world neither sees nor knows Him... John 14:17 NEB

The preceding statement is a clear response to all those who wonder: if the divine Redeemer came, why did the masses not

see Him or know Him? Further, how can the world expect to see Him who promises to come like a thief in the night (I Thess. 5:2; Rev. 3:2-3; 16:15)? And who can expect to see His great glory save those who stay awake in the night of doubt and disbelief (Matt. 24:21), who keep their clothes on (Rev. 3:18; 16:15), who preserve the purity of their vision (Psa. 24:3-5), refusing to be covered by the clouds of fantasy, fear, and falsehood (Zeph. 1:15)? These are the dark clouds the Redeemer was predicted to ride.

These prophecies are in harmony with many others predicting utter darkness during the dawn of the latter days (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18; 8:11-12; Zeph. 1:14-15; II Thess. 2:3; Matt. 24:21; Daniel 12:1). We are told again and again that at the time of the advent of the Redeemer, people will be afflicted with apathy, greed, and worldliness; they will be too absorbed in earning their daily bread to have time for the heavenly bread. So how will they respond to the Messenger's call? Exactly as their forebears responded to Noah's:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...  
Christ (Matt. 24:37-38 NIV)

The preceding predictions carry a clear warning to all seekers of truth, to all believers in the words of God. In His prophetic words Jesus is seeking to disperse the clouds of fantasy prevailing in our days. It is as if He is saying, O My faithful friends and followers:

- Strive that you may not be a part of the world that will neither see Me nor know Me; that you may not stand with the multitudes who will reject Me and condemn Me, that you may not act as your forebears did during the time of Noah—engulfed by unawareness and enchanted by the world.

- Do not think that being in the majority is a sign of safety, an evidence of being counted with the elect. True, as a rule, safety abides in numbers. But here the exception—not the rule—prevails. Here being in the majority is a sure sign of standing with the rejecting crowds.
- Do not think that the task of knowing Me is as simple as you have been led to believe. Be on guard lest excessive and unjustified fear of falsehood lead you away from love for truth—to apathy and suspicion.
- Do not be complacent and carefree, thinking that, by the display of earthly glory and power, I will subdue your soul or dazzle your vision. Do not think that without any effort on your part, I will redeem you and grant you the gift of faith. This is how the Pharisees felt during My First Advent. Should you not learn from their example?

### ***Why Does God not Rescue the Human Race Through Miraculous Means?***

Why would Jesus not come down from the sky to save our planet and its people, and establish His heavenly Kingdom? Bahá'u'lláh states that He is “fully capable of rescuing...wayward souls and of causing them to draw nigh unto His court and attain His Presence.”<sup>22</sup> He then explains that rescuing people by force, or through divine intervention, is contrary to God’s Will and Wisdom. Why? Because God’s purpose is “to enable ***the pure in spirit and the detached in heart*** to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers.”<sup>23</sup> Thus our Creator allows each of us to rise to the spiritual station we deserve or desire.

This principle is so paramount that God does not even choose His Redeemers from the ranks of the powerful. On the contrary,

He wants them to appear as ordinary as possible, and experience the full spectrum of human weaknesses and sufferings, so that no one is attracted to them for the sake of earthly powers and privileges. He conceals their splendor in the clouds of glory, just as the metaphor of “thief in the night” implies. To discover a thief, we must overcome the darkness that surrounds him.

By carefully hiding the Messenger’s divine distinction, our Creator gives us total freedom to choose our spiritual destiny, and the level of distinction we desire. What would happen if God suddenly displayed His supreme powers through miraculous means, such as sending His Redeemer from the sky with thousands of angels?

*Were the Eternal Essence to manifest all that is latent within Him, were He to shine in the plentitude of His glory, none would be found to question His power or repudiate His truth. Nay, all created things would be so dazzled and thunderstruck by the evidences of His light as to be reduced to utter nothingness. How, then, can the godly be differentiated under such circumstances from the froward?*<sup>24</sup>

*Bahá’u’lláh*

If Bahá’u’lláh had come from the sky with power and glory, many people would have reluctantly acknowledged Him. This would be like bribing a child or threatening him to study. True love requires freedom, not pressure exerted through a display of power. Consider this analogy. When red China displayed aggressive intentions toward Taiwan, the United States sent its fleet as a show of force. Red China got the message and backed off. Just a little display of power from the United States worked wonders. What would happen if **God** suddenly unveiled **His** power?

Consider another analogy. Almost everyone would love to hug or shake hands with a president, a queen, a king, or a celebrity. But how many would go out of their way to hug or shake hands with an old, homeless, man or woman, who hides an angel

within? That is how God tests us. During the early days of Christianity, only the humblest, the purest, the most courageous, and the most devoted and open-minded people left the security of their synagogues for an unknown son of a carpenter named Jesus. The same holds true today.

Suppose at this moment you are thinking, “If I accept Bahá’u’lláh, what will my wife think?” Then you conclude, “My family matters to me more than anything else. I do not want to alienate my wife.” Any thought of this nature points to attachment; it indicates that you are placing people or personal concerns and comforts above God. On the surface, the family alibi looks like a valid reason, but to God it is totally unacceptable. What did Jesus mean by this statement?

For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... Matthew 10:35-37

To become worthy of God’s heavenly Kingdom, we must be detached from everything and everyone, even our parents to whom we owe so much, the ones who deserve honor next to God.

Thus the Glory of God by being concealed in a humble human being, known as Bahá’u’lláh, allows you the total freedom to choose and achieve the level of spiritual distinction you deserve. This is the way it has been and will always be.

***I Have Been Raised as a Christian  
all My Life. I Cannot See  
Myself Becoming a Bahá'í***

Bahá'u'lláh states repeatedly that no one can recognize Him without “**detachment**.” *The Concordance to Bahá'u'lláh's Writings* lists over 150 references to that word. Consider these examples:

Cast away that which ye possess, and, ***on the wings of detachment***, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation...<sup>25</sup>

Blessed are they that have soared ***on the wings of detachment*** and attained the station which, as ordained by God, overshadoweth the entire creation...<sup>26</sup>

***Detach yourselves from all else but Me***, and turn your faces towards My face, for better is this for you than the things ye possess.<sup>27</sup>

The Cause of God hath come as a token of His grace. Happy are they who act; happy are they who understand; happy the man that hath clung unto the truth, ***detached from all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth***.<sup>28</sup>

Send down upon them what shall wholly ***detach them from aught else except Thee***, and make them able to soar in the atmosphere of Thy nearness...<sup>29</sup>

What does “detachment” mean? There are many kinds of detachment. Generally, they can be divided into two categories: ***affective*** (emotional), and ***cognitive*** (mental).

Suppose you are a judge in a supreme court. How can you be fair in your decisions?

- You must have affective or *emotional detachment* from every case brought before you. Your feelings, attitude, and desire must all be neutral.
- You must also have *cognitive or factual detachment*. You must discount everything you have heard from the news media about the case. You must start with a clear slate of mind.

Not...until thou consumest with the flame of *utter detachment those veils of idle learning*, that are current amongst men, canst thou behold the resplendent morn of true knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Let us now apply the topic of cognitive detachment to the advent of a new Redeemer. To experience vividly this kind of detachment, try to get a taste of it *for just a few moments* by considering yourself to be the defense attorney for Jesus. Suppose you are in a court defending Jesus' claim, and the following is the dialogue that takes place between you and the presiding Jewish judge, who wants to examine His claim:

**You:** I represent Jesus, the One for whom you have been waiting for many centuries.

**The judge:** He cannot be the One. Our Redeemer must come from an unknown place.

**You:** Your honor, Jesus is not a body, but a Spirit. His Spirit has come from an unknown place in heaven. As you may know He has declared: "I have come down from heaven" (John 6:36).

**The judge:** You are distorting the facts. We know Jesus is from Nazareth. "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" (John 6:42).

**You:** You are literal-minded. “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing” (John 6:36). Jesus’ body, like clouds, conceals His true Essence, which shines as brightly as the sun. He says “I am the light of the world” (John 95). Jesus is the Light of God that has come from heaven, from an unknown place. His body conceals His Light.

**The judge:** You are wrong. You cannot spiritualize the Word of God. Clouds are vapors that rise from the earth to heaven. Our Scripture means what it says.

**You:** If you know the meaning of prophecies, then **you** are the Lord. My Client should ask **you** to explain everything to Him.

**The judge:** What evidence does your Client have to prove His claim?

**You:** He has only what God has given Him.

**The judge:** What has God given Him?

**You:** Many proofs, far beyond what anyone can ever produce.

**The judge:** Give me some examples.

**You:** His most sublime and significant proof is His Word, the Word of God.

**The judge:** Words do not mean much to me. Give me another proof.

**You:** An evidence of His sincerity is that He endured much suffering.

**The judge:** Suffering does not impress me either. Many suffer in vain. Give me another evidence.

**You:** He has also brought wonderful teachings, which have transformed many lives.

**The judge:** Wonderful teachings do not matter to me either. Some great philosophers have had wonderful ideas. Give me another proof.

**You:** His many enemies have tried to prevent His Faith from spreading. They have all failed.

**The judge:** Any clever person can do what He has done. Give me another proof.

**You:** He has also fulfilled hundreds of prophecies.

**The judge:** I have already explained that I disagree with your interpretation of the prophecies. It doesn't matter how many prophecies He has fulfilled. If they are not fulfilled the way *I* interpret them, they don't count.

**You:** Do you have an interest in examining some of the prophecies that He has fulfilled?

**The judge:** No, He has not fulfilled the first and foremost sign: coming from an unknown place.

**You:** Your honor, may I ask you to take a little time and review some of the prophecies He has fulfilled?

**The judge:** That is a waste of my time. As I said, Jesus is *not* the One, because no one has ever seen Him coming down from heaven. If He had, every eye would have seen Him.

**You:** Then are you not interested in studying what *God* has given Him as proof?

**The judge:** I have adopted a few signs as the standard of separating truth from falsehood. Anyone who does not fulfill them is false. The first one is seeing my Redeemer come from heaven.

**You:** Jesus is the Lord, and yet according to your beliefs, He must learn from **you** the true interpretation of prophecies.

**The judge:** Yes, I will be glad to teach Him. Invite Him to our synagogue. Our rabbi would love to talk to Him.

Now resign from your position as the defense attorney for Jesus, and reexamine the dialogue. Isn't it the type of the exchange that took place between Jesus and the Pharisees? Is it not also the kind of the dialogue that is taking place between Bahá'ís and many Christians? Is it not true that the Jews believed they had **the only** true interpretation of prophecies? Isn't it true that they did not care what Jesus had brought from God as evidence? Have Christians learned this critical lesson of history from the way the Jews behaved?

Note what Bahá'u'lláh says about this same issue. He states that unless you put all your learning aside, you cannot recognize Him. One false assumption can prevent you from seeing His divine glory:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding ***except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you...***

The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, ***must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly - their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth.*** They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to

attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favor, ***unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.***<sup>31</sup>

Adopting a new religion with a new name is for many people a difficult task. But the One who expects us to make the transition offers a solution for every problem. Did not Jesus ask us to pray ***always***? If detachment were easy, why would He ask us to seek His help?

O God, my God!...I beg of Thee, O Beloved of every understanding heart and the Desire of such as have near access unto Thee, to grant ***that Thy loved ones may become wholly detached from their own inclinations***, holding fast unto that which pleaseth Thee. Attire them, O Lord, with the robe of righteousness and illumine them with the splendors of the light of detachment....No God is there but Thee, the Mighty, the Ever-Forgiving.<sup>32</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Note what Bahá'u'lláh wrote to a new believer who had attained detachment and made the transition to a new name:

Joy be to thee, O thou that hast drained the Cup of His love!...Great is the blessedness that awaiteth thee, O My servant, for thou hast attained unto that which none hath attained, ***except such as have detached themselves from all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and who are the emblems of true detachment.***<sup>33</sup>

Glorious is the honor that awaits the souls who are detached from everything except God:

Thou hast...asked Me concerning the state of the soul after its separation from the body. Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will,

assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved. By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or tongue describe. The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. ***Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world.*** Meditate on this, and be of the thankful.<sup>34</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Life is a choice. You can either stay in your church or synagogue, and avoid the “pain” or inconvenience of calling yourself a Bahá'í, or accept that “pain” or inconvenience in exchange for the everlasting glory and honor of being in God's glorious Kingdom.

I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

Revelation 3:8

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Now choose life...For the Lord is your life...

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

## ***Why Did Jesus Teach by Parables?***

Every soul has an inner “eye” with unique visual capacities and powers. Through parables—brief stories veiled with metaphors—Jesus filtered His light, even as sunglasses do, to protect the inner eye of the viewers: the truth watchers. The following statement from Jesus has puzzled theologians for

many centuries. It embraces a most precious pearl of knowledge—one that defines the lines of relationship between God and human beings. After presenting a *parable* Jesus concluded:

***He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*** *Luke 8:8*

Jesus' disciples asked him what the parable meant. He said:

***The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.*** *Luke 8:9-10*

Why did Jesus say, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*”? The same principle that applies to seeing, applies also to hearing. God always speaks at a level that allows people either to hear or not to hear. This way He shows respect for their freedom of choice. If He talks too loudly, He awakens the dreamers and sleep-lovers. If He speaks too gently, no one will hear Him. Parables, like a microphone, control the volume of His Voice: they awaken the Sun-lovers, without disturbing the dream-lovers and comfort-seekers.

The example of a microphone clearly demonstrates how we are connected to God. We can never understand God, we can never appreciate His Wisdom without understanding this connection. It defines the very foundation of our relationship with Him.

In principle, there is no difference between parables and prophecies. Indeed, most of Jesus' parables are prophecies. The purpose of giving signs is to guide, not to force. By clothing prophecies in metaphors, God protects people from any harsh exposure to His message. He wants them to see according to their vision, and hear according to their hearing. Letter-lovers cling to the shell, forgetful of the pearl. Spirit-lovers break the shell to get to the pearl. These are the daring souls God wants in His Kingdom. Note what a Christian scholar says about the purpose of parables:

A parable has a double use; it tends to veil and it tends to illustrate a truth; in the latter case, it seems designed to teach, in the former to conceal. Our Lord wished the multitude to understand, but the result and profit depended solely on the degree of their faithfulness. The parables resembled the Pillar of Fire, which was to the Egyptians a Pillar of Cloud.<sup>35</sup>

Who sees a “Pillar of *Fire*”? The one who rises *above* the “clouds.” Who sees a “Pillar of *Clouds*”? The one who stays *below* the “clouds.” The clouds are the metaphors that conceal the light of truth. Their purpose is to separate the daring from the fearful, the sky-lovers from the ground-lovers, the truth-lovers from the tradition-lovers. A believer who fails to overcome the clouds fails in his or her spiritual test.

From a Christian author:

***“The whole Gospel is a parable to him whose heart has not the key.” This solemn teaching is found also in the law and the prophets.*** Deuteronomy 29:3, 4; Isaiah 6:9; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2.<sup>36</sup>

Once again consider the amazing reason Jesus offered for speaking in parables or metaphors:

***The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you [those with inner eye and hearing], but to others [the spiritually blind and deaf] I speak in parables, so that, “though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”*** *Luke 8:9-10*

For those with spiritual insight, parables, metaphors, and symbols are not puzzling. With some effort and guidance, they can decode them. For the spiritually blind and deaf, parables work as a veil to protect their freedom of choice; they help them attain their hearts’ desire. They soften the strong light of the Sun, which bothers their eyes, and muffle the moving song of Heaven, which hurts their ears. The veiled language lets them enjoy their freedom to be what they like, and not be forced into

submission to the truth. For God, parables and metaphors serve this most critical purpose: They separate the spiritually blind from the spiritually sighted, the spiritually deaf from the spiritually hearing. That is a prime purpose of creating *the earthly* life.

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