

Prophecy:
The Obstacle that
Prevents Many People
from Knowing Their
Redeemer

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Who Knows the True Meaning of Prophecies?

...who has known the mind of the Lord...? I Cor. 2:16 NIV

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your
ways my ways... Isaiah 55:8 NIV

Then He [Jesus] opened their minds so they could under-
stand the Scriptures. Luke 24:45 NIV

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Prophecy: The Obstacle that Prevents Many People from Knowing Their Redeemer

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A Deadly and Rampant Disease

The Bible contains one verse so powerful, it could change the world. It speaks of a deadly disease that is quite easy to catch and spread. It has caused countless religious wars, it has divided Christianity into thousands of denominations, and it has caused the rejection of every Redeemer God has ever sent. This deadly disease is literal-mindedness. Its awesome powers are described in these words:

...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. II Cor. 3:6 NIV

It is amazing that even after 2,000 years of learning about this deadly disease, the bacteria of literal thinking is as alive and deadly at the time of the Second Advent as it was at the time of the First! This chapter demonstrates how this deadly disease has shaped the course of history.

The First and Foremost Obstacle

Prophecies are like sign posts; *they are given to guide us to our destiny, to help us recognize our Redeemer. But many believers, throughout all ages, have used them for an opposite purpose. They have turned them into obstacles to deny their Redeemer.* They have acted like someone who thirsts for water, but uses water to drown himself!

The prime reason for the abuse of prophecy is the abundance of symbols, parables, and metaphors in sacred Scriptures—especially in prophetic verses—and the abundance of literal-minded believers among the followers of all religions. Obviously this is not a good match. What would we expect if we had a married couple who could not communicate? What would happen if one

of them spoke in sign language, and the other could not interpret the signs? This seemingly little seed of misunderstanding has borne bitter fruits in all ages and all religions. The following verse describes the obstacle that people faced at the time of Jesus and still are facing:

Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

John 10:6 NIV

Why are Prophecies Clothed with Symbols?

Prophecy is essentially a sign language. There are many reasons for this. Let us explore two of them:

- What would have happened if King Herod had known who Jesus was? Would Jesus have had a chance of surviving beyond His infancy (Matt. 2:13-16)? Those who hold the reins of power, both secular and religious, always feel threatened by God's great Messengers and Redeemers.
- What would happen to people's freedom of choice if prophecies gave them the exact details about their Redeemer in a way that they could not deny Him? What would happen to their cherished gift of faith?

Symbolic or sign language serves as a means of testing the believers' sincerity. It offers the faithful a means by which they can reach their hearts' desire. It offers the faithful a stepping stone to reach their destiny by recognizing their Redeemer. But symbolic language also offers the same opportunity to the unfaithful. It provides them with a way to justify and follow their hearts' desire: to remain in their comfort zone by rejecting their Redeemer. It allows them to preserve their freedom of choice.

Concealing events through symbols is comparable with the way God conceals Himself. What would happen if God stepped out from behind "the veil" and allowed us to see Him? The consequences would be the same if all prophecies were expressed in literal language.

The Example of Jesus

The way Jesus spoke and the way the Pharisees responded to Him and treated Him presents the most valuable lesson for all believers. It demonstrates the difference between human language and God’s language. It teaches us what happens when spiritual language strikes the minds of literal thinkers, what follows when two opposites come together and interact. Imagine a four year old who hears his parents speak about “burning love,” and thinks that they mean literal fire. That is how the Pharisees interpreted the Word of Jesus. Imagine also a police officer who hears about a poor, homeless wanderer, with devoted followers, who walks around and tells people that:

I have come to set fire to the earth. Christ (Luke 12:44 NEB)

And if asked: “Where are you coming from?” The poor man responds:

I have come from heaven (sky). Christ (John 6:38 NEB)

Then he adds:

I am the bread that came down from heaven (sky).
Christ (John 6:41 NIV)

Literal Thinking is Anti-Biblical

The literal-minded believers encounter several specific references and many examples throughout the Bible that condemn literal thinking. They also encounter several specific references and many examples that encourage spiritual thinking. Despite this they continue to insist on the accuracy of their position, and continue to ignore the teachings of the Bible that they should not depend on their personal interpretation (II Peter 1:20).

What Scriptural defense do we find for literal thinking? None! To justify their stance, literal thinkers have their own verse. They simply claim—without a single reference to support their

views—that: “The Bible means what it says, and says what it means.”

We have countless references and examples that teach us just the opposite. Surely the Bible contains many literal facts. But contrary to what the literalists claim, the Bible often does not mean what it says, and often does not say what it means. This topic is so vast, it is treated in a forthcoming book by this author: *In the Clouds of Glory*. The book explains the many uses of metaphor in the Scriptures.

The Consequences of Literal Thinking

Literal thinking is not a minor problem. Its consequences are very serious, more than anyone can imagine. What consequence can be more serious and sinful than the rejection and ridicule of the One who comes to guide humankind and lead them to their divine destiny? What consequence can be greater than sending the Redeemer of the world to prison? What consequence is greater than executing the One who comes to give life to the world?

Since the Ones sent by God do not literally fulfill the prophecies, the literal-minded believers, who are always in the majority, simply refuse to pay attention (“Watch”) to the news of His coming. This has been the trend throughout all ages, the prime reason for the rejection of every Messenger and Redeemer God has sent to humankind.

Why is Literal Thinking Popular?

Literal thinking is popular for several reasons. It is easier; it does not require abstract thinking. Further, it appeals to the believers’ self-interests, it reinforces what they already want to believe. It gives them the good news of being among the privileged; it offers them the hope of receiving special treatments, favors, honors, and glories from their powerful Redeemer who comes

exclusively to comfort them and rescue them, while leaving the followers of other faiths in the grip of hopeless misery, humiliation, and even death by fire!

Imagine the sense of elation and ecstasy that this belief can generate in any believer. No wonder a series of books known as *Left Behind* (to suffer and die in misery) has sold over 40 million copies. This breaks the record set by any religious book published in the West except the Bible. The success of these books alone points to the fulfillment of the following prophecy concerning the believers who live at the end of the age:

...they will gather around them a great number of [Bible] teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

II Timothy 4:3 NIV

Today the first obstacle that prevents many Christians from investigating the news of the Second Advent is their assumption and insistence that they know how Jesus will return: from heaven to take the “true” believers with Himself back to heaven, but leave the great majority of humankind behind to suffer and die in misery. Some leaders of literal thinking even estimate the number of Christians who deserve to be saved: about nine percent of the earth’s population.

A Repeated Pattern

There are many parallels between the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus and the literal-minded Christians who live today. The Jews expected their Redeemer to come from an “unknown place” with great glory and power to crush their enemies and crown them on a kingdom as lofty and splendid as those ruled by David and Solomon. They said: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46 NIV). Where on earth can a place be unknown to humans? None except the heavens qualify for this honor.

How then did Jesus fulfill the expectation cherished by the Jews? What did He say to those who questioned Him? He told them in plain language that He had fulfilled their desire, that He

had indeed come from the sky, and that He had at His command “all power.”

...I have come down from heaven... Christ (John 6:38 NIV)
See also John 6:42

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
Christ (Matt. 28:18)

...a deliverer with victorious power... Luke 1:69 NEB

Why did Jesus advance a claim that did not seem to be true? Because He spoke in sign language, not literal language. He contradicted this widely accepted principle: “The Bible means what it says, and it says what it means.” In this instance and many others, Jesus did not mean what He said and did not say what He meant. He used metaphoric speech to show the fulfillment of metaphoric prophecies. Only a spiritual mind can discern and appreciate the things that come from God. The literal mind does not have this extremely valuable and unique talent:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.
I Corinthians 2:14 NIV

Once again Bahá'u'lláh* speaks in the same language to show the fulfillment of the same prophecies. He reminds Christians that He has indeed fulfilled their desire, that He has also come from heaven with great power and glory, even as he had come and fulfilled the same expectations in the same way, the first time:

He [Bahá'u'lláh], verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as He came down from it the first time.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

God is my witness! He, the Ancient of everlasting days [Bahá'u'lláh] is come, girded with majesty and power.²
Bahá'u'lláh

* See Part III for a brief introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's life.

The All-Merciful is come invested with power and sovereignty.³ Bahá'u'lláh

If Jesus' statement that He came from heaven is true, cannot the same statement from Bahá'u'lláh also be true? If Jesus' statement that He has "all power" is true, cannot Bahá'u'lláh's statement that He has "power and majesty" also be true? Why apply two standards to God's language spoken at different times? Why take one language symbolically, and the other literally? Who decided that there was a shift in God's way of speaking between the First and Second Advents?

The Narrow Limits of Human Understanding

Christians have a precedent for the meaning of "sky" in precisely the same context: the descent of a Redeemer from above. The Jews did not have this precedent. The example that Jesus set—how He fulfilled the prophecies and how people rejected His interpretation—should open the hearts and minds of all faithful Christians. It should awaken them to this truth, to this invaluable lesson of history: human beings should not regard their understanding of prophecy as the standard of truth.

...man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom...unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

When tested for their ability to decode the prophetic language, human beings have always received a failing grade. In the court of prophecy, they have always proved to be unfair and incompetent judges.

Does a Redeemer come to break the seal of prophecies, or should He ask Bible teachers to teach Him the wisdom required to break them?

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. Christ (Rev. 5:2-3 NIV)

Does a Redeemer come to judge us by *His* truth, or does He come to be judged by *our* “truth”?

...He is coming to judge...the peoples with His truth.

Psalms 96:13 NKJ

Listening to the Voice of Wisdom

If wisdom could speak, what would it say? Would it say: “Trust the popular beliefs, accept the traditional expectations? Would it say: your lucky birth into your family gives you a good reason to remain where you are? Would it say: If your family is Baptist, stay a Baptist; if a Sunni, stay a Sunni; if an atheist, stay an atheist? Would wisdom say: “This choice—investigating or ignoring the news of the Second Advent—is so minor, it should be left to the judgment of others? Would wisdom say: “If you wish to find the truth, do not waste your time in seeking”? Would it say: Do not hesitate to build your everlasting destiny on chance or coincidence? Would wisdom declare: “Do not pay attention to any claim that does not fulfill the orthodox, the popular, and the mainstream expectations”? Would wisdom say: “As long as you are in the majority, you are safe”? No, wisdom would say none of these. The Scriptures, the evidence of history, and reason reject all those assumptions.

...seek, and ye shall find...

Christ (Matt. 7:7)

...small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Christ (Matt. 7:14 NIV)

The Need for Humility

The tragic story of Jesus should encircle the lives of all faithful believers with haloes of absolute and unconditional humility. Those haloes should enlighten all their thoughts. They should

guide every step of their spiritual journey. Jesus exalted and blessed the meek who acknowledge their spiritual poverty (Matt. 5:3, 5), and debased those infected with pride (Matt. 23:12).

A lack of humility—such as saying “I am sure I am right and have no need to investigate Bahá’u’lláh’s Claim—is the first and foremost obstacle in the path of many devout Christians. This obstacle is so powerful, it conceals from the sleeping souls, the most splendid revelation of God’s glory and grace. To the awakened, the Glory of God shines as brightly as the lightning that illumines the sky (Matt. 24:27). To the sleepers, that Supreme Glory remains as hidden as a thief (Rev. 3:3). Those who start their spiritual journey with this grave obstacle—I am sure Jesus must come from the sky—will be unable to take the next essential step: Test Bahá’u’lláh—the Glory of God—by God’s standards, rather than by their own faulty assumptions. They will fail for the same reason that others before them have failed: staying firmly on the literal track, preferring the earthly bread over the heavenly.

Heeding the Lessons of History

Are the believers of this age, who look to the sky to deliver their Redeemer, justified in assuming that they understand the meaning of prophecies any better than the Jews? Is there a single verse that promises them this advantage, that validates this sense of superiority? Do they have a global vision of God’s plan? Can they assemble the grand jigsaw puzzle of prophecy? If they can, why then are there so many conflicting “schools” of prophecy?

The Jews were absolutely certain that their Redeemer would not come to suffer. He would rather come to relieve *their* sufferings. They did not link Chapter 53 of Isaiah—that speaks of suffering—to their expected Messiah. Consider the following statement from a major Christian institution, known as *Resources for Christian Communication*:

Jesus’ closes friends also found it impossible to believe that Jesus would suffer at the hands of His enemies (Matt. 16:21-23). They expected that He had come to conquer the world

and bring in the kingdom of God. Only in time would Jesus' disciples be able to see that the prophet Isaiah had predicted another side of the Messiah's work. Only in retrospect would the friends of Jesus be able to see the meaning of the prophet Isaiah's words...⁵

The publication then quotes several verses from Isaiah 53, a chapter people failed to link to Jesus.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not... We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:3, 6 NIV

Question: It took some time for the followers of Jesus and a long time for others, to see that Isaiah's prophecy was relevant to the promised Messiah, and that the phrase "despised and rejected by men" depicted another side of Jesus' First Advent. How long will it take for the masses of Christians to see that predictions such as "I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me" or "He must first suffer," or "I shall come like a thief" or "as it was in the days of Noah" and many others, also depict another side of Jesus' Second Coming?*

It took about three centuries before Jesus received His due recognition—when Emperor Constantine became a believer and promoted Christianity. How long will it take this time? How long will people wait before they will partake of the most glorious outpouring of grace from their Lord?

This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

* For a detailed review of prophecies that predict that Christ "must first suffer and be rejected" at His Second Coming, see *King of Kings*, Chapters 4 to 9. In that book, a total of 6 chapters are devoted to this topic.

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him.⁷

Bahá'u'lláh

Haste ye to win your share of God's good grace and mercy in this Day that eclipseth all other created Days. How great the felicity [bliss] that awaiteth the man that forsaketh all he hath in a desire to obtain the things of God! Such a man, We testify, is among God's blessed ones.⁸

Bahá'u'lláh

Should we allow once again three centuries to pass before we awaken to this glorious dawn, before we pay attention (“watch”) and open our hearts to the news of the coming of our Redeemer?

The Awesome Powers of One Word

Let us now see how a little obstacle—one word—prevented the people of the past from “seeing” the meaning of prophecies of the First Advent, and how once again one word is preventing the people of our time from “seeing” the meaning of prophecies of the Second Advent. The Jews were told repeatedly to expect their Messiah to be a **king**. Consider these prophecies among many others:

I will raise up your offspring to succeed you...his throne will be established forever.

I Chronicles 17:11, 14 NIV

...one who will be ruler over Israel...

Micah 5:2 NIV

When questioned about His kingdom, Jesus spoke in metaphoric language—as He did in relation to His “coming from heaven”—to show the fulfillment of a metaphoric prophecy. In response to the objections, He simply said that He was indeed a king, but in another world—the spiritual world:

My kingdom does not belong to this world.

Christ (John 18:36 NEB)

The story of the First Advent shows that when it comes to prophecy, human beings are “slow learners.” Why did it take them so long to learn that God often speaks in spiritual or figurative language? Now, once again, we are at a critical

turning point in history. How long will it take us this time to learn that same lesson? How long will it take us to learn that “every eye shall see Him” refers to the spiritual eye, the “eye” in the heart, not on the head? How long will it take us to learn the lesson of humility? How long will it take us to notice and obey this instruction?

...no prophecy of Scripture is a [matter] of any personal or private or special interpretation. II Peter 1:20 AB

How long will it take us this time to obey and honor this instruction?

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. I Corinthians 4:5 NIV

Ponder the following statement from the noted Christian author and scholar, Dr. James Kennedy:

The great Princeton theologian of the last century, Dr. Charles Hodge, said something which I have always thought is worth remembering. ***He said that though the Old Testament is filled with some 333 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ; in spite of that, nobody got it right.*** And as you know, they crucified Christ because of a misunderstanding about what the Messiah was really coming to do. And we should because of that be somewhat humbled and modest in our attempts to interpret prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. ***It is quite possible that all of us [Christian leaders] are wrong*** as well. [Emphasis added.]⁹

Even the enlightened people who lived at the time of Jesus needed help to understand the meaning of Hebrew prophecies:

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Luke 24:45 NIV

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27 NIV

Do we not once again need our Redeemer's help to open our minds? Do we not need His Wisdom to explain the meaning of prophecies to us?

Who Knows the Meaning of Prophecies?

In His First Advent Jesus rejected, even condemned, the personal, private interpretation of the Jews. He showed them that only He had the right to say that by “king” is meant “spiritual king.” Does not Christ have the same right in His Second Advent? Is He not allowed this time to say that by “eye” is meant the “spiritual eye”? Is He not authorized this time to declare that His true essence is His Spirit, and that only the “eye” that can “see” God can also see Him? Can He not declare, as He did in His First Advent, that once again He has descended from heaven?

Both by the way Jesus responded to objectors and by the story of His life, He set the standard of knowing what to expect. Should we change that standard and claim that this time *we* know the true meaning of prophecies, that this time *we* know what “sky” and “seeing” mean?

Does not God often speak in metaphoric language? Did He not teach us that only pure-hearted people can “see” God? Surely He did not mean “seeing” with physical eyes.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Christ (Matt. 5:8)

Whether we want to see God, the Glory of God, the Love of God, or the Greatness of God, the requirement is the same. We must possess a noble heart—pure and faithful. Note how clearly Jesus taught us the requirement or prerequisite for seeing “the glory of God” which is the English equivalent of “Bahá'u'lláh.”

Did I not tell you that if you have faith you will see the glory of God?

Christ (John 11:40 NEB)

Then who is qualified to decide which prophecy is literal, which prophecy is metaphoric? Can Christians or Jews find one bishop, one rabbi, or one scholar, among all the peoples of the world, who has this wisdom, who can “break the seal”? Will they be able to find one honest Bible teacher who can claim to have the insight to know for sure?

This is one of the greatest puzzles of all times. Those who lived at the time of Jesus did not understand the meaning of the prophecies regarding the First Advent. Jesus reminded them repeatedly of their failure:

When it is evening you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red”; and in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.” Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. Christ (Matt. 16:2-3 NKJ)

What do you think has changed since Jesus spoke those words? Could we assume that people did not have the wisdom to discern the meaning of prophecies at the time of the First Advent, but somehow they have gained that wisdom? What evidence is there to show that they have, that they are wiser, humbler, or more discerning? Unfortunately prophecies portray a gloomy picture of the spiritual profile of the people of our time:

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of...pleasure rather than lovers of God...They are the kind who...[are] always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. II Timothy 3:1-7 NIV

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

If people acknowledge this fact—their inability to understand the truth of prophecies—they will discover a panorama of fulfilled prophecies in Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation on a scale they have never witnessed.

Coming on the Clouds

Every Redeemer comes on the clouds: the clouds of traditions, assumptions, and misconceptions. The only “authority” that most people respected and obeyed at the time of Jesus was “tradition.” That same authority rules today. And what is tradition? It is an accumulation of assumptions—idle fancies—made long ago by some self-assured, imaginative, and bold theologians, and then passed to others until it assumed the appearance of truth!

What an awesome power tradition has at its command! Jesus was a poor and lowly Jew. Without any armies, He conquered the world. Today one out of every three persons living is Christian. By the example of His life and sacrifice, He showed us that He could not have falsely claimed to be a Redeemer from God. Further, He fulfilled many Hebrew prophecies. Yet, that one word—king—is still preventing millions of Jews from acknowledging their Jewish Redeemer! How can one word possess such an awesome power? How can it prevent the hearts and minds of millions from seeing?

In both of His Advents, Christ came not only from the sky, but also over the clouds. Like the Sun He shined, and still is shining, but the clouds of assumptions and traditions concealed—and still are concealing—His great glory and power from many millions of people.

Today another word is playing the same role, and it has assumed the same awesome power as the word “king” did long ago. That word is “sky.” Once again, to many people, it does not matter how great Bahá’u’lláh is, what incredible prophecies He has fulfilled, what great works He has accomplished, how noble a life He has lived, or what beautiful Scriptures He has revealed. All that matters is that word: sky. Once again one word is concealing the awesome Glory of God from countless millions of devout Christians. History is repeating itself with astonishing precision. As Jesus declared, it is the way of people to persecute the Prophets, and it is the way of future generations to build magnificent shrines in their memories (Matt. 23:29).

The Word of God as the Ultimate Evidence

Consider the following verses from Bahá'u'lláh. Can any human being, on his own, speak with such authority and power? These quotations alone manifest to receptive hearts and souls, the true identity of Bahá'u'lláh, His divine glory and power:

I am the One Whom the tongue of Isaiah hath extolled, the One with Whose name both the Torah and the Evangel were adorned.¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh

...from the heights of the Kingdom the Voice of the Spirit of God is heard proclaiming: "Bestir yourselves, ye proud ones of the earth, and hasten ye unto Him." Carmel hath, in this Day, hastened in longing adoration to attain His court, whilst from the heart of Zion there cometh the cry: "The promise is fulfilled. That which had been announced in the holy Writ of God, the most Exalted, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved, is made manifest."¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh

Solomon in all his majesty circles in adoration around Me in this day, uttering this most exalted word: "I have turned my face towards Thy face, O Thou omnipotent Ruler of the world! I am wholly detached from all things pertaining unto me, and yearn for that which Thou dost possess."¹² Bahá'u'lláh

O concourse of priests! Leave the bells, and come forth, then, from your churches. It behoveth you, in this day, to proclaim aloud the Most Great Name among the nations. Prefer ye to be silent, whilst every stone and every tree shouteth aloud: "The Lord is come in His great glory!"?...He that summoneth men in My name is, verily, of Me, and he will show forth that which is beyond the power of all that are on earth...Let the Breeze of God awaken you. Verily, it hath wafted over the world. Well is it with him that hath discovered the fragrance thereof and been accounted among the well-assured.¹³ Bahá'u'lláh

O concourse of priests! The Day of Reckoning hath appeared, the Day whereon He Who was in heaven hath come. He,

verily, is the One Whom ye were promised in the Books of God, the Holy, the Almighty, the All-Praised. How long will ye wander in the wilderness of heedlessness and superstition? Turn with your hearts in the direction of your Lord, the Forgiving, the Generous.¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

Wisdom Speaks

Wisdom is heaven's most precious gift to humans:

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her...She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed. Proverbs 3:13-18 NIV

...let the wise listen and add to their learning... Proverbs 1:5 NIV

Wisdom is the light that leads us to true knowledge. Among the lessons wisdom teaches is this: "Have courage, but do not take unreasonable risks." What is the risk no one should take? Leave his everlasting destiny to chance. In choosing our destiny, what choices do we face?

- We can either remain apathetic, complacent, and closed to new ideas.
- Or stay awake, watchful, alert, and open to new ideas.

Which choice is wise—apathy or alertness? The answer is evident:

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'

Christ (Mark 13:33-37 NIV)

Can wisdom coexist with apathy and ignorance? In a TV ad, someone asks a young lady: “What kind of guy are you looking for?” She says: “Whatever!” Then another lady appears. Someone asks her: “What kind of oil are you looking for?” She says: “Penzoil!” The ad ends with: “What you choose does matter.”

The contents of the ad fits the way many people choose their destiny. When they want to buy a car, they consult the *Consumer Reports* to make the wisest choice. But when it comes to choosing their everlasting destiny, do they also search for the wisest choice? Do they try to discover what God has planned for them? Do they ask questions such as:

- What really matters in human life?
- Should I set aside some time to choose my destiny, or should I continue to follow whatever my parents and my culture gave me?

In this age, it seems most people pay more attention to where they want to spend their few days of vacation than where they want to spend eternity. It seems most people prefer to watch their favorite TV show than watch for the news of the coming of their Lord. We should note that failing to choose our destiny is also a choice, but one with everlasting and irreversible consequences.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...the Lord is your life... Deut. 30:19-20 NIV

The Great Honor of Sitting on the Heavenly Throne

Jesus declared that when He returned, He would divide the people into two groups:

When the Son of Man comes...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.

Christ (Matt. 25:31-33 NIV)

Who are the two groups? One group consists of the believers who welcome their Lord into their hearts and homes, and the other of the believers who fail to respond to His knocking. Today Jesus' prediction has come true. Some Christians have welcomed the Lord and embraced Him, while many others have ignored His call. To those who would recognize Him and welcome Him, Jesus promised rewards beyond description. He said He would give them the glorious honor of sitting with Him on His throne:

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. Christ (Rev. 3:20-21 NIV)

Just as it was in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37) and in the days of Jesus, most people today are complacent with their lives. The news of the coming of the Lord does not excite them. It does not bring them out of their churches and synagogues. They continue to remain asleep in the night of unawareness. They do not heed Jesus' repeated warnings that they should be watchful and vigilant at all times.

Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. Christ (Rev. 16:15 NIV)

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. Christ (Luke 21:36 NIV)

Our Redeemer makes an urgent appeal to Christians—who have fixed their hopes and their eyes on the skies—to investigate for themselves the news of His coming—the news of the Advent of this most glorious Revelation. He invites each of us to step forward and see for ourselves the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Scriptures. He invites us to seek the knowledge of this most glorious event in human history!

He invites us to come and see for ourselves the supreme power and glory of the One we have been waiting for! He invites us to examine the Blueprint that He has brought for building the City

of God! He invites us to come and see for ourselves the heavenly Civilization that He has already established—a Civilization the like of which the world has never seen before!

This Civilization, this Kingdom, has been growing steadily and slowly “like a mustard seed.” And as our Lord has promised, it will become, in due season, the largest of all trees:

What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.

Christ (Mark 4:30-32 NIV)

We have the freedom and the honor to participate and become a part of this Kingdom. To succeed in our search, we must set aside all our fears, assumptions, and preconditions, and begin our spiritual journey with total dependence on God, rather than on Bible teachers and scholars who depend only on human understanding!

Can we expect to be delivered through avoidance and inaction? Can we expect to be saved by ignoring His “knocking” and by keeping our heart closed? Can we expect to be saved by disobeying our Lord, by not seeking, by not praying, and by not “watching” or paying attention to the news of His coming?

...through knowledge shall the just be delivered. Proverbs 11:9

This is the most auspicious time in human history. It is the time to lay the foundation for the City of God. Our Redeemer invites us to come and participate in building this city. He invites us to overcome our fears and open our hearts to His most glorious Advent! He invites us to search for the Heavenly Thief! He invites us to allow the “Lamp of our Spiritual Wisdom” to lead us to the Bridegroom and His everlasting Banquet! We are not asked to accept anything, only to investigate, test, and examine, only to “watch” or pay attention to the glorious News of His coming, and to the overwhelming evidence that proves that our Lord has already returned!

Is it wise to let history once again repeat itself? Is it wise to ignore the Sun because of the drifting clouds of literalism—clouds that have dominated the hearts and minds of humankind and concealed the light of true understanding?

May God bless and guide you in all your endeavors.

Part II

A Brief Dialogue with a Doctoral Candidate in Theology

A Brief Dialogue

The following dialogue did actually take place; it is not fiction. Recently a family friend, Elizabeth, was telling us about a relative, named Tom, who was working on his doctorate in theology. She described Tom as having both an open and sharp mind. Elizabeth suggested that I should call him and tell him about Bahá'u'lláh and send him a copy of *I Shall Come Again*. To prepare Tom for the dialogue, Elizabeth told him that I would call.

I am always curious and would like to know how people respond to an invitation or a challenge. One evening I called Tom and asked if he had heard about the Bahá'í Faith. He said he had studied the topic only in an introductory course during his undergraduate years, and had talked briefly with a few Bahá'ís. I then referred to *I Shall Come Again*—which covers biblical prophecies about the advent of Bahá'u'lláh—and asked if he wanted to receive a free copy. He said he was quite busy with his studies and had no time to read anything beyond what his professors required. He then indicated that he was quite happy with his beliefs because he had serious problems earlier, and since he had fully accepted Jesus, he now lived an abundant life. He seemed quite friendly and displayed no sign of impatience. So I decided to challenge him a little, and perhaps disturb his peace! The following is a paraphrase of the exchange of ideas between us, written immediately after our conversation:

- **Me:** Did you know that Bahá'u'lláh has fulfilled the biblical prophecies about the Second Advent?
- **Tom:** That is typical of those who make such claims. They take some prophecies and apply them to themselves.
- **Me:** Can you give an example?

- **Tom:** Louis Farrakhan believes Jesus and Elijah are the same person. He believes he is Elijah.
- **Me:** I agree; people abuse prophecies. The only way to know is to investigate each claim.
- **Tom:** We already know how Christ will come. We have accumulated an abundance of evidence about the way He will return. We have 2,000 years of interpretation. We know Christ has not come again.
- **Me:** You base your faith on fallible interpreters. Do you realize that the Gospel gives the right of interpretation only to the Lord? Do you realize we are told:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

I Cor. 4:5

- **Tom:** Some prophecies are clear. They do not need any interpretation. For instance, we are told in plain language that the same Jesus will come again. Is Bahá'u'lláh the same person who came as Jesus?
- **Me:** Bahá'u'lláh did not have the body of Jesus, but manifested the Spirit of God, the same Spirit that appeared in Jesus. Do you realize that your literal interpretation of prophecies is based on tradition? The Pharisees did the same. They followed their ancestral beliefs and denied Jesus.
- **Tom:** Pharisees *had* to deny Jesus, because prophecies predicted that they would.

At this point, I heard the alarm signal! I recognized that I could find no way to Tom's heart. First, even if the Pharisees *had* to deny Jesus, they were still wrong. And second, the Pharisees did not *have* to deny Jesus. Why would God force a person to deny His Messenger and then punish him for doing so? Why would Jesus force a few ignorant people to engage in a horrible act and then condemn them for doing it? I did not raise any one of these questions. To do so would have turned the friendly dialogue into

a stressful argument. I respected his decision to keep his heart closed.

His response demonstrates how the desire to win overcomes the simple rules of reason; it shows how a passionate need to protect one's belief subdues the rational powers. Tom showed no thirst for learning about Bahá'u'lláh. I was not looking for a victory, and stopped at the right moment. Why would anyone force his way into a locked house, unless he is a burglar? God has given each soul the right to protect and preserve his or her spiritual possessions. But I have to admit that, at times like this, it is so tempting to go on. The desire to break the lock is ever-present, the need to win feels almost as natural as breathing.

The attempts made by certain believers to break this lock by force has immensely damaged and even destroyed the dignity of religion. What would happen to the price of gold if people went around, knocked on doors, got the householders out of their bed, then asked them, and even argued with them, that they must accept free chunks of gold?

Any time we engage in a debate or argument about religion, we are violating God's principle of freedom, we are dragging a person into His Kingdom. Our Creator has taught us again and again that He does not want reluctant guests in His banquet. The only responsibility we have is to invite and inform. Resistance to an invitation must be met instantly by submission, silence, and an acknowledgment of the principle of freedom. When a person argues, as I think Tom began to do, he is sending a clear signal that I do not want your gift.

We must show unqualified respect to all those who say, "No!" to God's invitation to His heavenly banquet because they are exercising the right of freedom that God gave them. Respecting them is respecting God, and disrespecting them is disrespecting God, the original Designer. The beauty of the divine Drama comes from diversity.

Tom asked no question about Bahá'u'lláh except to say, "Is He the same person as Jesus?" If I had said yes, he could ask, "Did he have holes in his body?" And if I had said yes, he could ask,

“How many holes were there?” And if I had said the right number, he could ask, “Were they all in the right place?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Are there pictures to prove it?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Is there any evidence that the pictures are authentic?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Did he have the same height and weight as Jesus?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Did he have the same skin color?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Are there x-rays to show that some of his joints were separated?” And if I had said yes, he could ask, “Did He speak Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic as He did in ancient times? And if I had said yes, he could say, “Is there any recording of his voice?” And if I had said yes, he would probably say, “Your answers are all too good to be true,” and they were!

As this theoretical dialogue demonstrates, where there is *a will*, there will always be *a way* to deny any truth, no matter how evident it may be. Tom knew he was right and no evidence, no proof, no testimonial could have convinced him otherwise. How would he respond, if he was confronted by the same Jesus who came 2,000 years ago exactly as He appeared then? Would he repeat the same arguments the Pharisees pursued?

A prophecy often quoted by Christian scholars about the *First* Advent of Christ indicates that all of Messiah’s bones will be “out of joint” (Psalms 22:12). I could have asked him if he has any evidence to prove this. Did crucifixion disjoint *all* of Jesus’ bones? Another frequently quoted prophecy (Isaiah 53:10) about the *first* advent declares that the Messiah will be “pierced for our transgression” and then it states that “He will see His offspring.” I could have asked him, “Who was Jesus’ offspring?”

To continue the discussion, I felt, was a waste of time and money. This was a long-distance call! When he said, “The Pharisees *had* to deny Jesus,” I gently changed the subject. Our conversation ended on a friendly note. I saw Tom anxious to be well prepared for his course and university tests, but not for a test that would determine the course of his eternal destiny. How perfectly St. Paul predicted Tom’s response:

They are the kind...who are...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. *II Timothy 3:6-7*

Theology students must master an enormous amount of detailed information about biblical studies, and ancient and modern languages. As we noted, Tom said he could not read about Bahá'u'lláh because of his enormous studies. He was learning German and two ancient languages. Note how Bahá'u'lláh describes his status and that of today's many Bible students and scholars:

They cleave to *the obscure intricacies of knowledge*, when He, Who is the Object of all knowledge, shineth as the sun. They see the sun with their own eyes, and yet question that brilliant Orb as to the proof of its light.¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

Who were the scribes? According to Christian scholar F. F. Bruce, they were “the acknowledged students and teachers of the law.” In a way, ancient scribes can be compared to today's Bible scholars and professors at seminary schools. According to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*:

The higher the law rose in the estimation of the people, the more did its study and exposition become an independent business; and an independent class of “biblical scholars or scribes,” [who] were the *real teachers* of the people...¹⁶

How did the scribes respond to Jesus? Did their knowledge of the law of God serve as a beam of light to lead them to truth or as a veil of darkness to deprive them of truth? According to *Harper's Bible Dictionary*:

The scribes, like the Pharisees with whom their name is often linked in the N.T., were opposed to Jesus (Matt. 7:29), because he sometimes cut across their ancient traditions and exposed their unwarranted claims to prestige. Scribes played a conspicuous role in bringing about his Crucifixion (Mark 14:43, 15:1; Luke 23:10), though a few of them believed in his teaching (Matt. 8:19).¹⁷

Once again we can clearly see that there is no link whatsoever between being a scholar and being a truth lover. Yet most people have throughout all ages delegated their spiritual responsibility

to their leaders who are taught by religious scholars from institutions of higher learning. They assume that if someone knows Greek and Hebrew and has taken numerous courses in seminary schools, or has taught at institutions of higher learning, then he is the one who must lead them to their destiny.

Suppose you are a university student, taking an introductory course in biology. At the end of the semester your teacher tells you that you should look forward to meeting your next instructor, who will offer an advanced course in biology. Then he adds, "Trust this teacher. He is quite knowledgeable." Let us assume you register for this advanced course, go to the class and wait for the instructor. Now suppose a man suddenly enters the classroom and starts teaching. How should you respond? Should you start by saying, "You are not the instructor?" Or should you listen to him for a while to see if he sounds like one? Is not rejecting him, without listening to him, an unreasonable act? And yet, according to our experience in Mt. Pleasant, where I live, Christian leaders showed little if any interest in receiving a free book about the biblical prophecies fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh. Out of more than fifty only one pastor asked for a copy, and another called to say that he already knew that we were wrong, and that he did not need a book as further evidence. We later discovered that the pastor who requested a copy, threw it away without reading it! To him, removing even one copy out of circulation was a good deed!

Concerning the new instructor, should the students cling to their ideas about how he should look, or should they listen to him? Should they not give him a hearing? Why then are the religious scholars and students not examining the evidence Bahá'u'lláh presents? Why are they closing their hearts and minds? Why are they walking out of the classroom? How can a student judge an instructor without listening to him? Were the students not asked by their previous instructor to refrain from making any judgment about difficult issues? Were they not instructed to wait for the Lord to bring to light what was hidden in darkness?

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

I Corinthians 4:5 NIV

Why are the students not listening to those instructions? Why are they telling the instructor that he is wrong before they even listen to him? Why are they assuming that they already have the answer to difficult questions?

The story of Bahá'u'lláh is so astounding, the biblical evidence for His divine origin is so compelling that every seminary school should offer at least one course about Him. I wonder if Bahá'u'lláh is even mentioned in those schools. Students are kept within the confines of Christian theology. It is assumed nothing else is worth studying.

What the majority of people believe comes from their pastors and priests. And what the majority of pastors and priests believe comes from what their professors at seminary school taught them. Those professors are the true shakers and shapers of Christian's beliefs. They are highly respected as the authority on what the Bible means. As a rule, these scholars are financially supported by a given denomination. Does it make sense to undermine the institution that feeds you? Safety—the second most significant human need—lies in preserving the status quo rather than taking risks for the unknown. This is why it is so difficult to make a change. The system is closed. Many people mistake “scholarship” for love for truth. But these two attributes are not necessarily related. In fact, they are entirely different. There are some theology professors who are in heart agnostics and atheists!

Whether Christians realize it or not, most of their beliefs come from scholars and university professors. That is where the majority of their views about the meaning of the Scriptures originate and gradually trickle down to others. Is it then prudent to place by far the most important decision of our lives—the one that determines our everlasting destiny—mainly in the hands of professors at seminary schools?

Does knowing, loving, and “seeing” God require a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy), or a P.H. (a Pure Heart)?

Does knowing the truth require a D.TH. (Doctor of Theology) or D.T. (Detachment from Traditions)?

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

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Christ (Matt. 5:8)

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