

*Wake up...
I shall come like a thief!
Christ (Rev. 3:2-3)*

*I Shall
Come
Like a
Thief*

*The day of the Lord shall come
like a thief in the night.*

1 Thes. 5:2

I Shall Come Like a Thief!

**Have You Heard
the Greatest News?**

Wake up! I shall come upon you like a thief!
Christ (Rev. 3:2-3 NEB)

Hushidar Hugh Motlagh, Ed.D.

A publication of *Unity in Diversity*,
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to promote peace, understanding, and
unity among diverse nations, races,
and religions of the world



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I Shall Come Like a Thief

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I Shall Come Like a Thief!

I shall come upon you as a thief... Christ (Rev. 3:3)

*The day of the Lord will come like a thief
in the night. I Thes. 5:2*

Christ promised that He would return “*like a thief*.” What did He mean by this metaphor? Did He mean that to find Him and know Him, we must search for Him? He also asked us to “*watch!*” Did He mean that we must watch out for the news of His coming? Do we need to watch out for events that we can miss, or cannot miss? Do we need to watch out for the sun at noon on a sunny day, or for a twinkling star on a cloudy day? This book invites you to take a little time for your destiny, to investigate to see if you may have missed the news of the greatest and most glorious Event in human history—the coming of the heavenly Thief! What can you lose from knowing?

History is our best teacher. Did not Jesus come also the first time “like a thief,” and only those who paid close attention to the news of His coming, and the signs of His greatness, found Him and followed Him? Could this happen again?

Jesus fulfilled every prophecy that predicted His coming. Why then did the Jews fail to recognize Him? Was it not because He fulfilled them *in His own way* rather than *their way*? Could this happen again? Is it possible that the people of our time, like those who lived in the past, cherish many unfounded theories about the way our Redeemer will come? This book offers you an opportunity to explore this possibility. What can you lose from seeking and searching, from devoting a little time to your destiny? And what could you lose by *not* seeking and searching?

Seek and ye shall find that both the promised “thief” and the “appointed day” have come and gone! Why would any faithful servant fail to investigate the news of the coming of his Master?

***Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened
unto you.***

Christ (Luke 11:9)

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Greetings!

The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

Psalms 14:2 NIV

This book is like a little perfume. It is the essence of at least eight volumes, or 2,880 pages. It is designed for busy people who must run to get through each day, and get ready for the next, until all their days are gone.

If someone gave you eight large books and asked you to take them home and read them, how would you respond? Most people would panic. This mini book is prepared to save sensitive people from panic!

We have all heard and read about thousands of events and stories. How can one story be so newsworthy to be called: The Greatest News? This mini book is written to answer that question.

I Shall Come Like a Thief is gentle, friendly, and fair. It asks you only for a small favor. It says: “Give me just an hour of your time. You will be surprised by what you will receive in return. Don’t judge me by my size. Don’t take me lightly. I am only a little book, but I carry *the Greatest News*—the news that can change your destiny. Take time to learn about me. If after knowing me, you felt cheated, please state your case and send me an Email: info@TheKnowledgeOfGod.com. I will be honored to answer you. I offer you several topics. Feel free to start with the one you like the best:”

- If you wish to learn about one event that overshadows all other events in history, start with *Topic One*.

- If you would like to read the most beautiful story Jesus told to show the difference between wise and foolish people, start with ***Topic Two***. Please remember that wisdom is the supreme master and teacher of all virtues.
- If you wish to learn the specific parable Jesus offered to help Christians recognize Him at His Second Advent, start with ***Topic Three***.
- If you like history, start with ***Topic Four***.
- Finally, if you are patient and are equally interested in all the topics, follow the order they are presented here.

Part I

Choosing Your Destiny



If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Christ (John 15:22 NEB)

Where a man has been given much, much will be expected of him; and the more a man has been entrusted to him, the more he will be required to pay.

Christ (Luke 12:48 NEB)

I

The Greatest News

*The news of the advent of a great religion
that is changing the world and quietly
unifying and spiritualizing its people*

Today religion has become a breeding ground for prejudice, fanaticism, war, and terrorism. Can this trend be reversed? Can the very instrument that is causing so much pain and suffering serve an opposite purpose? Instead of inciting enmity and violence, can religion promote peace, harmony, unity, and understanding among the diverse peoples of the world?

While millions are building walls of separation, other millions are quietly building bridges of friendship. They are bringing the peoples of all nations, races, and religions together. How can this be possible? “You will believe it when you see it!”

The year 1844 marked the dawning of a new day in human history. It gave birth to a universal religion called the Bahá’í Faith. Today we have seven major living religions. The Bahá’í Faith is the most recent among them:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <i>1. Hinduism</i> | <i>2000 B.C.</i> | <i>5. Christianity</i> | <i>27 A.D.</i> |
| <i>2. Judaism</i> | <i>1500 B.C.</i> | <i>6. Islam</i> | <i>622 A.D.</i> |
| <i>3. Zoroastrianism</i> | <i>750 B.C.</i> | <i>7. Bahá’í Faith</i> | <i>1844 A.D.</i> |
| <i>4. Buddhism</i> | <i>560 B.C.</i> | | |

Every great achievement begins with awareness. Just as a bud, in due time, bursts into a flower, so does the state of awareness

in a human heart. When an idea reaches the saturation point, when it advances to a level called “the critical mass” it flourishes and spreads like a forest fire. At that point, no one can stop it. Today the idea of freedom has reached its “critical mass.” Dictatorship can no longer hold humanity in its grip. Awareness of the evils of slavery reached its “critical mass” in the mid-19th century and was abolished in the United States in 1863.

The purpose of this small book is to plant *the Seed of a New Awareness* in your soul—one that is quietly turning our chaotic planet into a place of peace, into a beautiful rose-garden called: “*Unity in Diversity*.” You are invited to walk through this garden, pick a few flowers, and witness the awesome powers and wonders of this *Most Glorious Awareness*. This Awareness is so vital, it can change your future in ways you cannot imagine.

The world is ready to take a giant leap forward toward its splendid destiny—one that has been the hope of humanity since the dawn of history. Yet it remains earthbound, incapable of advancing. It looks like an eagle intent on flying, but failing to leave the ground. What is holding this “eagle” back from soaring toward its glorious destiny? It is the disparity between its two wings. One wing represents the wonders of science and technology, the other the wonders of the spirit. This wing—that of the spirit—has been neglected by so many people for so long, it has lost its strength.

Compare the human race, in its present state, to an adolescent who has attained physical and mental maturity, but socially, emotionally, and spiritually it continues to behave like a child—focused on selfish demands and immature desires. Unless this “child” is helped to grow to maturity, the human race remains in grave danger.

The Bahá’í Faith proclaims that since the mid-19th century we have been ready to enter a new stage in our social and spiritual development. But we have failed to do so. The new stage is the realization that *we are all one people, living on one planet, and with one destiny*. We should no longer draw divisive lines between nations, but rather recognize that we now live in one

“global village.” The time has come to plant this *Seed of Awareness* in every heart, and proclaim this Message of Oneness to every home:

The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.¹
Bahá’í Scriptures

It is essential that we awaken to this new reality and spread this awareness to every heart and every home until the light of oneness circles the globe.

Like a caterpillar that turns into a butterfly and then abandons its closed and small home for the open and beautiful gardens beyond, we must liberate ourselves from our past prejudices and adopt a new perspective about the world within and without. We must open our minds to a new awareness, and our hearts to all peoples of the world. We must move from self-interest toward the greater goal of global interest. ***This is the first Seed of Awareness that must be planted in every heart and every home.*** This Awareness will bloom into Social Maturity.

O ye loved ones of the Lord! This is the hour when ye must associate with all the earth’s peoples in extreme kindness and love, and be to them the signs and tokens of God’s great mercy.²
Bahá’í Scriptures

The second Seed of Awareness, that must be planted and nourished, ***is Spiritual Renewal***. It is a call to the heart and soul of humankind, it is an awakening to:

- The great spiritual potential that God has placed in every human being.
- The everlasting glory that awaits those who cultivate their potential.

Every human being needs an enduring purpose. He must “know” himself and set a goal infinitely higher than being alive and making a living. The Bahá’í Faith declares that we are God’s most glorious creation:

O SON OF SPIRIT!
I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase

*thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.*³

Bahá'í Scriptures

Would God allow His most glorious creation to perish?

O SON OF MAN!

*Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not, wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished, why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.*⁴

Bahá'í Scriptures

Spiritual Renewal comes from the cultivation of human potential, especially from recognizing that:

- To be human is the most glorious honor.
- That honor is everlasting.

The preceding are the *pillars* of Spiritual Renewal. What is the *structure*? It is an awakening to our true purpose in life, it is knowing what God has planned for us. Unless this Seed of Awareness is planted and cultivated, we cannot reach our supreme potential.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that the purpose of life is spiritual, that the only reason we have come into this world is to know and love God.

*The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.*⁵

Bahá'í Scriptures

God is the Spirit of the universe, the generating source of all spiritual life. Knowing and loving Him must be our only reason for being alive. Without this reason, we have no reason; without

this purpose, we have no purpose. Without knowing God, we are ignorant, even if we master all human knowledge. Without loving God, we are poor, even if we own all the wealth of the world.



Most people express a belief in God. But “believing without knowing” has no roots. It can be blown away by the winds of time; it can wither and die before bearing any fruit. Knowledge is the root that provides the nourishment, stability, and strength to our beliefs.

Only our Creator can teach us about Himself. Only He can raise our vision, elevate our spirit, and enlighten our soul. The Bahá’í Faith, as the latest revelation of knowledge from God, raises our level of “knowing” to new heights never before achieved. It helps us to know our Creator, according to our maturity, on a scale not possible in past ages.

This level of knowledge, this advanced stage of knowing, leads us to our final phase of spiritual evolution or maturity: a state of experiencing absolute, unshakable, and unconditional love for God. The earth may quake, burn, or be ravaged by storms, but the sun continues to shine. Even so must our love for God be independent of all things. It must continue to shine, no matter what happens in our lives. Unconditional love requires trust, trust requires knowledge, and true knowledge can come only from God.

Attaining this level or state of loving must be recognized as the ultimate goal of every human being, and the very purpose of

living. This love is the most powerful force in the universe. It turns enemies into friends, sinners into saints. It transforms despair into hope and happiness, grief into joy and peace, apathy into exhilaration and ecstasy. Like the sun that is the source of light, this love is the generating source of all virtues.

Unless we connect our soul to this source, we cannot experience Spiritual Renewal. We remain a bud instead of a flower, a caterpillar instead of a butterfly.

Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted Dominion.⁶ *Bahá'í Scriptures*

I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me?⁷ *Bahá'í Scriptures*

The Bahá'ís believe that:

- The time has come for all nations to work together to create a world of peace and harmony, where all people cooperate as members of one unified family. By far the greatest obstacle to peace and prosperity is our failure to develop a global conscience, a failure to realize that we are all passengers on one planet with one destiny. Our awareness of this truth will lead us toward unity and cooperation. The unity of the human race is the foremost remedy, the panacea for all the conflicts that engulf the world and endanger its future.
- Every individual has a responsibility to participate in this supreme endeavor, in this social and spiritual adventure. Every person must play a part in moving the world toward its global and glorious destiny.
- The Bahá'í teachings on the unity of humankind offer a workable model for creating a peaceful world, and for helping us to take a giant leap forward in our social-spiritual evolution.

- Promoting spirituality—a sense of intimacy with God—is the foremost remedy, the panacea for all human suffering. ***Inside every problem lies a spiritual solution.*** “The heart of every problem is the heart.”

Who then is a Bahá'í? A Bahá'í is one who strives to cultivate in himself and others a global conscience and a spiritual perspective on life. His concerns and focus of interests pass far beyond himself and his loved ones. Everyone is his loved one. He spreads the knowledge and love of God to every heart and every home until the glory of God fills the earth:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14

A Bahá'í is socially active. He strives to promote the adoption of the following principles as a foundation for a peaceful planet:

- ***All great religions come from the same Source.*** They unfold an ever-evolving truth; they reveal the divine wisdom progressively according to the needs and maturity of humankind.
- ***The purpose of religion is to unify humanity,*** to join people in love and harmony.
- ***Religion and science are perfect partners.*** Their harmony must be recognized and their powers integrated.
- ***Prejudice—racial, national, religious—must be uprooted.***
- ***Gender discrimination must be abolished.*** Equal opportunities and rights should be provided for both men and women.
- ***Universal education must become a reality.***
- ***Schools must teach both knowledge and nobility.***
- ***It is essential to establish universal peace.***
- ***Extremes of wealth and poverty must be eliminated,*** both through laws and through individuals' recognition of their spiritual responsibilities.

- *Diversity among peoples and nations must be cherished and prized.*
- *A universal auxiliary language must be adopted* and learned throughout the planet.
- *A global order must be established* to regulate international relations.

When Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus become Bahá'ís, they suddenly discover that they have always been one people, worshipping one God, and believing in one everlasting and evolving Faith, with different names. They see with wonder and awe “the light of oneness”—a light that shines brightly in all the great religions. They discover that the lines that divide the peoples of the world are only shadows. When the light of knowledge is allowed to shine, the lines vanish away. That is what Bahá'ís in over 200 countries are doing: they are busy spreading the light of understanding and knowledge until all shadows are gone.

Bahá'ís believe that the time has come for each of us to stop saying: “I don't like the world! Let me get off!” and start saying:

I am grateful to be alive and awake at the dawn of this Glorious Day. And I am honored to play my role in this unfolding drama. With God's help I will do my share to turn this divided planet into a place of peace and harmony, where everyone enjoys freedom of conscience, and relates to everyone else—whatever his race, religion, or culture—in a spirit of friendship. I am responsible for what I can do, but with God's help I can do the work of a thousand who are too busy to hear the call to this *Most Glorious Awareness*.

There is so much to do and so little time! If we do not manage our time, then time will manage us—and ultimately determine our destiny. It will force us to focus on the demands of the hour at the expense of our eternal future.

If “wisdom” could speak, what would it say? What would it teach us? It would probably teach us the secrets of everlasting joy and happiness. But it would first gain our attention by asking a few questions—questions that hold the key to our everlasting destiny, such as:

Where have your past days gone? What did you do with them? And how will you spend your remaining days? What really matters in your life? What should you place first—choices that endure for only a little while, or the choices that have everlasting consequences? What if you continue to give all your time and talents to making a living, to staying in the race? ***Is this the reason for your coming into this world?*** What if you continue to postpone taking time for your soul? If not now, when? Time moves on. It does not wait for you. Should you let the events and demands of the passing hours make all the choices for you? What if you fail to choose your destiny before you have lost all your hours?

Reflect and meditate on these brief quotations from the Bahá’í Scriptures until they awaken your soul:

The days of your life flee away as a breath of wind, and all your pomp and glory shall be folded up as were the pomp and glory of those gone before you. Reflect, O people! What hath become of your bygone days, your lost centuries? Happy the days that have been consecrated to the remembrance of God, and blessed the hours which have been spent in praise of Him Who is the All-Wise.⁸

Bahá’í Scriptures

What advantage is there in the earthly things which men possess? That which shall profit them, they have utterly neglected. Ere long, they will awake from their slumber, and find themselves unable to obtain that which hath escaped them in the days of their Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Did they but know it, they would renounce their all, that their names may be mentioned before His throne.⁹

Bahá’í Scriptures

The past is gone, but the future is still yours. Would you like to have a plan for your future? If you do, first find out how you are spending the present. Estimate the amount of time you give each day to the following tasks:

- Sleeping
- Working or going to school
- Eating
- Cooking, cleaning, and bathing
- Shopping
- Exercising
- Watching TV or movies
- Talking to others
- Reading ordinary books and magazines
- Sitting behind your computer
- Time on road
- Wasted time
- *Time spent for your soul and your everlasting destiny*

O SON OF BEING!

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.¹⁰

Bahá'í Scriptures

2

The Difference Between the Spiritually Wise and Foolish

Among Jesus' parables perhaps the most touching and the most beautiful is that of the wise and foolish maidens or virgins (sincere Christians) who wished to meet the Bridegroom (Jesus) at His Second Advent, and then follow Him to His wedding Banquet as maids of honor. The parable is brief but powerful. It is like a little diamond shining with the blazing splendor of the sun. It bestows the spirit of wisdom on anyone who basks in its light. It reveals the secrets of everlasting joy and peace. It holds the key to every lesson that a human being may ever need to learn.

The parable portrays the stark contrast between the destiny of two groups or types of Christians who are waiting for the return of their Lord in the dark hours of the night: those who wait with "empty lamps," and those who wait with "oil in their lamps."

The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

Christ (Matt. 25:3-4)

Why did Jesus choose "maidens or young virgins" to represent Christians at His Second Coming? Being young and virgin symbolize purity, sincerity, and innocence. His purpose was to show that simply being "a good Christian," as defined by most people, does not suffice. In this case, faith, sincerity, and innocence must be crowned with *wisdom*. Only that virtue separated the two groups of believers. Only that virtue granted the maidens the honor of entering the heavenly Kingdom.

What is wisdom and what qualities distinguish or describe the wise? Wisdom is Heaven's most glorious gift. Everything depends on it, and without it everything falls apart:

*Above all else, the greatest gift and the most wondrous blessing hath ever been and will continue to be Wisdom. It is man's unfailing Protector.*¹ Bahá'í Scriptures

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Proverbs 3:13-15

Wisdom proclaims her glory and splendor to any human being who has enough wisdom to listen:

*He that hath Me [wisdom] not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me...I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way.*² Bahá'í Scriptures

The best way, perhaps the only way, to know wisdom—the crown of all virtues—is by examining its fruits: to learn what it produces, and where it leads us. Where does wisdom—or a lack of it—lead those two groups of maidens representing the two types of Christians living in our time? What will be their final destiny?

The destiny of sincere and **wise** Christians:

They went in with Him [Jesus] to the wedding Banquet. And the door was shut (Matt. 25:10).

The destiny of sincere but **foolish** Christians:

Sir, Sir! Open the door [to the Banquet] for us! (Matt 25:11)

Jesus: I do not know you! (Matt. 25:11)

Of what purpose is a lamp without light? A church without the light of wisdom is only a tomb. A believer without the light of wisdom is only a corpse. Is a church for the dead or for the

living? Can a moving corpse taste the joys and wonders of life? Of what purpose is a lamp without light?

In this dark night of confusion, many believers take great care of “the lamp” but pay little attention to “the oil”—the essence that sheds light on their path, that gives purpose to their lives. A failure to fill the lamp with oil is the root cause of most of the misery in human life, and the main reason religion has lost much of its purity and honor in the eyes of so many people.

At that time many will turn away from the faith...

Christ (Matt. 24:10)

What happens when we don’t know, and we don’t know that we don’t know? What happens when we don’t have enough wisdom to know that we lack wisdom? What happens when there is no oil to start a flame?

The wisdom of their wise shall vanish and the discerning of the discerning shall be lost.

Isaiah 29:14

Nothing can make as much difference to our lives as does wisdom. The destiny of the two types of Christians clearly demonstrates this fact. A true believer makes every effort to keep his “lamp” (the connection to a religion or to a name) filled with “oil” (wisdom). As the parable shows, only a lit lamp can lead a believer to the Bridegroom and His Banquet. Only a soul lit with wisdom can recognize the Lord, who comes in the darkness of the night.

If wisdom is so precious, should we not spend our lives searching for it? But who can find it? And how can it be found? These are the most critical questions in life. The rules for gaining wisdom are quite simple. Anyone who follows them will succeed. A wise believer:

- Identifies what matters most in life. He discovers what must come first.
- He also finds the ways that will lead to what matters most.
- And then dedicates his life to the things that matter most.

A foolish believer:

- Directs his life by what comes easy and feels good, with no regard for the consequences.
- He fails to search for truth, and keeps his mind biased and closed to new ideas and opportunities.
- He then dedicates his life to what comes easy and feels good.

What then is the first step in attaining wisdom? How can we discover “what matters most in life” and “what path leads us to what matters most”? The first step is to search for truth with a “sound mind.” What is a sound mind? It is a mind endowed with three virtues. A mind that is:

- *Open*
- *Impartial*
- *Critical*

The lack of any of these virtues will lead us astray. Like a chain, they are intertwined. All of them must be present to guide the mind to true knowledge and protect it from deception and misjudgment.

Consider the virtue of an open mind. Can anyone make a good choice if he is exposed to only *one* choice? Can a person be wise without listening to opposing views? A “sound mind” seeks for and exposes itself to diverse ideas before making up its mind! Consider also the virtue of being impartial. Can a judge come to a sound decision if he is biased, if he favors one side over the other? Similarly, being critical protects us from deception and danger, from being simple-minded or gullible.

*The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.*³

Bahá’í Scriptures

What are the requirements for being foolish? It is failing to search for truth, and keeping one’s mind closed, biased, and uncritical.

Your soul is an archeological treasure. The image of God is hidden there. He placed it within you long before you were born.

Would you like to look for the treasures you already own? If you would, then put on your working shoes, and take up the shovel! You will be amazed by what you will find: vast treasures hidden deep in your soul. The tools you need to dig them out are effort, patience, determination, and prayers.

- Recognize that there are rules for finding the treasures.
- Make a commitment to follow the rules.
- Then take action—start searching.

Have absolute faith that this promise is true, that it cannot and will not fail:

Seek and ye shall find. Christ (Matt. 7:7)

Would you like to receive the most glorious honor a human being may receive? Would you like to encounter “open doors” and be welcomed as a permanent guest at the heavenly Banquet? If you do, try to guide your destiny by the following principles. They are as essential for sustaining spiritual life as air and water are for physical life:

- Search for truth with an open, unbiased, and critical mind.
- Pray with all your heart and soul to be guided in your search.

Take ye heed, watch [search] and pray...

Christ (Mark 13:33)

Watch ye therefore, and pray always... *Christ (Luke 21:36)*

What I say to you, I say to all: Watch! *Christ (Mark 13:37)*

What if someone looks forward to the following encounter?

The Believer:

Sir, sir, open the door.

The Bridegroom:

I do not know you.

Anyone who has a desire to hear the preceding response—“***I do not know you!***”—will not be disappointed, because God loves all human beings and respects their freedom to choose their destiny. The believer who prefers closed doors, like the one who prefers open doors, can also attain his heart’s desire. All he needs to do is ignore the divine directions: neither search, nor pray. May God bless you and crown your destiny with these words:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.
Christ (Matt. 25:34)

Part II

A Brief History of the Greatest News

Bahá'u'lláh

The Advent of the One
Promised in All Sacred Scriptures

*The desire of all nations shall
come...* *Haggai 2:7*

*He Who is the Desired One is
come in His transcendent majesty
...Better is this for you than all
ye possess.* *Bahá'u'lláh*



*For the Son of man shall come
in the glory of his Father.*
Christ (Matt. 16:27)

*I have come in the shadows of
the clouds of glory, and am
invested by God with invincible
sovereignty.* *Bahá'u'lláh*

3

Bahá'u'lláh: The One Promised in All Sacred Scriptures

In examining the evidence for the One who has claimed to speak the Word of God, the most vital questions are these: Who was He? What was He like? How did He live? What happened to Him? Here are a few features of Bahá'u'lláh's life, adapted mostly from a book entitled *Some Answered Questions*:

Bahá'u'lláh was born in 1817, in Persia, to a rich and noble family. He died in 1892, as a prisoner and exile in the Holy Land. As an infant, He astonished His parents by His uniqueness and distinctions. His father related that He would never cry or scream. "You don't know," he said, "what a potential He has, how intelligent He is! He is like a flame of fire, and in His tender years superior to young people."¹ Bahá'u'lláh's father was so captivated by Him that he wrote a piece of poetry in his son's honor, inscribed it on a plaque, and hung it on the wall of a summer mansion in which Bahá'u'lláh lived. The content of the poetry shows that the father sensed the divine destiny of his Son:

When thou enterest the sacred abode of the Beloved say:

"I am at thy command.

This is the home of love; enter with reverence.

This is holy ground; remove thy shoes when
thou enterest here."²

People were attracted by Bahá'u'lláh's many distinctions. He did not attend any school, yet astonished people by His wisdom and knowledge. Even His enemies testified to His greatness. Great thinkers flocked to His presence, asking Him their most difficult questions. They said, "This man is unique in all perfections."

He had an extraordinary power of attraction, which was felt by all. People always crowded around Him. Ministers and people of the Court would surround Him, and the children also were devoted to Him. When He was only thirteen or fourteen years old He became renowned for His learning. He would converse on any subject and solve any problem presented to Him. In large gatherings He would...explain intricate religious questions. All of them used to listen to Him with the greatest interest.³

He showed no interest in politics:

When Bahá'u'lláh was twenty two years old, His father died, and the Government wished Him to succeed to His father's position in the Ministry...but Bahá'u'lláh did not accept the offer. Then the Prime Minister said: "Leave him to himself. Such a position is unworthy of him. He has some higher aim in view. I cannot understand him, but I am convinced that he is destined for some lofty career. His thoughts are not like ours. Let him alone."⁴

Bahá'u'lláh was known especially for His generosity and love for the poor:

He was most generous, giving abundantly to the poor. None who came to Him were turned away. The doors of His house were open to all.⁵

One day Bahá'u'lláh sent 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest Son, to inspect the work of the shepherds who were taking care of His sheep. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a small child at the time, and the persecutions against Bahá'u'lláh and His family had not yet started. Bahá'u'lláh then had a good deal of land in the mountains and owned large herds of sheep. When the inspection was finished and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was ready

to leave, the man who had accompanied Him said, “It is your father’s custom to leave a gift for each shepherd.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá became silent for a while, because He did not have anything to give them. The man, however, insisted that the shepherds were expecting something. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had an idea that made Him very happy! He would give the shepherds the sheep they were taking care of! Bahá’u’lláh was very much pleased when He heard about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s generous thoughts towards the shepherds. He humorously remarked that everyone had better take good care of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá because someday He would give Himself away. Of course, this is exactly what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did for the rest of His life. He gave everything He had, each and every moment of His life, to humanity, to unite us and bring us true happiness.⁶

Bahá’u’lláh was also known for His courage to stand against the powerful who would abuse their power:

All classes of men marveled at His miraculous success in emerging unscathed from the most perilous encounters. Nothing short of Divine protection, they thought, could have ensured His safety on such occasions...In His constant association, during those days, with the highest dignitaries of the realm...He was never content simply to accede to the views they expressed or the claims they advanced. He would, at their gatherings, fearlessly champion the cause of truth, would assert the rights of the downtrodden, defending the weak and protecting the innocent.⁷

Bahá’u’lláh spent the early part of His life in the utmost joy and happiness. But He later became a target of prejudice and persecution. Thousands of fanatical believers rose against Him. Religious leaders were terrified of losing their power. They said, “This man intends to destroy religion, law, the nation, and the empire.” (People made the same accusations against Jesus.) He faced His enemies with the utmost courage, showing no weakness or fear.

Bahá'u'lláh endured nearly 40 years of imprisonment and exile, yet He never complained. No human being can imagine the extent of His sufferings. Among His sufferings was imprisonment in an infamous dungeon in Tihrán, known as the Black Pit or Black Dungeon, where He was kept for four months. In that dungeon He endured every conceivable pain and anguish:

- **Total darkness:** The underground prison had neither lights nor windows.
- **A terrible stench:** About 150 of the worst criminals were thrown in that dark, deep, and damp dungeon with no air circulation or sanitary facilities. The ground was covered with several inches of filthy mud and mire.
- **Hunger and thirst:** For the first three days and nights Bahá'u'lláh received neither food nor water.
- **Severe pain and lack of mobility:** Bahá'u'lláh's feet were put in stocks, and on His neck was placed a chain so heavy that He was unable to hold Himself upright. To hold the weight of the chain, Bahá'u'lláh had to press His hands against the ground covered with slime up to His wrists. From the weight of the harsh metal, His neck became inflamed and injured.
- **Little if any sleep:** Bahá'u'lláh could hardly sleep under those horrible conditions.
- **Lack of clothes:** His outer garments were stripped away on His way to the prison.
- **Illness:** Because of the unsanitary conditions, Bahá'u'lláh suffered grave illness.
- **Being poisoned:** He also suffered pain from consuming poison placed in His food.
- **Homelessness:** All His properties were confiscated.
- **Loneliness:** "During this time none of His friends were able to get access to Him."⁸

- ***Being surrounded by the worst criminals*** who had little if any hope of survival or freedom.
- ***Anxiety about His family***: Bahá'u'lláh's family members, including His young children, were left at the mercy of fanatical mobs, filled with rage and incited to seek revenge. (His Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was then 9 years old.)
- ***Deep grief and concern for His devoted and distinguished disciples***, who were being hunted down, tortured, and killed by enraged mobs outside the prison.
- ***Concern about the future***: From that prison Bahá'u'lláh was banished to strange lands. As foretold in a prophecy (Matt. 25:41-46), He became a stranger (an exile). Never again did He see His homeland.
- ***Deep sorrow*** for those who were rejecting God's choicest blessings and bounties.*

It was in this dungeon that Bahá'u'lláh expressed the first intimations of His Divine Mission:

One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: "Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name..."⁹

Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly stated that He spoke only by God's command, and not of His own choosing. He declared:

Think ye, O people, that I hold within My grasp the control of God's ultimate Will and Purpose?...Had the ultimate destiny of God's Faith been in Mine hands, I would have never consented, even though for one moment, to manifest Myself unto you, nor would I have

* The Bible contains numerous prophecies that predict suffering for Jesus in His Second Advent. For a review of such prophecies, see ***King of Kings*** by this author.

allowed one word to fall from My lips. Of this God Himself is, verily, a witness.¹⁰

This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? Nay, by Him Who is the Lord of all Names and Attributes!¹¹

Bahá'u'lláh's arrest and imprisonment in that dungeon give us only a glimpse of the sufferings He endured for nearly 40 years in three different countries. How could anyone survive the scourge of such unrelenting pressures? How much pain can a human being endure? Why would God allow the One He loved the most to go through so much suffering? Did not Jesus endure similar ordeals?

Worldly friends, seeking their own good, appear to love one the other, whereas the true Friend [Bahá'u'lláh] hath loved and doth love you for your own sakes; indeed He hath suffered for your guidance countless afflictions. Be not disloyal to such a Friend, nay rather hasten unto Him.¹²

Bahá'u'lláh

The religious leaders feared Bahá'u'lláh's influence, so they had Him exiled to another land. They thought in a strange land His influence would die out. But the result was that His charm captivated many more disciples. They exiled Him again and again. The results were the same—a spreading of His influence. Finally, they sent Him to the worst place they could find: a prison for murderers and thieves, located in a remote city ('Akká) with a dreadful climate and foul water. The sufferings Bahá'u'lláh endured in 'Akká surpassed even those He experienced in the Black Dungeon.

Bahá'u'lláh was placed in a barren, filthy room, while His followers were crowded into another, the floor of which was covered with mud. Ten soldiers were posted to stand guard over them. To add further to their misery, the exiles, parched from a long day in the hot sun, soon found that the only water available to them was unfit for consumption.

Mothers were unable to feed their babies, and infants cried for hours...

Under these conditions, all but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [Bahá’u’lláh’s Son] and one other, fell ill. Within a matter of days three men died. The officials denied the prisoners permission to leave the citadel to bury them, and the guards demanded payment before removing the bodies. Bahá’u’lláh ordered that His prayer rug, the only item of any value that He possessed, be sold to cover the cost of the burial. The guards pocketed the money and buried the men in the clothes in which they died...

Three days after the exiles’ arrival, the Sultán’s edict was read aloud in the mosque. It sentenced Bahá’u’lláh, His family, and His companions to life imprisonment and expressly forbade the exiles to associate with one another or with local inhabitants.¹³

During Bahá’u’lláh’s imprisonment in ‘Akká, His young son was pacing the roof of the prison, “wrapped in devotions, when he fell through a skylight. Mortally wounded, his dying wish to his Father was that his life might be a ransom for those who were prevented from attaining Bahá’u’lláh’s presence.”¹⁴ In a prayer, Bahá’u’lláh speaks of the sacrifice of His son:

I have, O my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united.¹⁵

Here Bahá’u’lláh explains why He accepted so much pain and suffering:

The Ancient Beauty [Bahá’u’lláh] hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner...that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful. We have accepted to be abased...that ye may be exalted, and have suffered

manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish. He Who hath come to build anew the whole world, behold, how they...have forced Him to dwell within the most desolate of cities!¹⁶

Despite this severe repression, Bahá'u'lláh's influence continued to spread, His glory became more evident. From behind prison walls, He triumphed over all His enemies.

For if this idea...is of human origin, it will collapse; but if it is from God, you will never be able to put them [the believers] down, and you risk finding yourself at war with God.

Acts 5:38-39

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to the Holy Land, those aware of biblical prophecies suddenly realized what had happened: Bahá'u'lláh's enemies had, unknowingly, become the very instruments for the fulfillment of prophecies about Him because the Bible predicts repeatedly that the Redeemer of the Last Days will come to the Holy Land. Those who had wished to destroy Him became the means of His triumph. (For a review of these prophecies and many others, see *I Shall Come Again, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.*)

In 1868, while under arrest, Bahá'u'lláh addressed the kings and rulers of the earth, asking them to act with justice and to work for peace. With the exception of Queen Victoria, they ignored His call. He predicted their downfall and His own triumph.

Among these sovereigns was Napoleon III. Bahá'u'lláh asked him to investigate the reason for His imprisonment. The sovereign did not respond. Bahá'u'lláh sent a second letter, predicting his downfall. Soon thereafter, in 1870, war between Germany and France broke out. Everything seemed to be in Napoleon's favor, yet he was defeated, dishonored, and debased. According to *The Fall of Paris*:

History knows of perhaps no more startling instance of what the Greeks called peripateia, the terrible fall from prideful heights. Certainly no nation in modern times, so replete with apparent grandeur and opulent in material

achievement, has ever been subjected to a worse humiliation in so short a time.¹⁷

Other sovereigns addressed by Bahá'u'lláh encountered similar fates. Every prediction that Bahá'u'lláh made was fulfilled. These are discussed in a book titled *The Prisoner and the King*, by William Sears.

Bahá'u'lláh's greatness touched even those who did not follow Him. They wrote about His knowledge, His kindness, and His patience. They flocked to His presence and marveled at His wondrous works.

How often would one of His bitter enemies say to himself, "When I see Him, I will argue with Him and defeat Him in this way..." But when faced with Bahá'u'lláh, he would find himself speechless—unable to utter a word.

Bahá'u'lláh declared His willingness to be tested. To leave the religious leaders with no excuse, Bahá'u'lláh said that He was willing to perform any miracle that they requested. The only condition He set was that, after the miracle was performed, they would acknowledge the validity of His claim. The religious leaders declined to accept the condition. (God has always refused requests to perform miracles to prove His power, see Matt. 4:7. We cannot be sure why Bahá'u'lláh accepted this request. Perhaps one reason was that He knew it would be rejected.)

Bahá'u'lláh demonstrated His dependence on the divine and detachment from worldly desires by associating with the poor and the humble and avoiding the powerful and the pompous. A notable figure wanted to meet Bahá'u'lláh. But to be seen with Bahá'u'lláh meant danger. He sent a message asking to meet with Him secretly. In response, Bahá'u'lláh sent him a piece of poetry to this effect: "Unless you have a desire to sacrifice your life, don't come here. This is the way if you wish to meet Bahá. If you are unprepared for this journey, don't come, and don't bring trouble." The man dared not take the risk of endangering his life and declined.

For nearly 50 years Bahá'u'lláh faced bitter enemies who killed thousands of His followers, yet failed to destroy Him. Repeatedly they planned and plotted against Him, but to no avail.

Are these marks of distinction not similar to those found in the life of Jesus?

Part III

Why Does God Test Us and How?

*In dealing with men, it is God's purpose
to test them and to see what they truly are.*

Ecclesiastes 3:18

*The hour of trial which shall come upon
the whole world...*

Christ (Rev. 3:10)

4

The Need for Testing

Why did God put us on earth instead of heaven? Why should the first step of our eternal journey begin with a physical experience? If we are, in essence, spiritual beings, why are we given a body?

This world is a “testing station,” where we make a brief stop on our way to God’s “many mansions in heaven.” The test is designed to be tough, and yet it is offered on many levels. We have a choice to drop out of school, to remain ignorant of the purpose of our life and our spiritual destiny, or work hard to graduate with honors.

The hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world...
Christ (Revelation 3:10)

In the third chapter of the Book of Revelation, Jesus first speaks of His coming “like a thief,” and then predicts a severe test for all the earth’s inhabitants:

The hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world...He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
Christ (Revelation 3:10, 13)

Jesus asked His disciples to pray to be protected from tests:

Pray that you may be spared the test...Christ (Matthew 26:41)

He has also instructed us to pray for the same reason:

Our Father in heaven...do not put us to the test...
Christ (Matthew 6:9, 13)

The purpose of praying is not to escape all tests, but to ask God either not to give us a hard test or provide us the power to pass

it. Sacred scriptures declare that everyone must face tests. In fact, we are tested at every moment of our lives. For instance, every time we spend money, we face a test.

O SON OF BEING!

Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

Why have tests? Imagine a school without it. In thought and theory, everyone can claim perfection. We all have a hidden self that remains evasive and unknown even to us. Tests bring that self out into the open. They allow us to see ourselves not in the dark of self-deception, nor in thought and theory, but in the light of truth as we really are.

Each of us is like a flower in a bottle with a tight lid. Unless the lid is removed, the flower's fragrance remains untapped and unknown. In some cases, only by pressing the petals can we detect any fragrance. Sometimes nothing comes out except foul odor. The same holds true with humans. Unless we face difficult choices, unless we are pressed for a response, our true essence remains untouched, untapped, and invisible.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God...See how I tested you...in the furnace of affliction; there I purified you. Isaiah 48:10 NEB

For everyone shall be salted with fire... Mark 9:49

Even gold passes through the assayer's fire, and more precious than perishable gold is the faith which has stood the test. I Peter 1:7

...that each soul may be tested by the touchstone of God, that the true may be known and distinguished from the false.² Bahá'u'lláh

The Qur'án confirms the same principle:

We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere. We must expose your true qualities. Qur'án 47:31

Bahá'u'lláh also quotes this prophecy from the Qur'án:

Verily, God will bring everything to light, though it were but the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, and hidden in a rock or in the heavens or in the earth; for God is Subtile, informed of all.³

Compare the preceding passage with this one:

For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.

Christ (Luke 8:17-18)

Why would God give more to the one who has much and take away from the one who has little? As we discuss the meaning and purpose of tests, the answer will become clear.

The purpose of coming to this world is to advance toward our Creator, to become more and more like Him—as pure and perfect as possible. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48). A receptive, open mind advances through tests; an obstinate mind resists and regresses.

A topic that is universally ignored in Christian theology concerning the second Advent is the need for *testing*. Those who set conditions for accepting Christ’s second coming, such as expecting to see Him display spectacular power and glory, without knowing, are putting God to the test. By their expectation they are saying, “I will not accept you, unless you perform a miracle.” They do not realize that it is for God to test us, not for us to test Him. They simply brush aside or ignore the prophecies that challenge their theories.

Prophecies indicate that those who live in this age will encounter severe tests and trials:

...the hour of trial [testing] which is coming on the world, to try those who dwell upon the earth.

Christ (Revelation 3:10)

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and

like launderer's soap. He will sift as a refiner and a purifier of silver...

Malachi 3:2-3

God always tests us. What then makes our age different? Ours is the time of transition and renewal. It takes far more courage to investigate a new Faith than to continue to conform to old and established ways of believing and behaving. Human beings always love to keep their favorite illusions alive. Our resistance to overcome our selfish desires and illusions is our test. This test comes from within; it is self-selected. Passing it, requires self-examination, self-discipline, and self-victory.

But there is another test that God presents. It is His special test designed for those who live at the dawning of His great Messengers. The nature of this test is clarified in one of Bahá'u'lláh's major works, *The Book of Certitude*. By explaining that test, Bahá'u'lláh also resolves a riddle that has baffled the mind of every believer and reader of sacred scriptures. The following statement from a noted Christian philosopher and historian, Dr. Elton Trueblood, demonstrates the riddle:

According to the Synoptic Gospels the parable was Christ's chief way of presenting his teaching... Apparently the number of parables was very great, far greater, indeed, than the number of those preserved for us. "With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything" (Mark 4:33, 34). This seems straightforward and clear, but on the question of the fundamental reason for using parables there is a serious problem. Mark announces flatly that the purpose of parables is to confuse the people, and Luke follows him in this, almost word for word (Mark 4:10-12 and Luke 8:9-10). Here is a hard saying, indeed, but it is unambiguous: "And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.'"

Is there any thoughtful person who has ever read this for the first time without a shock? We rub our eyes and look again, convinced that we have made some mistake in reading. Could it be that Christ went to great pains to keep people from understanding? If so, this seems to be utterly inconsistent with His character as we find it depicted in other parts of the Gospel. A vast amount of squirming has been done to defend such a policy of arbitrary exclusion, but without manifest success. Certainly this policy is far removed from “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20).⁴

Jesus even praises God for hiding certain truths from the so called “the wise and learned,” but disclosing them to the pure-hearted:

I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because ***you have hidden these things from the wise and learned***, and revealed them to little children.

The Qur’án presents a similar message:

And who doth more wrong than one who is reminded of the signs of his Lord, but turns away from them..Verily We have set veils over their hearts lest they should understand this, and over their ears deafness. If thou callest them to guidance, even then will they never accept guidance. But your Lord is most forgiving, full of mercy.

Qur’án 18:57-58

God asks us to seek Him and find Him. Why then would He conceal certain truths from certain people? Such an act seems inconsistent with His supreme love and grace. Bahá’u’lláh’s explanation of tests resolves the riddle. In *The Book of Certitude* He states that God tests us by blending some of His prophecies about the coming of His Manifestations with symbols and metaphors:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse [difficult] allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God’s holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable

and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books.⁵

Compare the preceding statement with this one from St. Paul:

...wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

St. Paul's statement contains two main messages:

- Do not try to express your view or take any position concerning issues that are "hidden in darkness." This right is given to the Lord, the One destined to come and empowered to resolve the riddles.
- When He comes, He will expose people's motives.

Bahá'u'lláh's statement contains the same messages. He declares that the purpose of "symbolic terms and abstruse allusions" is to test the people. And what is the purpose of a test? To expose the hidden motives of the heart. The similarities between the two passages are remarkable. Symbols and abstruse allusions are the kind of truths that remain, in Paul's words, "hidden in darkness"; and their purpose is to test people. "In Hebrew and Aramaic the word for 'parable' might also mean 'riddle.'"⁶

The following passage from Bahá'u'lláh points to the fulfillment of Paul's prediction:

The time is at hand when whatsoever lieth hid in the souls and hearts of men will be disclosed... This Day the deceitful of eye, and all that men's breasts conceal, are made known and laid bare before the throne of His Revelation. Nothing whatsoever can escape His knowledge. He heareth and seeth, and He, in truth, is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.⁷

The biblical message of concealment that has puzzled Dr. Trueblood and countless other Christian scholars appears also in Matthew:

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of

the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”

Matthew 13:10-16

Why would Jesus not speak to His disciples in parables? Consider a chemistry teacher who tells her students that they cannot work in the lab until they have mastered the basic principles of chemistry. She will allow them that privilege only after they have passed their written exam. Why would she do this? Because such students are worthy enough and mature enough to handle the chemicals. They have done their homework; they deserve to witness the nature’s wonders. Jesus’ disciples had already done their homework, they had already proved themselves worthy and capable of advanced knowledge of God. They had already proven worthy and capable of recognizing their Lord. Not only did they deserve to receive advanced knowledge, they could also appreciate it and understand it. Because of their meritorious achievements, Jesus offered them treasures of truths unwrapped, without the protection of symbols and metaphors. Others were struggling with an elementary test. They had to advance to the point of breaking through the wrappings before they could become capable and worthy of receiving the advanced truths. They had to open the box to get to the gift. Jesus would not do what was theirs to do. If He wanted to turn them into believers, He could do it in the twinkling of an eye. But the design of creation is based on courage not comfort, independence and self-discovery, not

dependence and dictated-discovery. Without initiative, effort and striving, we remain as immature and selfish as spoiled children.

Scientific truths are concealed for the same reason. We must reach out and break through the wrappings of nature to get to concealed mysteries and wonders.

To get from the shell to the pearl, we must always seek God's blessings. Without His help, nothing of significance can be achieved. Our sincere devotion and desire crowned with the grace of God can move any mountain.

Why did Jesus say, "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matthew 25:29)? Those who had little faith, lost it because they failed their test; they did not recognize their Lord. Those who had true faith gained even more, because they passed their test; they recognized the Spirit of God in a humble and poor person.

God provides a perfect balance of concealment and revelation both for Himself and His Redeemers. Too much concealment prevents the sincere from finding Him, and too little allows the insincere to see His banquet. That banquet is so precious, so beautiful, so marvelous, it must be protected from the strangers, the ones who are not properly dressed, who want the pleasure of going to the banquet without paying the price.

God is the source of infinite knowledge. There were truths that Jesus concealed even from His disciples. Had He revealed them, even *they* might have failed their test.

...in the sayings of Him Who is the Spirit (Jesus) unnumbered significances lie concealed. Unto many things did He refer, but as He found none possessed of a hearing ear or a seeing eye He chose to conceal most of these things. Even as He saith: "***But ye cannot bear them now.***"⁸

Bahá'u'lláh

The brief passage Bahá'u'lláh quotes at the end of His statement comes from this prophecy as appears in *The Amplified Bible*:

I have still many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them nor to take them upon you nor to grasp them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth (the truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all the truth—the whole full truth. For He will not speak His own message—on His own authority—but He will tell whatever He hears [from the Father, He will give the message that has been given to Him] and He will announce and declare to you the things that are to come—that will happen in the future. [Brackets and parentheses belong to the original.]

Christ (John 16:12-13)

Humans Unable to Decode the Metaphors

Bahá'u'lláh did not attend school, yet with a stroke of a pen He resolved mysteries that have baffled Jewish and Christian scholars for thousands of years. With His explanation, everything falls in place. Without it, we face nothing but chaos and contradiction. We encounter hundreds of conflicting views that not only violate the rules of reason but also the facts of the Scriptures. To see the extent of conflict in prophecy alone, see *The Last Day Handbook* by Dr. Robert Lightner, especially written to promote peace among warring Christian schools of prophecy.

Dr. Lightner, a professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, chooses strong words to describe the extent of the conflict. He refers to scholars and religious leaders who “battle so tenaciously over prophecy.”⁹ He speaks of “unChristlike fierceness of the battle.”¹⁰ He refers to name calling, accusations, and attacks of all kinds. He speaks of laymen finding the professional in the ring and “watching the fight.”¹¹ He describes a never-ending fight, because “When those in the ring are too

weak to keep fighting, they are quickly replaced by others who carry on the struggle...”¹²

Those involved in the interpretation of prophecy harbor intense emotions about the rightness of their position. As Dr. Lightner points out:

The real issues are not clear. You may wonder if these people are really being honest, but when you talk about the different viewpoints with others in the grandstand, you soon find yourself taking sides. Before you know it, you are arguing with your best friend.¹³

This prophecy explains why theologians are facing so much difficulty:

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; *the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.*”

Isaiah 29:13-14

No wonder we are asked not to make any judgment, but wait for the Lord—the Wellspring of all Wisdom—to come and break the seal of mysteries.

God has given us many precious gifts, among them the gift of freedom to like or dislike the truth. Our Creator never deceives us, never prevents us from knowing Him. But He does allow us to deceive ourselves. It is because of self-deception that human beings deny Him and His great Messengers:

Through deceit they refuse to know Me, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 9:6

In the following passage, Bahá'u'lláh refers again to tests, the multiple meanings of divine Word, and the spiritual attributes that can help us pass through the crust of symbols, parables, and metaphors to reach the precious pearl of inner meanings:

“God verily will test them and sift them.” This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favor with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: “Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people.”¹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh concludes His explanation of tests and inner meanings of divine Word with this statement:

These things We mention only that the people may not be dismayed because of certain...utterances, which have not yet been literally fulfilled, that they may rather attribute their perplexity to their own lack of understanding, and not to the non-fulfillment of the promises...The people, therefore, must not allow such utterances to deprive them of the divine bounties, but should rather seek enlightenment from them who are the recognized Expounders thereof, so that the hidden mysteries may be unraveled, and be made manifest unto them.¹⁵

As God conceals certain pearls of truth in parables and metaphors, He also gives us clear instructions to find them. His infinite love requires that all of us pass our tests, that all of us make the right choices. What are His instructions?

- He tells us that we are not the authorized interpreters of His Word (I Corinthians 4:5; II Peter 1:20).
- He warns us of the dangers of being literal-minded (II Corinthians 3:6).
- He teaches us that His Word must be discerned spiritually (I Corinthians 2:13-14).
- He warns us that in order to see Him, we must strip every veil away from our soul. We must become free from all

personal desires, illusions, and attachments (Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14).

- He asks us not to remain passive, complacent, and conforming, but seek and search for truth every moment of our lives (Matthew 7:7-8; Proverbs 11:9; Luke 21:36).

Why Come “as a Thief”?

Not only God conceals certain truths from us in the mold of metaphors, He also conceals His Redeemers in the robe of their physical form. Just as we must pass through the wrappings of metaphors to discover the Truth, so must we pass through the wrappings of physical form, “the human temple,” to discover the Ones who *teach* the Truth. No analogy can be stronger or more vivid than that of *a thief in the night*. God promised to conceal the Redeemer of our time from the strangers just as a thief conceals himself from the sleeping householders. To help us find His heavenly Thief, He has asked us repeatedly to remain awake and alert.

In the third chapter of the Book of Revelation God first speaks about the thief-like coming of Jesus. He then warns us that we will be tested. This warning is one more instruction, one more hint, one more clue on how we can find Him. The idea of being tested implies the possibility of failing to find the object of our search. To make sure everyone listens to His clues and instructions, Jesus ends that chapter with:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Revelation 3:20-22

Notice that Jesus declares that He will *knock* on the door of our heart. He does not say, “I will break through the door.” If we

open the door with gratitude, we have passed our test; if we keep it closed, we have failed. The choice is ours.

Jesus concludes His discourse by instructing and inviting His church to listen to Him, to open its heart to His heavenly glory, because He knows it won't. Are today's churches hearing the voice of the Spirit, as Jesus instructed them? Are people wise enough to understand God's instructions (Daniel 12:10), to apply His clues for finding the heavenly Teacher and His hidden treasures of Truth? Are they humble enough to acknowledge their ignorance? And are they faithful to their own scriptures to admit that the right of interpreting the prophecies is given not to theologians, but to the promised One? Do they have sufficient insight to recognize the grave dangers of being literal-minded? Are they listening to the commands and warnings of Jesus?

History shows that the desire for doing what comes easy is so strong, it overshadows and subdues every other desire. It shows that attachment to one's ancestral beliefs overcomes every evidence, every instruction, every encouragement, every reward, every commandment, every warning, however grave it may be. Even the threat of eternal "fire" does not move people, does not open their hearts and souls. Consider the awesome resistance to Jesus Christ. It took the power of a king and the passage of three centuries before Jesus received His due recognition. Even today most people do not acknowledge Him. Our age is no exception. Once again we encounter the same sad news of resistance to the new, and attachment to the past.

At the end of *The Book of Certitude*, Bahá'u'lláh offers this dire warning to all the peoples of the world:

We perceive none, however, amongst the people of the earth who, sincerely yearning for the Truth, seeketh the guidance of the divine Manifestations concerning the abstruse matters of his Faith. All are dwellers in the land of oblivion, and all are followers of the people of wickedness and rebellion. ***God will verily do unto them that which they themselves are doing, and will forget them even as they have ignored His Presence in His day.*** Such

is His decree unto those that have denied Him, and such will it be unto them that have rejected His signs.¹⁶

The Power of Metaphors to Separate People

Now meditate on God's infinite Wisdom. With the help of a few symbolic words, He separates and grades people. On one side we have hundreds of literal prophecies fulfilled by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. As demonstrated in *I Shall Come Again, Lord of Lords*, and *King of Kings*, the probability of those prophecies being fulfilled by chance is 1 in 4×10^{91} —a figure that exceeds by more than a hundred billion times the estimated number of elementary particles in the observable universe! (See *Lord of Lords*, Chapter 20.) Thus the evidence on the side of fulfilled prophecies is greater than the universe. What do we have on the other side? Only a few figures of speech, such as *heaven, fire, angels, trumpet blast*, and *the resurrection of the dead*. What all such figures have in common is this: they imply a miraculous display of power over the laws of nature. What have these few metaphors accomplished? Their powers have been awesome! ***They have prevented hundreds of millions of Christians from investigating the universe of evidence on the side of fulfilled prophecies.*** They have prevented many people from even approaching the new Revelation. Those symbols have discouraged leaders and laymen alike from coming close enough to witness the most majestic and awesome expression of God's glory and power in Christ's second Advent, with His new name Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God!

How strange! How astonishing! How incredible! A little eyelid, Bahá'u'lláh declares, can conceal the whole universe. This seemingly little veil of metaphor can do the same for the soul. It prevents it from seeing a universe of evidence, from beholding the Blessed Beauty, the Glory of God! It has concealed a Revelation so magnificent, so splendid the like of which the world has never seen.

The little eyelid on the soul works as perfectly as the one on the eye. This points to the supreme power and wisdom of our Creator. Through a few words, He tests the in-sight of the souls of all inhabitants of the earth. He separates the detached from the attached, the open-minded from the obstinate, the curious from the complacent, the fearless from the fearful. The power of separation in this seemingly simple test is awesome. It has worked marvelously throughout all ages. Even repetition of the test has not taught the people the lesson.

Consider the awesome power of God's amazingly simple test in the first Advent of Christ. By a single metaphor—*king*—He tested and graded all the people of Israel. Most of them failed because of that single metaphor! This is so amazing to believe, yet it is true. After the lapse of many centuries, still the Jews have not awakened to the dawning of divine splendor in Jesus, still they are expecting a powerful king, who would also be their first Messiah! If this happened to the followers of Moses, could it not happen also to the followers of Jesus?

Is It Fair to Conceal?

Let us now examine the question of fairness about concealing from us certain truths in metaphors, and then giving us directions and clues on how to find them. Why would God do this? Please note that God wants to separate the faithful from the unfaithful, the open-minded from the obstinate, the humble from the proud. He knows that some people cling to the "letters" or the surface meanings of specific verses and words, others search for the spirit of the scriptures, for they know "the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." The spiritual-minded seekers are not disturbed by a new name; they recognize the Spirit behind any name, no matter how strange it may sound. An unknown name such as Bahá'u'lláh does not deter them. When they hear the news of His coming, instantly they begin to search. Their love for that Spirit is so intense, they would offer their very lives to find Him. Who would the Master choose? Although many are called, He declares, only *a few* are chosen

(Matthew 22:14). These few are the daring ones, who do not bury their “talents” (Matthew 18:22-35), who jump over every obstacle, who have no fear of falling.

What about the others, who do not want to be disturbed, who feel comfortable in their little fish bowl, who are pleased with their spiritual possessions? God knows that they will ignore his instructions, that they will disregard His clues and directions. He knows that they would rather daydream than face reality; that they would rather see a material miracle than a spiritual wonder, that they would rather witness a winged warrior come down from the sky with an army of fighting angels at His command than look for and discover God’s supreme glory and His magnificent power and splendor in His Word, uttered by a humble and gentle human being. God knows that those believers do not want to be disturbed, do not wish to be awakened from their sweet dreams. Since God loves all His creatures, even the ones who reject Him, He helps them attain their heart’s desire. Without His help, they will experience undue stress. He makes it possible for them to find excuses to stay in their fish bowl, without being bothered, without any pressure to come out. Undue exposure to the light will drive them out of their dark closet, running and trembling with fear. The clouds of metaphors and symbols provide them a buffer of protection from the intense light.

God nurtures and loves little egos, but leaves the inflated ones alone. He does not puncture them. He rings the bell, but never climbs over the wall. He always honors people’s privacy and freedom of choice.

But God has another reason for putting human beings to such tests. He wants to pick and choose guests fit for His heavenly banquet. He does not want any proud person in his presence, such as a soul who might say, “I am right and no one can tell me otherwise!” He does not want anyone who hangs this sign on his soul: “I’m asleep! Please no knocking!”

When Bahá’ís complained to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about people’s refusal to acknowledge Bahá’u’lláh’s divine mission, in response He

quoted this verse from Jesus: “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). The verse clearly indicates that God is the One who chooses guests for His heavenly banquet. Only He knows the souls worthy of His Kingdom. Only He can empower them to approach His presence.

...no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him. Christ (John 6:65)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... Christ (John 6:44)

Let me illustrate by a true story how an individual with closed heart responds to God’s invitation. Let us see how an insincere person responds, when God out of His grace, lends him a lending hand to see His splendid glory, when He sends a hard-to-ignore sign.

Once a Bahá’í wanted desperately to teach her dear friend about Bahá’u’lláh. The friend continued to resist and deny the evidence. Finally she said, “If Bahá’u’lláh is true, let Him give me a sign.” As we shall see, she was looking for an alibi, and did not expect what was about to happen. At that point, her Bahá’í friend, out of sheer love, went to work: she began to pray fervently to Bahá’u’lláh to give her friend a sign. Sure enough, Bahá’u’lláh appeared in her friend’s dream! What do you think happened? Did she like the encounter? Did she welcome Him? No, she protested against Bahá’u’lláh’s intrusion into her life! This true story shows clearly that even God, the All-Powerful, cannot enter a locked house, cannot force Himself on unreceptive and obstinate souls, unless He crushes their ego into submission through sheer power, just like a dictator. What would happen if Bahá’u’lláh appeared a second or a third time in her dreams? Would this be fair?

God does not have to give us any sign other than His words. His face glows through them as brightly as the sun. Yet out of sheer grace, sometimes He offers us a lending hand. This was one example. I have read and heard about many other examples, but mostly with positive consequences.

The story of this lady brings to memory the response of Pharisees to Jesus' miracles. When they witnessed His awesome powers, they declared that the Son of God was healing the sick not by divine pleasure, but by demonic powers (Luke 11:20). It was not the prince of peace, they believed, who did those wonders; it was the prince of demons. It was not the angel of light, but the angel of darkness disguised as the light. Miracles, as mighty and memorable as those performed by Jesus, could not unlock closed hearts.

God never prevents people from entering His banquet. They choose to stay out, and God simply respects their choice. Invitations are mutual. God first sends an invitation. We invite Him to our hearts; He invites us to His heavenly celebrations: "the great banquet of God" and "the Lamb's feast" (Revelation 19:7; 19:9; 19:17). As a pure mirror attracts the light of the sun, so does a pure soul the light of God. The moment we accept His new Messenger, we enter His banquet. Before passing from this life, His banquet remains invisible to our eyes; after passing away, it becomes as visible as the sun.

God always knocks, and enters only if invited. Once entered, He stays and at death He simply takes us to His heavenly feast. Only He knows the way.

So much for those who close their hearts. What about others, the true seekers? How do they act? Because they are humble, they do not start with "I know I am right and no one can tell me otherwise!" or "I am quite comfortable with my beliefs and have no need to look!" Their humility, curiosity, and openness allows them to pass beyond complacency. The metaphors do not blind them as by a veil, the symbols do not prevent them from seeking, for they know they should not be deterred or distracted by "the letters" of their scriptures. They strive for the Soul behind verses and words. They show no interest in surrendering their everlasting destiny to their ancestors out of convenience or family loyalty. Instead of starting their search with the symbolic prophecies, they begin with the literal. They recognize that hundreds of signs and clues cannot be fulfilled in the life of a person by chance. Such seekers have no fear of leaving their

comfort zone. And they do not put their wish for seeing glamour above their Master's command that they should leave all interpretations to Him.

An Objectionable Background

At the times of transition, God puts us still to another test. As a rule, He chooses a Savior or Messenger who may have, according to human standards, something objectionable in His background. Bahá'u'lláh presents Moses as an example. Why would God choose for His Redeemer someone who had committed murder?

Reflect upon the strange and manifold trials with which He doth test His servants. Consider how He hath suddenly chosen from among His servants, and entrusted with the exalted mission of divine guidance Him Who was known as guilty of homicide..Was not God, the omnipotent King, able to withhold the hand of Moses from murder, so that manslaughter should not be attributed unto Him, causing bewilderment and aversion among the people?¹⁷
Bahá'u'lláh

Did Jesus also have something objectionable in His background? Yes, by human standards, He was born out of wedlock. Surely God could find someone with a more acceptable family. Let us not picture Jesus as He is regarded now. How much would people pay today for a broken button on His robe? What about a single strand of His hair? Now go back to 27 A.D., when He declared His mission. How was Jesus viewed then? A poor young man born to an unmarried woman. Just picture such a person on the streets of Chicago or New York asking you to become his disciple. Would you pass that test? Who would not laugh and walk away with pity? Yes, that was the earthly state of Jesus! God expected the revered rabbis and pompous Pharisees to leave their synagogues and carry a cross behind Him! What a test! Bahá'u'lláh asks us to ponder why God would choose a person with such questionable background to become His Manifestation:

...God conferred upon that essence of the Spirit [Jesus], Who was known amongst the people as fatherless, the glory of Prophethood, and made Him His testimony unto all that are in heaven and on earth. Behold how contrary are the ways of the Manifestations of God, as ordained by the King of creation, to the ways and desires of men!¹⁸

Notice what Bahá'u'lláh states about Mary, about how she could explain her pregnancy:

Likewise, reflect upon the state and condition of Mary. So deep was the perplexity of that most beautiful countenance, so grievous her case, that she bitterly regretted she had ever been born...Reflect, what answer could Mary have given to the people around her? How could she claim that a Babe Whose father was unknown had been conceived of the Holy Ghost?¹⁹

Consider the country in which the Bahá'í Faith was born. If people in the time of Jesus said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46), today they may say, "Can anything but violence come out of Iran?"

Does then God put stumbling blocks in our way? He surely does. He wants to know who are the champion jumpers—over worldly obstacles. He wants to know who is willing to pass through the many layers of human desires to discover and behold His Blessed Beauty, the most awesome revelation of God's glory and power..

The Creator hides Himself for the same reason. Is every obstinate, prejudiced person worthy of beholding the awesome splendors of God? Why should that same rule not apply also to His Messengers? They are God on earth; they manifest Him to us. They too must hide the divine in them.

If a person is looking for an alibi to deny the divine, to reject any one of heavenly Redeemers, he will have no problem. God in His supreme love wants to help him also. Without His help, the deniers will be caught between two opposite poles; that is too stressful. God is not a dictator. He wants to make it easy for everyone to attain his heart's desire.

Please carry out the following project as an experiment. Find a born-again evangelical Christian and say, “A man named Bahá’u’lláh claims to be the return of Christ and He presents a mountain of evidence to prove His claim.” What do you think he might say? First, he will search for a biblical verse to remind himself that he is safe where he is, such as, “I am the way and the truth.” If you press him a little more, he might say, “Was this person resurrected?” If you say yes, he will continue his search to find something that will make the new Savior different from Jesus. As a last resort, he might say, “Jesus is *the only* Son of God. That other person is not Son of God.” Then he will look for an excuse to walk away. What he will *not* say is, “Please tell me more about the new Savior. What evidence does He present? Could you lend me a book by Him or about Him?” This individual is completely closed. Should we go after him or leave him alone? What would Jesus do?

Respect for Human Freedom

God does not want to drag a complacent and fearful sleeper from a soft bed into His celestial banquet. In His Wisdom He knows how much of Himself He should reveal or conceal in His Redeemers. He knows what stumbling blocks He should put in our way to test our courage and spiritual strength. The choice is up to Him.

God is All-Powerful; if He wanted everyone to be in His heavenly Kingdom, He could make that happen in the twinkling of an eye, but only at the expense of becoming an authoritarian and overprotective parent. In His infinite Wisdom, God knows what treasures of truth He should reveal or conceal in order to create a balance between freedom and guidance. Guidance in conformity with our capacity bestows freedom. But if offered in excess, it diminishes our liberty, uniqueness, and individuality. We see an example of this in the family. Children who receive too much guidance and instruction become overly dependent; they lose their initiative, individuality, and self-esteem.

The kind and amount of guidance we receive from our Creator is always measured to our capacity and need. God also knows what words or language He should use and how much instructions He should give to attract only the kind of guests and residents He wants in His banquet. More specific or literal instructions will attract the wrong people. A balanced dosage of metaphors sprinkled on some prophecies will protect His banquet from the closed-hearted believers, the kind who love His name but love even more the cozy closet that their little faith offers them.

The Book of Revelation predicts that Christ will come with a sword in His mouth. "I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:16). What is that sword? It is the Word of God, especially the symbolic Word, with awesome powers of separation:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

The symbol of "sword" shows the severity of divine judgment on those who deny the divine Messengers:

All the signs and allusions concerning the Day of Judgment, which thou hast heard, such as the raising of the dead, the Day of Reckoning, the Last Judgment, and others have been made manifest..These revealed words were a blessing to the righteous who on hearing them exclaimed: "O God our Lord, we have heard, and obeyed." They were a curse to the people of iniquity who, on hearing them affirmed: "We have heard and rebelled."

Those words, sharp as the sword of God, have separated the faithful from the infidel, and severed father from son.²⁰

Bahá'u'lláh

Saying yes or no to the One sent by God to guide us and redeem us is by far the most critical decision in our lives. Our eternal destiny is on trial. This is why the time of the return of Christ is called the Day of Judgment. We have a choice to move to the right or stay on the left. What we think is often tinged with

illusions; what our Creator declares is absolute reality. We may not like what we hear—the harsh judgment against those who deny the Redeemer of our age—but that should not deter us from facing reality.

To conclude, God is always testing, grading, and separating human beings. But those who live at the points of transition—from a previous “age” to a new “age”—face the most awesome and trying test. Believers who are the masters of their own destiny, who are detached from past traditions and illusions, when they hear the good News of the coming of the Kingdom, they arise with supreme courage, and search for the hidden treasures of truth with all their hearts and souls. Their search leads them to discover God’s great glory and power in His humble and gentle Messengers, such as Christ and Bahá’u’lláh. They pass their test with flying colors. Others allow past traditions, illusions, and superstitions to suffocate their freedom. They fail their test, and by their action, they keep themselves out of the heavenly banquet. As C.S. Lewis suggested, “the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.”²¹

Compare God’s promise as revealed through Christ, the Anointed One, and as revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ***All the nations will be gathered before him***, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ***He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left***. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me...’

Christ (Matthew 25:31-34,41)

Pope! Rend the veils asunder. ***He Who is the Lord of Lords is come*** overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained.

...He, verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as He came down from it the first time. Beware that thou dispute not with Him even as the Pharisees disputed with Him (Jesus) without a clear token or proof. ***On His right hand flow the living waters of grace, and on His left the choice Wine of justice***, whilst before Him march the angels of Paradise, bearing the banners of His signs.²²

Bahá'u'lláh

The All-Merciful is come invested with undoubted sovereignty. The Balance hath been appointed, and ***all them that dwell on earth have been gathered together ...The people of the left hand sigh and bemoan. The people of the right abide in noble habitations***: they...are, verily, the blissful.²³

Bahá'u'lláh

Ponder, now...the influence of the word of God, that haply ***thou mayest turn from the left hand of idle fancy unto the right hand of certitude***...Let him who wisheth turn thereunto, and let him who wisheth turn aside.²⁴

Bahá'u'lláh

Part IV

Special Tests

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life. James 1:12 NIV

From time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness. Bahá'u'lláh

5

The Meaning of “Seek And Ye Shall Find”

Test I

Would you like to put yourself to the test? If you do, read about several theoretical dialogues between two Christians: one with a curious and open mind, the other with a complacent and closed mind.

Curious Christian	Complacent Christian
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have a Bahá'í friend who believes Christ came again in 1844.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is impossible. We know for sure how the Advent will take place. We know He has not come.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you be sure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everything is in plain language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Then why are there so many schools of prophecy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are always some people who dislike the truth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• But how do we know that those who disagree are wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They take everything out of context.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could you give me an example?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are you trying to prove?

- I am not trying to prove anything. I just like to let you know that Bahá'ís are firmly convinced that Christ has come again and they say they have much evidence to prove it. The question is critical. Our eternal destiny depends on it
- All I can tell you is that there are many deceivers. You need to be careful.
- But what does it mean to be careful? Does that mean I should not investigate?
- The devil is always looking to tempt us. As long as you stay Christian, you are safe.
- Should I take your word as the truth?
- Yes, I am quite confident. Jesus is the way and the truth and life. Anything else is deception.
- I am not talking about anything else. Bahá'u'lláh claims to be Christ returned. How can I know He is not the One? Do you believe I should ignore His claim and not investigate it?
- Yes, I believe you are wasting your time. Just read the Bible and go to your church. Be a good Christian, and you are saved.
- But why did Jesus say, “seek and ye shall find”? Should I ignore His command, and follow your instructions?
- I do not know what you should do. But I know in my heart that once you step outside the church, you get lost.
- Isn't that what the religious leaders told the Jews at the time of Jesus?
- Yes, but we are different.

- What evidence shows that we are different? Why does the word “always” in this verse apply only to a specific time in history: “You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51)? What makes the people of this age wiser and better than the people of the past?
- That verse does not apply to me. I know I am saved.



Question

_____ “Seek and ye shall find” require that we should fully examine the evidence Bahá’u’lláh presents.

_____ It is wise to stay in one’s church or synagogue and ignore Bahá’u’lláh’s invitation to investigate His mission.

6

The Meaning of “Watch”

Test II

I say to everyone: “Watch!” Christ (Mark 13:37)

Curious Christian	Complacent Christian
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christ repeatedly asked us to watch. What does “Watch!” mean?• Aware of what?• How can I be aware? What can I do to be aware?• But what action should I take to conform to that command? What should I do that I do not normally do? A man claims to be the One we Christians are expecting. His name is Bahá’u’lláh. Should I examine the evidence He presents?• But why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It means be aware.• Aware of what is going on.• Just be aware!• No! There is no need for that.• Because we are sure of certain signs. For instance, we are told in plain language that every eye shall see Him.

- But if every eye shall see Him, why do we need to watch?
- We have two sets of clues. I want to know which I should follow. What action a watchful person must pursue to fulfill Christ's command? Should he:
 - ◆ Watch the national news?
 - ◆ Read Christian magazines and books?
 - ◆ Watch CBN (Christian Broadcasting News)?
 - ◆ Watch the sky?
 - ◆ Examine the evidence that Bahá'u'lláh presents to prove that He is the return of Christ?
- What is your point?
- I don't think we need to do anything. When the Lord comes, we will know.



Question

_____ The command "Watch!" points to the necessity of investigating Bahá'u'lláh's claim.

_____ The command does not justify such an investigation.

7

The Metaphors of “Seeing” and “Coming Down on Clouds”

Test III

God tests us in many ways. One way is to give us messages in metaphor and then provide the clues to decipher them. Our willingness to apply His clues is an evidence of our faith. Consider this prophecy about seeing:

...every eye shall *see* Him. Revelation 1:7

To help us decipher the word “see,” God has provided us with certain clues such as:

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and *salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.* Revelation 3:18

...without holiness no one will *see* the Lord. Hebrews 12:14

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will *see* God. Matthew 5:8

“The great day of the Lord is near...The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there ...I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like *blind* men...” Zephaniah 1:14, 17

The connection between the preceding passages is quite clear. All of them relate to seeing, to the gift of sight. The first one “every eye shall see Him” is a test. All the others are clues or

instructions for finding the answer and passing the test. One prophecy declares that people will walk like the blind, unable to see. Another prophecy declares that every eye shall see Him. How can people be blind and be able to see? Another prophecy offers the prescription for curing the blindness. Does it not make sense to conclude that every eye that has benefited from the prescription, that has been rubbed by “salve” will be able to see Him? Thus if we consider “salve” the essential remedy for curing blindness, both passages make perfect sense. As Zephaniah declares, people are spiritually blind, but every person who applies the remedy prescribed by Jesus, everyone who puts salve on his eyes, will cure his blindness and see the Lord. Anyone who follows the required instructions will see the Glory of God, the second coming of Christ. Every inner eye that is blessed by the remedy will see Him. Obviously those who fail to apply the remedy, as Zephaniah indicates, “will walk like blind men.” Even if Jesus Himself stood in front of them, they would be unable to see Him. Because only the eye of the spirit can see Him.

Can a student succeed if he fails to listen to all the teacher’s instructions, if he fails to look at the clues? How then can we succeed in the school of the spirit if we disregard all the clues and instructions our divine Instructor has given us? How can we pass our test if we take only one item and ignore similar items that can help us understand that one?

Is this test—about the meaning of seeing—too difficult? It is, if we start with tradition, with untested and unverified assumptions, if we fail to look at all the clues. With an open and impartial mind, any ordinary high school student can find the right answer to the test of “every eye shall see Him.”

Aside from the cited clues, we also have historical examples. The following words of Jesus, addressed to His enemies at His trial, should liberate every Bible reader and interpreters from the snare of literal-mindedness:

But I tell you this: *from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the*

clouds of heaven. At these words the high Priest tore his robes and exclaimed ‘Blasphemy!’ Matthew 26:64-65

Did Annas and Caiaphas, who condemned Jesus to death, see Him from then on “seated at the right hand of God”? Did they see Him any time in the future coming down on the clouds of heaven? Did even His disciples see Him in those positions? Again an atheist can use the preceding prophecy to discredit Jesus. No one saw Jesus in those positions with earthly eyes. What about spiritual eyes, the eyes of faith? If we follow St. Paul’s admonition that the Word of God must be understood spiritually, if we discern the meaning of this prophecy in that way, we face no problem. Every “eye” of faith at every moment, has seen Jesus and will continue to see Him seated at the right hand of God, and coming on the clouds of heaven. In fact Jesus never left heaven. Only His body lived on earth for a while.

According to this prophecy, ***seeing Jesus “coming on the clouds of heaven” is not something that happens on His return at a given point in history. It is an endless and continuous event.***

From now on, you will see the Son of Man...coming on the clouds of heaven. *Christ (Matthew 26:64)*

The preceding verse shows that the “coming down” of Jesus began even before He was crucified. The prophecy demonstrates the unique language our Creator speaks.

Notice what Christian scholar, F.F. Bruce, states about Christ’s prediction that the people around Him will see Him coming down on clouds:

He [Jesus] says this in symbolic language, but the source of this symbolic language is biblical...The right hand of God was [symbolizes] the place of supreme exaltation; the clouds were [symbolize] the vehicle of divine glory.¹

Is it then unreasonable to use the fulfillment of one prophecy about seeing, in the context of the supernatural, to understand the meaning of a similar prophecy in the same context? Why

then have double standards? Why take one prophecy spiritually, the other about “coming down on clouds” literally?

The Bahá'í view of “visibility” and “clouds” is also confirmed by some Christian authors and scholars. Consider this passage from a Christian publication:

What is meant by his ‘coming on the clouds’ and ‘every eye seeing him’? Revelation 1:7: “Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...” What is indicated by “clouds”? Invisibility. When an airplane is in a thick cloud or above the clouds, people on the ground usually cannot see it, although they may hear the roar of the engines. Jehovah told Moses: “I am coming to you in a dark cloud.” Moses did not see God, but that cloud indicated Jehovah’s invisible presence. (Ex. 19:9; see also Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 11:25.) If Christ were to appear visibly in the heavens, it is obvious that not “every eye” would see him. If he appeared over Australia, for example, he would not be visible in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, would he?

In what sense will ‘every eye see him’? They will discern from events on earth that he is invisibly present. Also referring to sight that is not physical, John 9:41 reports: “Jesus said to [the Pharisees]: ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, “we see.” Your sin remains.’” (Compare Romans 1:20.) Following Christ’s return, some persons show faith; they recognize the sign of his presence. Others reject the evidence...²

Notice Bahá'u'lláh’s description of what Jesus meant by saying that He was sitting at the right hand of God:

...call thou to mind the day when the Jews, who had surrounded Jesus, Son of Mary, were pressing Him to confess His claim of being the Messiah and Prophet of God, so that they might declare Him an infidel and sentence Him to death. Then, they led Him away, He Who was the Day-star of the heaven of divine Revelation, unto Pilate and Caiaphas, who was the leading divine [religious leader] of that age. The chief priests were all assembled in the palace, also a multitude of people who had gathered to witness His sufferings, to deride and

injure Him. Though they repeatedly questioned Him, hoping that He would confess His claim, yet Jesus held His peace and spake not. Finally, an accursed of God arose and, approaching Jesus, adjured Him saying: “Didst thou not claim to be the Divine Messiah? Didst thou not say, ‘I am the King of Kings, My word is the Word of God, and I am the breaker of the Sabbath day?’” Thereupon Jesus lifted up His head and said: “*Beholdest thou not the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and might?*” *These were His words, and yet consider how to outward seeming He was devoid of all power except that inner power which was of God* and which had encompassed all that is in heaven and on earth. How can I relate all that befell Him after He spoke these words? How shall I describe their heinous behavior towards Him? They at last heaped on His blessed Person such woes that He took His flight unto the fourth Heaven.³

As you may have noticed, Bahá’u’lláh’s wording differs somewhat from that of Matthew, although the message He presents is the same. If you wonder which version is more precise, please remember that the Gospel was written long after crucifixion by people who may have not been present at Jesus’ trial. What about Bahá’u’lláh? The same divine Spirit that was present at crucifixion was, is, and will always be present in Bahá’u’lláh. When Christ’s enemies spoke those words, that same Spirit—now called Bahá’u’lláh—was there and heard every word that was spoken! This is of course only a surface explanation, for that Spirit, whether attached to a body or not, is always All-Seeing and All-Hearing.

In the following verse, Jesus declares that He will show Himself to His loved ones:

He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and *show myself to him*. John 14:21

How does Jesus show Himself to His loved ones? Physically or spiritually? How many have seen His body or even His Spirit with their physical eyes?

Thus when we study related passages together, we become aware of the unique language our Creator speaks. We discover an abundant use of metaphor. With the aid of our spiritual eye, as confirmed by St. Paul, we can discern their true meaning. *Viewed with the eye of the spirit, the metaphors glow with full clarity.*



Question

_____ The clues and instructions given in the Scriptures make the metaphorical meaning of “seeing” and “coming down on clouds” clear.

_____ The clues and instructions do not make the meaning clear.

Part V

How Can You Recognize Your Lord?



Prayer: The Essential Means for Knowing and Attaining the Presence of Jesus

*Pray always, that ye may be accounted
worthy to escape all these things that
shall come to pass, and to stand before
the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:36)*

8

Pray Always

Christ (Luke 21:36)

Praying for God's Most Glorious Gift: Knowing the Redeemer of the Age

*O my God, let me see through your eyes
until your eyes are my eyes.*

We pray for many reasons: to travel safely, to pass an exam, to get a job, to do well in business, or even to win a lottery! Should we, then, simply assume that to receive the greatest gift that heaven may bestow on humans—recognizing and welcoming the Redeemer of the Age—we do not need to pray? Have you ever heard anyone say: “To know Jesus at His Second coming and to become worthy of the honor of attaining His presence, we should pray”? Seldom if ever do Christian teachers and authors raise this question. And yet Jesus specifically asks us to “pray always” for this very purpose:

*Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy...to stand
before the Son of man.*

Christ (Luke 21:36)

Why does Jesus say: “pray *always*”? Because the gift of knowing Him and attaining His presence is so precious, so lofty that it requires unceasing and earnest imploring and entreating. Faced with danger, we plead for our earthly life—one that

endures for only a few years. Should we not then plead for our everlasting life?

What purpose does praying serve? It cultivates our soul by connecting us to our Source. It helps us become more spiritual. We are like the fruits on the tree of life growing in God's garden. The Gardener is quite choosy. He wants and selects only the best fruits—the ones suitable for His heavenly Banquet. Praying nourishes, ripens, purifies and sustains the soul. It prepares us for our divine destiny. It makes us worthy of the Gardener and fit for His heavenly Feast.

In knowing the laws that bind us to our Creator, this question is critical: who is the chooser? Does the gardener choose the fruit, or does the fruit choose the gardener? As many as 95 percent of the people in some countries declare their faith in God. They believe they have chosen God. But has God also chosen them? It is easy to be self-righteous and consider oneself one of the elect. For everyone looks clean in his own eyes (Prov. 16:2). But contrary to what we are told—such as “Say Jesus is your Savior, and you will be saved!”—joining the ranks of “the saved” and “chosen ones” of God is not that simple. What ultimately matters is not what we say, think, or assume, but what God knows for sure. Only He knows who is worthy for His banquet. Only He chooses His guests of honor:

You did not choose me, but I chose you...

Christ (John 15:16 NIV)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...

Christ (John 6:44 NIV)

The believers who assume that they are “saved” by simply declaring their faith in God or Jesus, must realize that their standards may not be high enough. For we are told that when the heavenly King comes to establish His Kingdom, He will find only a few guests ready for His Banquet. He will find only a few who are “well-dressed,” only a few who will be living up to His standards. The heavenly Host is quite choosy:

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding

banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come...Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ***For many are invited, but few are chosen.***

Matt. 22:1-3, 8-14 NIV

To emphasize the need for praying as a means of receiving heaven's most glorious gift—knowing the Redeemer of the Age—Jesus also spoke a specific parable—that of the persistent widow—for this purpose. He wanted to remind us that we should not take the supreme honor of “knowing Him” for granted. He wanted to teach us that, without appealing to God and even pleading with Him, we may not receive this most glorious gift:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell

you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Luke 18:1-8 NIV

Jesus’ parables are brief, but they abound with pearls of knowledge and truth. We often read them without pondering their purpose, without meditating on their mysteries, without unraveling their precious pearls of truth. The parable of the persistent widow has a special significance. It should draw our attention for two reasons:

- It defines one of the most critical laws that bind us to our Creator.
- It was spoken specifically for us: to cultivate our soul and make us worthy of our Redeemer.

Understanding and following the precepts of this parable is of paramount significance. It holds the key to our divine destiny. To fathom its supreme purpose, let us first review its content:

- A widow, who has been wronged, goes to a judge and seeks justice, but the judge ignores her pleas.
- The widow does not give up. She appears before the judge repeatedly and pleads her case.
- At last the uncaring judge gives in and responds to her pleas for justice.

The parable concludes with this disparaging question: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Another translation of the last verse:

Yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find men on earth who believe in him?

NTME

The first question we should explore is this: What relevance has the story of the widow to the scarcity of faith at the time of Jesus’ return? A brief review of the basic components of the parable helps us find the answer:

- A desire to attain a purpose.

- The required means to accomplish that purpose.
- And the scarcity of the virtue that empowers the believers to accomplish that purpose at a given time.

Since Jesus links this parable to His Second Coming, it is clear that He is teaching us the required means for attaining the supreme purpose of knowing Him. His story clearly conveys this message: the honor of recognizing Jesus in His Second Advent will come only to the believers who remain proactive—those who take the initiative to search and look for their Lord. What does the parable then teach us to do?

- To present our desire to God.
- To have faith that our desire will be fulfilled, that our prayers will at last be answered.
- And to persevere in our efforts until we receive an answer.

What should be our greatest wish and our most passionate longing at the time of the coming of our Lord? What should be our prime purpose of praying and pleading at that blessed time? It can only be this: receiving His grace to overcome the obstacles that prevent us from knowing Him; receiving His blessings to tear “the veils” and overcome “the clouds” of false assumptions and expectations concerning the manner of His return.

Can we determine or predict for sure how Christ must come? Are we wise enough to decode God’s metaphoric and mysterious language of prophecy? Should we use authority of Jesus to “prophesy in His name”? Are we not condemned for doing this?

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...? Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Christ (Matt. 7:22-23 NIV)

Bahá’u’lláh often uses a special word in His Writings: “idle fancy.” What is an “idle fancy”? It is something that one

assumes to be true, but is in fact false. It is synonymous with “myth” and “illusion.” Perhaps the best-known example of such an “idle fancy” is the Jewish expectation that the Messiah must come with great power and glory to save the Jews from suffering. Is not this precisely what many Christians are also expecting from their Messiah? In fact the Gospel predicts such a trend among today’s Christians. It uses the synonym of “idle fancy”—myth—to describe the way many believers will behave:

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn
aside to myths. II Timothy 4:4 NIV

What if our Redeemer fails to fulfill our “idle fancies” or favorite “myths”? Should we rush to judgment and call Him “a false prophet” as did the Jews? History shows that the way people believe and behave does not change from age to age. In the story of God’s latest Messenger and Redeemer—Bahá’u’lláh—we can find one more chapter with the same lesson.

Any believer, who thinks he knows how the prophecies must be fulfilled, by this very thought, has stepped beyond his line of authority. He has acted like a servant who imagines he is a king. He has violated the command of the Scripture that no servant has the right to prophesy in his Master’s name. The violation of this command is quite serious. The violators are threatened with the harshest punishment: hell! And yet this sacred command is widely ignored.

Bahá’u’lláh offers many prayers to rescue the believers from these dangerous clouds of idle fancies, vain imaginings, and myths. These clouds are so massive and so obstructive that only God can disperse them. Only He can help the seekers of His Kingdom rise above them. Only He can rescue them. Bahá’u’lláh often prays for such seekers:

Debar not Thy servants, O my Lord, from the door of Thy
grace, and drive them not away from the court of Thy
presence. Assist them to dispel the mists of idle fancy,
and to tear away the veils of vain imaginings and hopes.

Thou art, verily, the All-Possessing, the Most High. No God is there but Thee, the Almighty, the Gracious.¹

Hold Thou the hand of this seeker who hath set his face towards Thee, O my Lord, and draw him out of the depths of his vain imaginations, that the light of certainty may shine brightly above the horizon of his heart...²

Bahá'u'lláh also encourages the seekers of the Heavenly Kingdom to do their share in seeking God's blessings:

Rend asunder the veils of idle fancies. He, in truth, will reinforce thee, and assist thee, as a token of His grace. He, verily, is the Strong, the All-Subduing, the Almighty.³

Rising above “idle fancies” and myths that have captured the hearts and minds of millions for many centuries is not simple. It is the greatest challenge every believer must face. To inspire Christians to overcome these obstinate obstacles, Jesus offered them incredible incentives. To awaken them from their dreams, He showed them a glimpse of the most glorious dawn of the blessings in store for those who overcome the prevailing myths or idle fancies:

I am coming soon...Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God...I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Christ (Rev. 3:11-13 NIV)

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:7 NIV

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it... Revelation 2:17 NIV

He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son...But the cowardly*...and all

* Those who are guided by their fears rather than by their faith. Believers who fail to investigate the news of the coming of their Lord because they are either afraid of being deceived or otherwise fear the social consequences of accepting a new religion. If they had true faith, they

liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Revelation 21:7-8 NIV
See also Rev. 3:5; 2:11, 26

Most Christians simply assume that after Jesus returns, it will be too late for us to accept Him. At the moment of His arrival, we will suddenly lose our freedom of choice. That assumption, that myth or “idle fancy” comes from misunderstanding God’s metaphoric or spiritual language—a language used abundantly throughout the Scriptures. Consider the following admonition, among many others. It clearly shows that after Jesus arrives, after we hear the news of His Advent, we will still have a choice to open our hearts to Him or keep it closed:

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. Christ (Luke 12:35-36 NIV)

Jesus uses the same message and the same metaphor in the *Book of Revelation*:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Christ (Rev. 3:20-22 NIV)

Who is being addressed by Jesus, when He declares: “to him who overcomes”? The believer who has a choice to liberate himself from the myths and idle fancies he has accepted as the truth. The believer who can overcome his resistance to the call of the new Redeemer, who can either open his heart to His call or keep it closed as most people have done throughout all ages.

would be certain that God would protect them from the deceivers, and they would have no concern about facing unpleasant social consequences.

As we noted, Jesus ends the parable of the persistent widow with a gloomy message. He predicts that there will be a universal famine of faith at the time of His Second Advent. He declares that the virtue the believers will need to overcome their deeply emotional, spiritual, and mental handicaps, and attain their foremost desire—knowing their Redeemer—will be in short supply. His critical and concluding question—“Will He find faith on earth?”—clearly implies that by then the world’s supply of faith will dwindle to such a low level that it will be hard to detect. In His Olivet Discourse Jesus made the same prediction:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold... Matthew 24:10-12 NIV

The prediction from the Hebrew Scriptures is also gloomy:

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.” Amos 8:11-12 NIV

“When the Son of Man comes will He find faith on earth?” Will He find many Christians who will be faithful to His instructions? No, He will find only a few who will live up to the widow’s example. Only a few will stand before the court of divine justice and humbly ask God to grant them the gift of knowing His Redeemer. Only a few will have faith that by praying persistently and pleading with God, like the exemplary widow, they will also be able to “overcome” that is, to see through the “veils” or “clouds” that prevent them from attaining their heart’s desire. Only a few believers will manifest her persistence and devotion to the task.

In this parable Jesus also reveals one of the basic laws that bind us to our Creator. He teaches us the supreme powers and wonders of praying. He declares that even an uncaring judge responded to a sincere and desperate plea for help. Is God, then, less caring than the judge who had no concern for justice? Would the Judge of the universe ignore the sincere prayers and pleas of His servants?

The parable clearly teaches us this lesson: To know our expected Redeemer, we should not simply wish and wait. We must take the initiative. We must be proactive. Otherwise, if we fail to know Him, it will be our fault. It will be our failure to resort to the means that God has created for our salvation, for helping us attain our life's purpose: recognizing the One He sends to guide us to our divine destiny.

Could the widow receive justice without appearing before the judge and presenting her case? How then can we receive God's blessings if we fail to make a sincere plea to our Judge to lead us to our Redeemer? God is more than just. He is abounding in His grace. He never turns us away even if we are unworthy of His blessings as long as we follow His roadmap. He never fails to guide us to our divine destiny, as long as we respect His rules.

But what can we expect if we ignore His directions? What if *we* decide to write the rules? What if we refuse even to present our desire to God. What if we even fail to ask Him to grant us the honor of recognizing His new Redeemer? What if we are drowned in self-righteousness, if we believe we *already* know the truth, and have no desire or need to investigate the news of the coming of the One who accepts a life of suffering for our sake?

Say,* O followers of the Son!...We, verily, have come for your sakes, and have borne the misfortunes of the world for your salvation.⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

* Equal to "Thus says the Lord."

Verily, He hath consented to be sorely abased that ye may
attain unto glory...⁵
Bahá'u'lláh

“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” Will He find followers who trust Him, who have faith in His promise that by praying to Him persistently and pleading with Him, they will attain their heart’s desire, they will be aided to know their Redeemer? Will the Son of God find servants who have remained faithful to His instructions? Will He find believers who will acknowledge that they neither have the wisdom nor are they authorized to decide how their Master must come—whether from the sky or as a thief? Will He find followers who have enough faith in the words of their Savior that they should not judge Him by their traditional expectations? Have they forgotten the lessons of the first Advent? If Jewish expectations were wrong; why would Christian expectations be right? Do people change from age to age? Do they grow in wisdom? Why would the following judgment apply to the peoples of the past, but not to the peoples of this age:

You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! Christ (Mark 7:9 niv0

Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols [of illusions]. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did.

II Kings 17:41 NIV
See also Matt. 15:3; Acts 7:51

The parable of the persistent widow clearly shows that by the time Jesus returns, the majority of Christians will have lost their faith in the words of their Master. How will such servants behave? Will they not follow their own desire, as people in a similar position have always done throughout all ages? Are they an exception to the rule?

You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? Acts 7:51-52 NIV

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! 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 NIV)

The parable of persistent widow, like many other parables of Jesus, relates to His Second Advent. It is one more attempt on His part to educate Christians that recognizing Him will require an effort, that they must pray to receive this most glorious honor, that they have a choice to listen to the news of His coming or ignore that news, that they must knock if they expect doors to be opened, that they must search for the Heavenly Thief, that they must investigate the news of the Advent of the One who has warned them repeatedly that He would arrive at the darkest hour—at midnight—when the light of the faith is dimmest in the heart of humankind (Matt. 25:6). Who can find the Heavenly Thief in this dark night of unbelief? Only those who have preserved their faith and followed its light.

Why would Christ come like a thief? Why would the believers be asked to stay “awake” to know Him? Because He wants to conceal His supreme splendor from “the strangers,” from those who would rather remain asleep and dream of being suddenly taken or “raptured” to heaven, than to stay awake, watchful, and active: seeking, searching, pleading, praying, and knocking persistently until the door of grace is opened unto them. He wants to conceal His glory—the Glory of God—from those who have faith in the Bible teachers but not in the One revealed the Bible. He does not want the kind of guests at His banquet who listen to the fantastic tales and myths their “itching ears” like to hear, but not to the One who teaches them the truth, who tells them what their ears do not like to hear (II Tim. 4:3 NIV).

Only the Heavenly Thief should wear a veil, not others. His veil is essential; it protects Him from His enemies and from the strangers—those unworthy to stand before Him (Luke 21:36). What will happen if those who are supposed to be searching for Him also wear veils? Will they see Him? No! Their mission is

just the opposite. They must first remove the veils of their illusions, and then pierce the veils that conceal the glory of the Heavenly Thief. They can accomplish these tasks only with the piercing light of their faith.

Jesus instructed us not to throw pearls before pigs. Why, then, would God unveil His glory to those who are unworthy of seeing such supreme splendor? God's great Messengers and Redeemers have always worn a mask. Did the masses of people see who Jesus really was? Did they see His Spirit? Did they get even a glimpse of His glory?

And when this process of progressive Revelation culminated in the stage at which His peerless, His most sacred, and exalted Countenance was to be unveiled to men's eyes, He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

Jesus declared that when He returns, every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7). This literal expectation is the first and foremost obstacle Christians must overcome. It is a misunderstanding that is preventing many believers from paying any attention to the news of the return of their Lord. They ask: If Bahá'u'lláh is indeed the Glory of God, if He is indeed our Lord, why has He not captured the eyes of humankind? Why has the world not seen Him or known Him? To respond to this question and solve this puzzle, let us place two critical pieces of end-time prophecies together:

The First Piece of the Puzzle

When the Son of Man comes, will he find
faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8 NIV)

The Second Piece of the Puzzle

Did I not tell you that ***if you have faith you will see
the Glory of God*** [Bahá'u'lláh]. (John 11:40 NEB)

As Jesus declares, to see “the Glory of God” (which is an equivalent of the title “Bahá’u’lláh”), we need *faith*. But what if the supply of faith is extremely scarce? What if we have to travel hundreds of miles to detect only traces of it? Can the one who lacks eyesight see the glory of the sun? Can the one who lack insight see the glory of the Son? Just as seeing *God* requires a pure heart (Matt 5:8), so does seeing *the Glory of God*.

To help us know Him the second time, Jesus declares in another statement that not only should we pray persistently but also *pay attention* to the news of His coming. We must investigate that news, we must test the Spirit who claims to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Why did He make such a request? Because He knew that the news of His Advent would not draw much attention—it would not become the headline of the day. To be faithful, prayer must be sustained by action. What if we pray, hear the news, but fail to look into it? What if we are invited to learn about Bahá’u’lláh, but we pay no attention to the invitation?

Then he sent some more servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.” *But they paid no attention...*

Christ (Matt. 22:4-5 NIV)

What would happen if we obey Jesus’ commands, if we:

- Pay attention to this most glorious News
- Take the time to investigate the evidence for its divine origin with a keen and searching mind?
- Devote much time and effort to praying and pleading with God to aid us in our efforts, and grant us the supreme honor of knowing His new Redeemer?

If we obey these three rules, all the doors of heaven will open unto us!

Obeying, with absolute devotion and sincerity, the following command of Jesus—expressed in only three words—is the magnet of all heavenly blessings:

Watch, pray always.

Luke 21:36

If we are truly in love with our Lord, and cherish genuine faith in Him and His words, we will follow His directions as carefully as we would follow a roadmap to a city. Not only we will pay attention to the monumental evidence that Bahá'u'lláh presents in support of His claim, we will also pray persistently to become worthy of God's greatest of all blessings: seeing the most splendid and awesome expression of His Glory in a humble human being at a most critical time—when the light of faith is dimmest in the heart of humankind, when wide is the gate that leads to hell and everlasting loss, and narrow the gate that leads to heaven and everlasting life (Mark 7:13), when many are invited to know Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, but few respond to the invitation or exert any efforts to join the ranks of the faithful.

If we are sincere in our desire to know our Redeemer, we will follow the example of the persistent widow, who stood before the judge many times. If we are faithful believers, we will stand before the Judge of the universe and plead with Him day after day, night after night, until we hear His answer. What if we disobey our Lord? What if we fail to follow our Master's will? We are warned that such a failure will result in grave consequences:

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.

Christ (Luke 12:47 NIV)

To help us attain our foremost desire, Bahá'u'lláh also offers a roadmap, quite similar to the one given by Jesus. His directions are in perfect harmony with the ones found in the parable of the persistent widow. Spiritual rues and roadmaps do not change from age to age:

*We should with tearful eyes, fervently and repeatedly,
implore Him to grant us the favor of that grace*
[knowing the Redeemer of the Age].⁷ Bahá'u'lláh

It is quite likely that the persistent widow satisfied all the requirements stated by Bahá'u'lláh:

- She spoke fervently, perhaps with tearful eyes.
- She appeared before the judge repeatedly.
- She implored and pleaded with the judge to take action.

Perhaps the only difference between the two sets of instructions is this: the widow asked for justice; we ask for grace. Because faith is bestowed by grace.

To attain our goal, we must follow God's roadmap word for word. Those who fail to satisfy the preceding three requirements for knowing their Lord, by their response fulfill Jesus' prediction that at the end times a universal famine of faith will sweep across the earth.

- Such believers will not stand before the Judge of the universe and plead with Him to grant them the honor of knowing His new Redeemer
- They will not persist in praying and pleading.
- And they will not have faith that if they followed the roadmap, they would reach their destination, they would receive an answer.

Such believers will read the promise of their Scriptures that God always answers sincere prayers, but they will act as if He will not.

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!
Christ (Matt. 7:9-11 NIV)

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3 NIV

Since we do not know how to pray and seek the heavenly blessings, again God comes to our aid. He even teaches us the exact words we must say. The following section contains a few prayers from hundreds, perhaps thousands, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. If you have a deep desire to know the truth, recite these prayers fervently every day, even every hour of the day “with all your heart and soul.”

...you will find him, if indeed you search with all your heart and soul. Deut. 4:29 NEB

Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. Psalms 119:2 NIV

Follow the divine prescription—without making the slightest change—even as you would follow your doctor’s. The sounds that come simply from reciting prayers cannot reach the heavenly court. *Only the heart can speak to the Heart of God.*

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul.⁸ Bahá'u'lláh

Seize, O friends, the chance which this Day offereth you, and deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of His grace. I beseech God that He may graciously enable every one of you to adorn himself, in this blessed Day, with the ornament of pure and holy deeds. He, verily, doeth whatsoever He willeth.⁹ Bahá'u'lláh

Nine Prayers *from Bahá'u'lláh**

All praise, O my God, be to Thee Who art the Source of all glory and majesty, of greatness and honor, of sovereignty and dominion, of loftiness and grace, of awe and power...Of all who are in heaven and on earth, none can withstand the operation of Thy sovereign Will. From all eternity Thou didst rule the entire creation, and Thou wilt continue for evermore to exercise Thy dominion over all created things. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.

Illumine, O Lord, the faces of Thy servants, that they may behold Thee; and cleanse their hearts that they may turn unto the court of Thy heavenly favors, and recognize Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Day-Spring of Thine Essence. Verily, Thou art the Lord of all worlds. There is no God but Thee, the Unconstrained, the All-Subduing.¹⁰



Glory be to Thee, O my God! Thou hearest Thine ardent lovers lamenting in their separation from Thee, and such as have recognized Thee wailing because of their remoteness from Thy presence. Open Thou outwardly to their faces, O my Lord, the gates of Thy grace, that they may enter them by Thy leave and in conformity with Thy will, and may stand before the throne of Thy majesty, and catch the accents of Thy voice, and be illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy face.

Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. None can withstand the power of Thy sovereign might. From everlasting Thou wert alone, with none to equal Thee, and

* These prayers were selected from *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, 347 pages.

wilt unto everlasting remain far above all thought and every description of Thee. Have mercy, then, upon Thy servants by Thy grace and bounty, and suffer them not to be kept back from the shores of the ocean of Thy nearness. If Thou abandonest them, who is there to befriend them; and if Thou puttest them far from Thee, who is he that can favor them? They have none other Lord beside Thee, none to adore except Thyself. Deal Thou generously with them by Thy bountiful grace.

Thou, in truth, art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.¹¹



I am he who is sore athirst, O my Lord! Give me to drink of the living waters of Thy grace. I am but a poor creature; reveal unto me the tokens of Thy riches. Doth it beseem Thee to cast out of the door of Thy grace and bounty such as have set their hopes on Thee...from beholding Thy face? By Thy glory! Such is not my belief in Thee, for I am persuaded that Thou art the God of bounteousness, Whose grace hath encompassed all things.

I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by Thy mercy that hath surpassed the entire creation, and Thy generosity that hath embraced all created things, to cause me to turn my face wholly towards Thee, and to seek Thy shelter, and to be steadfast in my love for Thee. Write down, then, for me what Thou didst ordain for them who love Thee. Powerful art Thou to do what Thou pleasest. No God is there beside Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bountiful.

Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds!¹²



The hearts of Thy chosen ones, O my Lord, have melted because of their separation from Thee, and the souls of Thy loved ones are burnt up by the fire of their yearning after Thee in Thy days. I implore Thee, O Thou Maker of the heavens and Lord of all names...to send down upon

Thy loved ones that which will draw them nearer unto Thee, and enable them to hearken unto Thine utterances.

Tear asunder with the hand of Thy transcendent power, O my Lord, the veil of vain imaginings, that they who are wholly devoted to Thee may see Thee seated on the throne of Thy majesty, and the eyes of such as adore Thy unity may rejoice at the splendors of the glory of Thy face. The doors of hope have been shut against the hearts that long for Thee, O my Lord! Their keys are in Thy hands; open them by the power of Thy might and Thy sovereignty. Potent art Thou to do as Thou pleasest. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the Beneficent.¹³



Hold Thou the hand of this seeker who hath set his face towards Thee, O my Lord, and draw him out of the depths of his vain imaginations, that the light of certainty may shine brightly above the horizon of his heart...¹⁴



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. Thou, verily, doest what Thou choosest. There is no God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious, the Unconstrained.¹⁵



Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! I implore Thee, by Thy Most Great Name...to assist Thy people to turn in the direction of Thy manifold bounties, and set their faces towards the Tabernacle of Thy wisdom. Heal Thou the sicknesses that have assailed the souls on every side, and

have deterred them from directing their gaze towards the Paradise that lieth in the shelter of Thy shadowing Name, which Thou didst ordain to be the King of all names unto all who are in heaven and all who are on earth. Potent art Thou to do as pleaseth Thee. In Thy hands is the empire of all names. There is none other God but Thee, the Mighty, the Wise.

I am but a poor creature, O my Lord; I have clung to the hem of Thy riches. I am sore sick; I have held fast the cord of Thy healing. Deliver me from the ills that have encircled me, and wash me thoroughly with the waters of Thy graciousness and mercy, and attire me with the raiment of wholesomeness, through Thy forgiveness and bounty. Fix, then, mine eyes upon Thee, and rid me of all attachment to aught else except Thyself. Aid me to do what Thou desirest, and to fulfill what Thou pleasest.

Thou art truly the Lord of this life and of the next. Thou art, in truth, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.¹⁶



I pray Thee, O Thou Who causest the dawn to appear...that Thou wilt grant that we may draw near unto what Thou didst destine for us by Thy favor and bounty, and to be far removed from whatsoever may be repugnant unto Thee. Give us, then, to drink from the hands of Thy grace every day and every moment of our lives of the waters that are life indeed, O Thou Who art the Most Merciful!...

Brighten our hearts, O my Lord, with the splendor of Thy knowledge, and illumine our sight with the light of such eyes as are fixed upon the horizon of Thy grace and the Day-Spring of Thy glory...

...Ordain, then, O my God, for me and for whosoever hath sought Thee what beseemeth the excellence of Thy glory and the greatness of Thy majesty. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.¹⁷



Praise be to Thee, O Lord, my God, my Master, my Possessor, my King...I call unto Thee with my tongue and the tongues of all that are in heaven and on earth, and beseech Thee with my heart and the hearts of all that have entered beneath the shadow of Thy names and Thine attributes, not to shut us from the doors of Thy loving-kindness and grace, nor to suffer the breeze of Thy bountiful care and favor to cease from being wafted over our souls, nor to permit that our hearts be occupied with any one except Thee, or our minds to be busied with any remembrance save remembrance of Thy Self...

Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Highest, the All-Glorious, the All-Subduing, the All-Possessing.¹⁸



I entreat Thee, O my God, by Thy name through which...the fire of Thy love hath been kindled throughout Thy dominion, to assist Thy servant who hath turned towards Thee...Fortify, then, his heart, O my God, in Thy love and in Thy Faith. Better is this for him than all that hath been created on Thine earth, for the world and whatsoever is therein must perish, and what pertaineth unto Thee must endure as long as Thy most excellent names endure. By Thy Glory! Were the world to last as long as Thine own kingdom will last, to set their affections upon it would still be unseemly...how much more when they recognize its fleetingness and are persuaded of its transience. The chances that overtake it, and the changes to which all things pertaining unto it are continually subjected, attest its impermanence.

Whosoever hath recognized Thee will turn to none save Thee, and will seek from Thee naught else except Thyself. Thou art the sole Desire of the heart of him whose thoughts are fixed on Thee, and the highest Aspiration of whosoever is wholly devoted unto Thee.

No God is there beside Thee, the Almighty, the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.¹⁹

Prayers from the Psalms

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Psalms 25:4-5 NIV

You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning...? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalms 43:2-5 NIV

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us; may your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations...May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. Psalms 67:1-2,5-6 NIV

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalms 139:23-24 NIV

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalms 19:14 NIV

To continue your search for your divine destiny—for what God has planned for you—and to learn how you can contribute your share to the unfolding drama of the birth of a new Revelation of Knowledge from God and of a peaceful planet, visit the following Websites:

www.TheKnowledgeOfGod.com

www.GlobalPerspective.org

The Websites offer information for three types of seekers:

- Those who wish to find answers to questions of identity and purpose, who are mostly interested in cultivating their spiritual potential.
- Those who are social activists, who wish to create a peaceful and prosperous world.
- Those who are interested in discovering the fulfillment of hundreds of biblical prophecies that predict the advent of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Websites give you a choice to pursue your special line of interest. They will help you discover opportunities you may never have imagined you had. They will open a new world to you, one that will inspire you to raise your vision, that will change your plans from building a house on shifting sands to raising a heavenly Mansion that will be yours for evermore—a world that will elevate your soul from experiencing the fleeting moments to capturing a splendid panorama of the future and your eternal destiny.

If you prefer to read, start your search with these books:

- Choosing Your Destiny
- One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers
- On Wings of Destiny
- Bahá'u'lláh, the One Promised in All Scriptures

May God bless you and aid you in all your endeavors. May His grace surround you all the days of your life. May He plant the

Seed of the *Most Glorious Awareness* in your soul. May He inspire you to investigate the *Greatest and the Most Glorious News*. May He aid you to recognize the honor of witnessing this Most Splendid Dawn. May He guide you to your everlasting and divine destiny.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for you!

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