

Christianity Renewed
Volume III

The Return of Christ

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to our youngest son Alexander who passed away on 4th November, 1996 at 11 years and 11 months old. He has abandoned this mortal life and has flown to the spiritual world.

Contacting the authors

If you have any comments or questions, please share them with the authors Marc and Helen Vloeberghs. We have a free newsletter which we send to those who would like to join in an ongoing dialogue. If you would like to email us - it is at mvloeb@gmail.com. We also have a web site which offers 35 free lessons: www.christianityrenewed.com

Foreword

The glorious message of Jesus the Christ has been so completely misunderstood that its survival over the centuries has become one of the greatest proofs of its truth. Nothing but the power of Almighty God could have enabled it to exert the enormous worldwide influence as it has done, and still does.

Christianity today is divided, and unable to stop the decline of humanity into chaos and disaster. Yet its greatest hope, forgotten, unbelieved, or even ridiculed, lies in the very words of Jesus Himself. Several times, the record states, He promised to come again “in the glory of the Father” or as “the Spirit of Truth”, and this promise was incorporated in the early centuries into the major official creeds. At various times over the long two thousand years since it was made it became the central theme of Christian hope.

Now, when all the detailed circumstances described in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, which would attend that wonderful event have come about and are indeed the experience of our daily lives, Christianity is hopelessly divided in itself about Christian truth and its validity, and has ignored the injunction to “watch and pray” for the time when He would come “like a thief in the night”.

Maxwell Alexander’s excellent presentation of this vital theme rests on the words of Jesus Himself as recorded in the Gospels. He shows how spiritual truths have been taken by simple and naive people to have impossible literal meanings. These have, under the weight of traditional authority, crystallized into doctrines until the Sun of Truth has become clouded over by obscurantism, bigotry, narrow mindedness and prejudice. It is these clouds that disappear with the new sunrise, revealing in all its splendour and beauty the eternal spiritual Truth. This is indeed the renewal, the triumph of Christianity

David Hofman (Former member of the
Universal House of Justice)

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[Image of Abdu'l-Baha]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, who suffered many years of imprisonment with His father.

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Book of Revelation and 666

“Blessed are the just souls, who seek the truth.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 82)

The Book of Revelation is difficult to understand. It is full of symbols and analogies. During the last two thousand years, these symbols have been interpreted in many different ways and have been the cause of division in the Christian churches.

Let us now look at some of the subjects dealt with in the Book of Revelation. Sometimes the visions are joyful, telling us about the coming of the next Messenger of God after Jesus. In other parts of the book, visions are of dreadful beasts such as the one popularly known as “666”, which is “the number of the beast”.

The beast with the number 666

This is a minor subject in the Book of Revelation, but in certain countries missionaries often preach in villages about the number ‘666’ and they attach great importance to it. Many people are especially fascinated with the number ‘666’ when they hear some of the fanciful interpretations made of it. Hence, they often regard it as the greatest evil that can come into their life. This is not true!

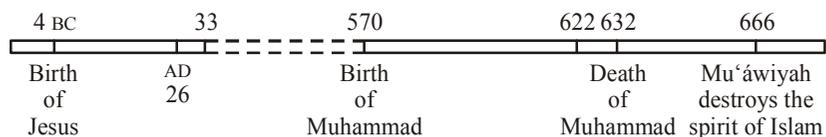
The story of the number 666 is a very good example of how things can be taken out of context, exaggerated beyond proportion, and unfortunately cause division between Christian churches, who often accuse each other of being the ‘666’. As soon as one church group accuses another of being the beast with the number 666, love and unity disappear, and hatred and division take their place.

The Bahá’í Writings offer a lot of guidance for a better understanding of the true meaning of the number 666. Where does this term ‘666’ come from? Jesus never mentioned it. In fact, it is only mentioned once in the Book of Revelation. Let us now look at the only reference given in the Bible regarding the number 666. (If it really was important, then we would expect Jesus to have also mentioned it!)

“Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”
(Revelation 13:18)

Many Christians are worried about the number 666, as they believe this beast is coming soon. However, this also is not true. The text tells us that the beast is a man and that 666 is his number. To understand the meaning of the number 666, it is important to know the history of mankind, especially any significant religious events that occurred in the year 666. In Arabia, in the year AD 666, Mu‘awiyah, the leader of a powerful tribe called the Umayyad, strongly opposed the teachings of the religion of God. He engaged in blasphemous forgery that divided the believers. In his attempt to take over power and use the religion of God for his own purpose, he attacked the holy cities of Islam, which were the birth place and the burial place of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. The “beast” is the symbol for the leader of the Umayyad. His number is 666 because of the year 666 during which he carried out his evil plan to destroy God’s religion.

John gives a description of the beast, *“and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns”* (Revelation 12:3). The seven heads and ten horns have a special meaning. It is a symbol for the Umayyad tribe who misguided the followers of Muhammad. The seven heads symbolize the seven countries over which the Umayyad ruled, and the ten horns are the names of the ten leaders of the Umayyad tribe.



Meaning of the number 666

The time of the 666 was a long time ago. Therefore, Christians belonging to denominations that place great importance on “666” do not have to worry any more as it has already happened.

Book of Revelation a spiritual vision of the future

John had a great vision that the Revelation of God was not completed by Jesus, but that it will continue into the future.

To understand the Book of Revelation better, it is important to know that nearly six hundred years after the death of Jesus a new religion called Islam was born. Islam is today one of the largest religions of the world, with more than seven hundred million believers. When John had his visions about the future, he saw the birth of this new revelation of God and described it in a symbolic language. Many Bible scholars tried to explain the Book of Revelation without taking into account the world-shaking historical events that occurred around the year AD 622 with the rise of Islam. Additionally, many of the explanations of the events in the Book of Revelation given by Bible scholars are in contradiction to science. They do not recognize that the language used is symbolic, not literal. Bahá'ís believe that religion must not disagree with science.¹ The Bahá'í writings also tell us that a study of Islam, as one of the major influences which shaped the destiny of mankind, is essential to gain a logical understanding of the Book of Revelation.

The coming of Muhammad

To understand better the role that Islam plays in the plan of God for humanity, we must learn more about the life of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Muhammad was a great divine Educator.

Muhammad was born around the year AD 570 in Arabia, a big desert country in the Middle East. At that time, the Arabian tribes were in the lowest depths of savagery and barbarism. These tribes kept plundering and destroying each others property.

Among these fierce, blood-thirsty people, Muhammad arose as a great Educator from God. The people worshipped many idols, but Muhammad, like Abraham, taught them to believe in only the one true God. Muhammad, who had never been taught to read or write, revealed a book called the Qur'án, which is the 'Bible' of the Muslims. It was considered a great miracle that God chose a supposedly illiterate person to produce a book of divine teachings.

Despite severe persecutions, Muhammad laid the foundation of a great new civilization—the Islamic civilization. During Muhammad's lifetime, the relationship between Islam, the religion founded by Muhammad, and Christianity was very good. Muhammad protected the Christians, their churches, their priests, bishops and monks. When Imam 'Ali attempted to assert his position as Muhammad's verbally designated successor 'Umar said "the Book of God is sufficient unto us". Because of this statement there was no written testament which led immediately to division, tribal jealousies, and personal ambitions arising. This short statement has echoed through the centuries. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, describes its woeful consequences, saying that *"this statement caused the foundation of the religion of God in the Islamic Dispensation to be shattered and the ignoble worshippers of self and passion to rule over the righteous souls. It became a deadly weapon by which the Imam 'Ali himself was martyred, which caused great divisions within the nation of Islam and which changed the loving spirit of that nation to one of armed warriors. In His Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that as a result of this statement Imam Husayn, the most illustrious of the Imams, was decapitated on the plain of Karbila, the other holy Imams were inflicted with great suffering, imprisonment and death, and the blood of countless innocent souls was shed for almost twelve hundred years"*. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 40)

Islam was divided. The killing of Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son in law, in 661 A.D. opened the door for the powerful Umayyad tribe to rule Islam as an Arab empire, with little regard for religion or the teachings of Muhammad. The Umayyad tribe further destroyed the spirit of Islam. Instead of fostering brotherhood with the Christians they created hatred between the Christian civilization in the West and the new Islamic civilization in the East. Every history book will tell you how Christians and Muslims fought for hundreds of years resulting in the killing of millions of people during religious wars, called the 'crusades'. History records that the Christian church promised the people a direct entrance into Heaven if they killed Muslims during the crusades.² Those battles

prevented the establishment of the unity in brotherhood that was the desire of both Jesus and Muhammad.

Islam – and the Book of Revelation

The dramatic story of the birth of Islam, the rise of Muhammad and the spiritual death of Islam is foretold in the Book of Revelation. The coming of Muhammad and Islam is described in highly symbolic language in chapters 11, 12 and 13. as: *“a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”* (Revelation 12:1)

In many Biblical texts, a woman, often a bride, represents the Law of God. The sun and the moon are symbols for Persia and Turkey, the two countries that were under the shadow of that law. The crown of twelve stars upon her head are the twelve Imams who were the teachers of the Law of Muhammad.

“And she being with child, cried.” (Revelation 12:2)

This shows us that the Law of Muhammad fell into the greatest difficulties and endured great trouble until the perfect child was born. Who caused the problems? It was the Umayyad tribe represented by the beast. John tells us this in symbolic language:

“... the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.” (Revelation 12:4)

Suddenly, the author of the Book of Revelation, John jumped further in time when he foretold events that would occur exactly 1,260 years later in another country: *“... that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”* (Revelation 12:6)

One day in biblical terms represents one year: One score is 20 days. *“I have appointed thee each day for a year.”* (Ezekiel, 4:6) and *“each day for a year”*. (Numbers, 14:34) This means that 1,260 years after Muhammad, the perfect child would be born. The year 1260 after Muhammad is the year 1844 of the Christian calendar. The Bahá'í era begins on this date. Therefore the perfect child is the coming of the Bahá'í Faith, announced by the Báb.

“Therefore rejoice ye heavens and ye that dwell in them.”
(*Revelation, 12:12*)

John asks us to rejoice in the coming of the new era, the new heaven, the beginning of the Bahá'í era.

John repeats in Chapter 12, the same vision of the woman with child; the child is now nourished for:

“... *a time, and times, and half a time* ...” (Revelation, 12:14)

This is three times and half a time, or three years and half a year, or 42 months, or (when one day equals one year) 1,260 years ($42 \times 30 = 1,260$). This brings us again to the year 1260 after Muhammad, the beginning of the Bahá'í era! That the same term “a time, times, and half a time” was also used in Daniel 12:7, and this, together with the number 1,260, convinced most Bible scholars that their method of calculation was correct.

Consider how the prophecies correspond exactly with each other. The complete agreement between the prophecies of Daniel as referred to by Jesus and now again in the Book of Revelation is not a coincidence. This is very exciting, as the coming of Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the prophecies of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. These are three different religions, whose followers often opposed each other. The Bahá'í writings tell us “*There are no clearer proofs than this in the Holy Books for any Manifestation.*” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 71)

Biblical importance of the year 1844

In Chapter Eleven of the Book of Revelation there are additional references to the year 1260 A.H. of the Islamic calendar, which is the year 1844 in the Christian calendar:

“*and the holy city shall they [the Gentiles] tread under foot forty and two months.*” (Revelation, 11:2)

As we discussed earlier, 42 months is 42 times 30 days, 1,260 days or 1,260 years:

“*my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*”

(Revelation, 11:3)

“... the beast ... shall overcome them, and kill them. ... nations shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.”

(Revelation 11:7 and 9)

The beast is again the Umayyad tribe that will destroy the spirit of the teachings of Muhammad. The dead bodies that could not be buried means that the religion of God would be dead. The spirit of the religion, the fundamental principles that teach its morals, rules of conduct and the knowledge of God, were lost. Only the outer appearance and laws, such as prayer and fasting, would remain. This condition would last for 1,260 years or until the year 1844.

Again we find a reference to the three days and a half, bringing us to 1844:

“... after three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered in them [the dead bodies] ...” (Revelation, 11:11)

The year 1844 marks the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith.³

“For him who is just, the agreement of the times indicated by the tongues of the Great Ones is the most conclusive proof. There is no other explanation of these prophecies.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 71)

Conclusion

John not only foretold events occurring within Christianity, but also the coming of other new Messengers of God and the opposition to the plan of God. The power struggle of the leaders of religion against the new Messenger of God is symbolized by dragons, devils and beasts.

Let us now consider the glorious events that are occurring today. John mentions them over and over again using different expressions and symbols, because they are really important.

Clear indications for 1844 as the beginning of a new era, the Bahá'í Era, are found in the Book of Revelation more than six times. The coming of Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth. St. John describes this joyful event as follows: “... great voices in Heaven, saying, *‘The kingdoms of this world are*

become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'" (Revelation 11.15)

The appearance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, is described again and again by John in the most glorious terms, with the most beautiful symbols:

- The birth of a child
- The coming of a new heaven on earth
- The coming of the Glory of God, (Bahá'u'lláh)
- The cleansing of the temple
- The return of life into the dead body of religion
- The descent of the new Jerusalem as a bride
- The opening of the heavens
- Voices from heaven announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth;

"Then at last the call of the Kingdom was raised, the spiritual virtues and perfections were revealed, the Sun of Reality dawned, and the teachings of the Most Great Peace, of the oneness of the world of humanity and the universality of men, were promoted."(Selections of the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 285)

6

Difference between a true or false Prophet

“But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends. Test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into the world, there are many prophets falsely inspired.” (1 John 4:1)

There are many statements in the Bible warning people to be aware of false prophets. However this does not mean that we should not investigate the truth of their claims. The Bible teaches us to *“test the spirits, to see whether they are of God”*⁴

Jews believed that Jesus was a false prophet

Jesus was considered to be a false prophet by the religious leaders of His time. The majority of the people blindly followed the priests who rejected Jesus.

“And there was much muttering among the people about Him; While some said, ‘He is a good man’; others said: ‘No, he is leading the people astray.’” (John 7:12)

Only a few Jews had “opened their spiritual eyes” and believed in Jesus. Most Jews did not believe in Jesus of Nazareth because He did not fulfil their understanding of the prophecies concerning the Advent of the Messiah. They believed:

- The Messiah will sit upon the throne of David but where is the throne of the Nazarene? *“He will re-establish King David’s throne”* (Isaiah 9:6)
- The Messiah will rule with a sword. Jesus did not even have a staff, let alone a sword. *“He will carry a sword and defeat the enemies”* (Isaiah 66:16)
- Daniel has promised that He will rule Israel, but Jesus is a carpenter and not of princely birth. *“He will rule over Israel”* (Micah 5:2)

Most Jews believed in a literal fulfilment of the prophecies. Therefore, they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Why was Jesus crucified?

The Jews had been waiting for thousands of years for the Messiah to appear. When Jesus came and proclaimed that He was the Messiah or the Christ, the Jews were very angry with Him and called Him a false prophet. Why, because they expected the Messiah (which means the Christ) to come as a strong and glorious earthly king, who would deliver them from oppressors and again form a great independent kingdom of the Jews. He would be a descendent of David and bring the whole world under His rule. The Jews were looking for such a Saviour or Deliverer, particularly around the time of the Advent of Jesus.

When Jesus said, He was the Christ or the Messiah, the rulers among the Jews refused to accept him largely because He and the way of His coming were so completely different from what they expected. Therefore, they rejected Jesus as the awaited King and crucified Him. To mock Him, the following writing was placed on the cross. "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*". (John 19:19)

Were there false prophets after Jesus?

Many false prophets claiming to be Messiah or the Christ arose after Jesus. Bar-Jesus is mentioned in the Book of Acts 13:6: "*they found a ... false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus*". Another false prophet by the name of Bar-Kochba arose about one hundred years after the death of Jesus. While Jesus had very few followers during His life, this false prophet was hailed by all the Jews as a saviour. Bar-Cochba promised to destroy the Roman army and make Palestine (consisting of Judea and Israel) a free land again.

Although Jesus warned us not to follow false prophets, many Jews accepted Bar-Kochba blindly because he promised them what they wanted. As a result, the Romans destroyed Israel. More than half a million people were killed, thousands of villages wiped out and entire cities burned! All the Jews were obliged to leave Palestine, and from that time until 1844, Jews only lived outside of Palestine.

The Jews blindly followed a false prophet with their spiritual eyes closed, firmly believing in all his promises. The result was physical and spiritual catastrophe.

How can we recognize a false prophet?

Many people go to church and hear many promises. They are promised that if they follow the teachings of that particular denomination they will be saved.

Sometimes the term “false prophets” is misused. It is often claimed that other churches are falsely leading the people. Unfortunately, this divides the people and prevents them from looking independently for the truth.

If we want to investigate what is true or false we must investigate ourselves. As the Apostle Paul advises us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21: *“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”*

Jesus’ standard of judging prophets

Jesus gave us a standard by which we can judge what is true or false without having to rely on the opinions of others.

Jesus said: *“Beware of false prophets. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruits. Wherefore by the fruits ye shall know them.”* (Matt 7:15–20) (Emphasis added)

Three times Jesus repeats the phrase “**the fruit is important**”.

What does Jesus mean by fruits?

A tree is often used as a symbol for the Prophet or the Messenger of God. The fruits produced by a tree symbolize the teachings of the Messenger of God. If you study the teachings of Jesus, you will see that they are very good teachings or good fruit.

Similarly, when you study the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, specially revealed for this time, you will conclude that His teachings will help you to develop spiritually. These teachings will also help to unite people from all denominations, religions, races,

Difference between a true and false prophet

nations and cultures to create a better world therefore they are also good fruits. If the fruit is good, then the tree is good; if the teachings are good, the Prophet is true. That is the test. This was the case in the time of Jesus, and it is also the case now with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. Using this test, judge for yourself whether Bahá'u'lláh brings good fruits or not.

Some teachings or fruits of Bahá'u'lláh

1. **God is One, the foundation of all Religions is one and Mankind is one.** This means that people of all races in reality belong to one human family and are equal in the sight of one God.
2. **Man must investigate truth for himself** and not blindly follow the customs, traditions and religions that vary from one country to another.
3. There is no inequality based on gender. **Men and women must have equal opportunities, rights and privileges.**
4. **An international language** should be taught in schools for everyone to learn along with the mother tongue. World communications will be facilitated when everyone knows this international language.
5. **All people** must receive a basic **education.**
6. **Everyone must** try very hard to **remove all the prejudices** that divide races, religions and cultures, and promote the unity of its people.
7. **Religion and science must agree** and complement each other: religion deals with our spiritual life and science deals with our material life.
8. Everyone must work to **end the extremes of wealth and poverty.** All people must have equal educational and economic opportunities, and equal access to decent living conditions. There is a spiritual solution to economic problems.
9. In the future there will be **World Peace.**

These teachings are but a few of the fruits of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. These **fruits are good fruits**, which help humankind.

Already they have united millions of people worldwide who are from diverse races and different religious backgrounds.

When you study the life of Bahá'u'lláh, you will find many proofs of His Divine authority: His compassion for poor people, His innate wisdom and knowledge from the time He was a child, His accurate predictions, His perfect character manifested in a life of suffering, and His great contributions for moral education and social reform.

The antichrist

No discussion of false prophets is complete without mentioning 'the antichrist'.

Some churches believe in the coming of a sinister individual known as the 'antichrist' who will mislead Christians. Jesus never mentioned this and it is not found in the Gospels. This idea was developed in the early church and is only mentioned in a letter of John written at the end of the first century.

One of the greatest problems for the early church was the appearance of false teachers who denied the human and spiritual nature of Jesus Christ, and created new sects.

John exposed these false teachers and called them antichrists. The word 'antichrist' is only mentioned in three passages in the Bible.

In I John 2:18, John tells us that there is not one, but many antichrists: "*Little children ... there are many antichrists*".

In I John 4:1-3, John explains the meaning of antichrist and tells us that the antichrist was already in the world soon after the death of Jesus. "*Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world*".

In II John 1:7, John confirms again how to recognize the antichrist. He tells us that the antichrist is "*Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist*".

Difference between a true and false prophet

Churches have often used fear of the antichrist to turn people away from investigating truth. However, a minute of reflection will prove that Bahá'u'lláh glorifies Jesus, defends all of His claims and affirms the reality of Jesus' divine position as the 'Word made flesh'. Therefore, it is obvious that He cannot be the antichrist. His followers, called Bahá'ís, have a strong belief in Jesus the Christ, accept Jesus as the Son of God and testify to the truth of all that the Bible teaches about Jesus.

The new name

“Say, O followers of the Son [Jesus]! Have ye shut out yourselves from Me by reason of My Name?”

(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 9)

Why a new name?

Initially we may find it strange that the new Manifestation of God will have a new name. We are so used to the name of Jesus Christ. However, in this day we should try not to be too attached to His name. Jesus warned that false prophets would come after Him using His name (Christ) to deceive people.

“For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ and shall deceive many.”(Mark 13:6, Matt. 24:5 and Luke 21:8).

The Bible tells us that at His Return Christ will be called by a new name. Many Christians will not like this idea. However, we must be careful not to make the same mistake as the Jews in Jesus’ time who had never heard the name Jesus. They only knew Moses. The name Jesus was not mentioned in their Holy Writings.

“The Lord God ... shall call His servants by another name”
(Isaiah 62:2)

The Book of Revelation when referring to the Second Coming of Christ promises that that He will have a new name.

“I will write upon him my new name” (Revelation 3:12)

“He who hath an ear, let him hear ... To him who overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written. He who hath an ear, let him hear ...”(Revelation 2:17)

Both of these references are accompanied by the words: *“He who has an ear, let him hear”*. Both also emphasize that in order to recognize the new name one must struggle to overcome obstacles. An obstacle is the prejudice we typically feel towards any new and strange sounding name and a new identity.

The new identity

The Pharisees and the scribes especially pointed out to the people that the name Jesus did not appear in the Books of Moses or in any of the Jewish writings. The new name was also accompanied by a new identity. *“Is this not a carpenter’s son?”* (Matt. 13:55)

He was coming from a place which had much less prestige. *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46)

“Is the Christ to come from Galilee?” (John 7:41)

The Jews became angry when Jesus said he came from heaven and they muttered:

“Who is that man Jesus, we know his father?” (John 6:42)

“Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? ... and they took offence at him” (Matt. 13:55–57)

The new name: Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God

When you heard for the first time the name Bahá’u’lláh did you think what a strange name? The name is Oriental, from the East. It is interesting to note that the name Bahá’u’lláh is clearly mentioned several times in both the Old and New Testaments, every time in connection with the Return of Christ and as a prophecy for important events that would occur during the life of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh is an Arabic name that can be translated into English as the “Glory of God”, “Glory of the Lord” or “Glory of the Father”.

For those readers who are interested in Bible prophecies, we will list some of the quotations where the Glory of God is mentioned in the Bible together with significant events during the life of Bahá’u’lláh

“For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the Glory of His Father” (Matt. 16:27)

Several prophets in the Old Testament had visions about a Messenger of God coming from Persia and standing near a river, close to Baghdád. The name of this new Messenger is “The Glory of God”. All those prophesies were fulfilled by Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God, in 1863 when He declared His Message to the world

while in the vicinity of Baghdád, on an island in the midst of the river Tigris.

“And behold the Glory of the Lord stood there as the Glory which I saw by the river of Chebar and I fell on my face.” (Ezekiel 3:23)

This quote from Ezekiel mentions not only the name of the new Messenger of God as the ‘Glory of God’, it also gives a place name: ‘the river Chebar’. Where do we find this river? A detailed map of Iraq shows the river Chebar flows in the vicinity of Baghdád. In the time of Ezekiel (more than 2,500 years ago), modern Baghdád was not yet built. However, close to the present day Baghdád, we find the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon. Ezekiel tells us that he was in exile in Babylon (close to Baghdád) when he saw the appearance of God in a vision which he describes as the *“appearance of the likeness of the Glory of God.”* (Ezekiel 1:28)

That Jesus and Bahá’u’lláh were different becomes clear from this vision of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, was accused by the religious authorities of blasphemy against Moses and God. In a moving speech, Stephen explained why he believed in Abraham, Moses and Jesus. This speech, recorded in the Bible, gives us an insight into the thinking of the first Jewish Christians before Christians of pagan background became the dominant voice heard in the Christian church. Before Stephen was stoned to death, he saw a vision in which Jesus and Bahá’u’lláh were standing at the right hand of God.

“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the Glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55)

Also Isaiah spoke about the Glory of the Lord.

“And the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (Isaiah 40:5)

Bahá’u’lláh was exiled from Persia to Palestine (Israel). You will see on the map on page 8 that Iran is positioned east of Israel. Ezekiel recorded his vision of the last days saying: *“And behold, the Glory of the Lord of Israel came from the way of the East”* (Ezekiel 43:1)

In another verse, Ezekiel says:

“And behold, the Glory of the Lord came into the house by way of the gate, whose prospect is towards the East” (Ezekiel 43:4)

The name Bahá'u'lláh (The Glory of God) is mentioned several times in the Book of Revelation with reference to the coming of the City of God, the New Jerusalem. For example:

*“And showed me the Holy city the new Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven, having **the Glory of God**: and her light was like unto a stone most precious”* (Revelation 21:10-11)

What is the meaning of Jerusalem coming down from Heaven? The coming of the city of God, a new Jerusalem, from heaven cannot be literally understood. *“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”* (Rev. 21:2)

It is very clear that cities do not fall out of Heaven. Cities are built up from the ground with much effort. Therefore, a literal interpretation makes no sense! How could a city be adorned as a bride? Therefore, the “city of God” has a spiritual meaning. The new Jerusalem is the “Word of God”, the new teachings brought by the “Return of Christ”. *“Behold I make all things new”* (Revelation 21:5)

Elsewhere in the New Testament the name Bahá'u'lláh is also mentioned.

*“And the city had no light of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for **the Glory of God** did lighten it”* (Revelation 21:23)

The sun and the moon are the symbols for spiritual guidance. The spiritual guide (or light) for the New Jerusalem is “**the Glory of God**”.

Some prophecies even mention Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, when He was a prisoner in 'Akká, near the valley of Sharon and the mountain Carmel in the Holy Land.

“The excellence of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the Glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God.” (Isaiah 35:1)

The place of His Coming

Many Bible scholars were surprised that so many of the prophecies that had not been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus, pointed to the Persian Empire as the place of His second Coming

Mr. H. Bonar, a Christian scholar writing on Biblical prophecy in the early part of the nineteenth century, accepted the prophecies about Assyria, Elam and Persia, but he confessed that he was unable to explain why these places should, “in the latter days” be so blessed. For example, in Jeremiah 49:38 we read that God promised: *“I will set my throne in Elam”*. Also Daniel 8:2 and Ezekiel 1:28 gives “the province of Elam” as the place of the vision for the time of the end. Daniel prophesied from Shushan,⁵ the capital city of Elam (which is now called Iran) and mentions in Daniel 8:2 that *“Elam would be given as a place of vision in the latter days”*.

Both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh fulfilled these prophecies as they were born in Iran, which was called Elam at the time when Daniel wrote the prophecy.

Other prophecies fulfilling events in the life of Bahá’u’lláh

Bahá’u’lláh fulfilled many other prophecies related to the Second Coming. To understand this we have to study the significant events in the life of Bahá’u’lláh.

In this introduction to the topic we will look at only one paragraph in one small book from the Bible called the book of Micah. In this book, we find many prophecies that present a picture where all the pieces fit together. Some are related to the life of Jesus⁶, others to the life of Bahá’u’lláh.

“In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. Notwithstanding the land will be desolate ... Feed thy people with thy rod ... in the midst of Carmel ... According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see ... they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears will be deaf.” (Micah 7:12–15).

[1] *“He shall come from Assyria”*

Bahá’u’lláh was born in Tíhrán, the capital city of Iran or Persia, which was located in the ancient Assyrian Empire.

[2] *“... from the fortified cities”*

Bahá'u'lláh was taken in chains from the fortified city of Constantinople to the fortress city of 'Akká. (see map on page 55). Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the fortress city of 'Akká. This fortress was so well built that even the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was unable to capture it. He left cannonballs buried in the thick stone walls as a memory of his futile attempt.

[3] “... *from the fortress to the river*”

After being released from the fortress of 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh went to the small island (also named the Ridván Garden) in the Na'mayin River just to the south of 'Akká. There He spent many hours and welcomed those who sought His counsel.

[4] “... *from sea to sea*”

During His exile and banishment Bahá'u'lláh was sent from the Black Sea in Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea on whose shores the prison-fortress of 'Akká is located.

[5] “... *from mountain to mountain*”

Bahá'u'lláh withdrew for two years to the remote Mount Galú in Iraq. Later He was banished to 'Akká close to Mount Carmel, on whose slopes he spent His last years.

[6] “... *the land shall be desolate*”

When Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 'Akká after a miserable sea journey the entire population of the city was filled with hatred for Him since the religious leaders had lied to the people telling them that Bahá'u'lláh was a criminal and an enemy of Islam. Not only was the land spiritually desolate, but it also was filled with physical desolation, typhoid, malaria, diphtheria and dysentery. (Soon after the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká, the climate in 'Akká started to gradually improve. The winds changed direction. When a leader of 'Akká, who respected Bahá'u'lláh, asked Him what he could do for Him, Bahá'u'lláh asked him to restore an old aqueduct. The leader obeyed the prisoner and soon fresh water was once again available for the population. Today, 'Akká is a healthy place for people to live)

[7] “*Feed thy people ... in the midst of Carmel*”

Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned very close to Mount Carmel. During one of His visits after He was released He pitched His tent

on the slopes of Mount Carmel. It was there that He revealed The Tablet of Carmel in which He spoke of the Glory of this Holy Spot. His words were like spiritual food to edify the souls of men.

[8] *“According to the days of thy coming out of Egypt will I show unto Him marvellous things.”*

“The days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt” means the period the Jews were wandering through the desert under the guidance of Moses after leaving Palestine. The Bible tells us that after forty years the Jews finally reached the Holy land, Palestine.

Just like Moses, after Bahá'u'lláh was released from the prison in Tihrán He began a forty year period of exile and further imprisonments. His sufferings ended only with His Ascension in the Holy Land in 1892. Hence, from the beginning of His mission in 1852 until the last days of His life there passed forty years of suffering and revelation exactly “according the days of Moses coming out of the land of Egypt”.

[9] *“The nations shall see ... they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears will be deaf.”*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote letters to all the great leaders of the nations of His time but received little response from most of them. As Micah prophesied, the great kings laid their hands upon their mouths and their ears were deaf.

Fulfilment of prophecies

The new name, the place and time of His coming have all been foretold in the Bible. Man's planning is futile when confronted with the plans of God.

The reason why the clergy and government officials banished Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká was because they hoped that He would die quickly in that desolate prison and not be heard of again. As an exile and a prisoner Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, who had visions of “the Glory of God” appearing in Persia and coming to 'Akká in the Holy Land;

Indeed *‘The promises of God, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled.’* (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh p. 13)

8

How will we recognize the Messenger of God?

“... whoso looketh for Christ in His physical body hath looked in vain, and will be shut away from Him as by a veil. ... In this new and wondrous day, it behoveth thee to seek after the spirit of Christ.”

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 167)

Some people think that when the Christ returns they will be able to recognize Him physically. They expect to see the same bodily form of Jesus who walked the streets of Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

The Bible does not give us any physical details of Jesus’ appearance. The existing paintings of Jesus are according to the imagination of the artists⁷

Jesus Himself gave some signs that would enable us to recognize Him at the time of His return which can be summarized as follows:

- The promised One will speak with the same voice as Jesus.
- He shall glorify and bear witness of Jesus.
- He will explain Jesus’ words.

He will speak with the same voice

Jesus gave the following sign to His disciples when they asked Him how they would recognize the Promised One. Using a symbolic language Jesus compared His followers with sheep. He said: *“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow Me”* (John 10:27)

Would you recognize the voice of Jesus when He returns? No one alive today knows His voice. Therefore, it is clear that we are not thinking of the voice itself but rather what He has to say i.e. His teachings. Bahá’u’lláh revealed more than one hundred books. Anybody who studies these books will conclude that there is no

contradiction between the ‘voice’ or teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and the ‘voice’ or teachings of Jesus both of which are the Word of God. Bahá’u’lláh speaks with the same voice as Jesus but has addressed the issues of the people in our time. Jesus was a good teacher and addressed the needs and level of the people of His time. Bahá’u’lláh speaks about the problems of the whole world as we now know it.

There is no conflict between the words of Jesus and the words of Bahá’u’lláh. Both complement each other. For example, Jesus said to love your neighbour and now Bahá’u’lláh says to love mankind.

He shall glorify and bear witness of Jesus

Jesus Himself promised that the Promised One would glorify Christ. In John 16:14, Jesus said: “He will glorify Me ...” and in John 15:26: “He will bear witness to Me”.

Bahá’u’lláh glorified Jesus in His Writings. For example, Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed:

“This is that which the Son [Jesus] hath decreed” And whatsoever hath proceedeth out of His blameless, His truth-speaking, trustworthy mouth, can never be altered.” (Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 14)

Bahá’u’lláh glorified Christ:

“He [Christ] it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 86)

Bahá’u’lláh wrote about the crucifixion of Jesus:

“Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 85)

Bahá’u’lláh linked His own life with that of Jesus Christ throughout His mission. After having suffered stoning, poisoning, torture and imprisonment, Bahá’u’lláh lifted up His voice to cry out:

“O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you. Deal with Me as ye wish, for I have vowed to lay down My life in the path of God.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 101)

He will explain the words of Jesus

Jesus said: *“He will take of mine and show it unto you”* (John 16:15)

Bahá'u'lláh explained many verses of the Bible that for centuries had confused and divided Christianity. He confirms that Jesus is the Son of God, explains the mystery of the Trinity, the meaning of resurrection, the day of judgement and many other statements.

Bahá'u'lláh, the new Manifestation of God

A new Messenger of God has appeared who fulfils all the conditions given by Jesus for His Return. His name is Bahá'u'lláh, which means the Glory of God! His words bring the same wisdom as the words of Jesus, as they both spoke with the same divine inspiration and both had the same heavenly power. Both suffered greatly from persecution. Large numbers of their first followers were mocked, imprisoned, tortured and executed in public in the most horrible fashion. Just as the Christian martyrs had the choice of denying Jesus and thereby saving their lives; so too the Bahá'í martyrs had the choice of renouncing Bahá'u'lláh or to die for their love of Him.

Bahá'u'lláh lived a life of sacrificial devotion to God, upholding the Teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“... Jesus, the Spirit of God ... hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you.”*

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 101)

“He who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds. ... He, verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as

He came down from it the first time."(The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 54-5)

"Beware lest ye dispute that which He proclaimeth, even as the people before you disputed His utterances."

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 11)

"The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth," affirms Bahá'u'lláh, "is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled.... This is the Day which the Pen of the Most High hath glorified in all the Holy Scriptures. There is no verse in them that doth not declare the glory of His holy Name, and no Book that doth not testify unto the loftiness of this most exalted theme"

(Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 76)

Appendix

Invitation to join the Bahá'í Faith

An important principle of the Bahá'í Faith is the independent investigation of Truth. Therefore it is between you and your Creator whether you wish to become a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í Faith has no priests or clergy. It also has no sacraments or rituals such as baptism.

The process of becoming a Bahá'í is very simple. Once you feel in your heart that that Bahá'u'lláh is the latest Messenger from God you can fill in a registration card which is available from any member or institution of the Bahá'í community where you reside. You can find a local telephone listing for the Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly in your area. The registration card will have the following declaration:

“I wish to become a member of the Bahá'í community. I accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Bearer of God's message for this Day and will endeavour to follow His teachings and the Bahá'í way of life. I also accept the authority of the institutions which administer the affairs of the Bahá'í community”.

There are a number of websites which give you more information about the Bahá'í Faith.

- Official website of Bahá'í Faith: www.bahai.org
- General Information: www.bahai.com
- Index and Bahá'í search engine: www.bahaindex.com
- Bahá'í education: www.bahai-education.org
- Prophecies: www.bci.org/prophecy-fulfilled
- Prayers: www.bahaiprayers.org (beautifully presented)
- Multi-lingual link site: www.uga.edu/bahai/
(Information in many local languages)
- Christianity: www.christianityrenewed.com (35 free lessons)

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Notes and References

- ¹ “Bahá'u'lláh declared that religion is in complete harmony with science and reason.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 231)
- ² During the Crusades, Christian Europe was living in the ‘dark ages’. Europeans were very primitive. At the same time, in Asia, Islam had given birth to a great new civilization. There was peace. The Christian Crusaders were very surprised when they arrived in the Muslim cities around the year 1200. The Moslem cities were full of light and were well organized. In Europe, it was not safe to travel on the roads as there were many robbers, but in the East people could travel freely during the day and the night without being afraid of being robbed. A peaceful society allowed the arts, literature and sciences to become highly developed. Thanks to Islam and the Islamic knowledge that the warriors brought back from the East, Christian Europe left ‘the dark ages’ and a new civilization, called “the Renaissance” was born.
- ³ The year 1844 is the time of renewal of the religion of God and refers to the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. The Báb declared His Mission in 1844. This was called “the second woe” by St. John. Why associate the coming of a new Messenger of God with a woe or a warning? Because in the beginning the coming of the Messenger of God brings with it a lot of woe or sorrow, grief and distress. First, there is the suffering of the Messenger of God Himself, and then of his followers who are martyred for His sake. In the Bible, the Advent of Jesus was also called the dreadful day of the Lord. (Malachi 4:5) It is also the time of judgement between the lovers of God who accept His new Messenger, and the unbelievers who reject Him. Woe to them who reject Him, theirs is the greatest loss. John spoke of three woes or warnings. The first woe or warning was Muhammad. (Rev. 9:12) The second woe was the Báb. The third woe, which came quickly thereafter, was Bahá'u'lláh, even as John prophesied: “*The second woe is past; and, behold the third woe cometh quickly.*” There was only a

brief period of 19 years between the declaration of the Báb and the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh.

- 4 Bahá'u'lláh issued a similar warning: *“Beware that thou allow not the wolf to become the shepherd of God's flock ...”* (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 233.)
- 5 The mound of ancient Shushan is adjacent to the village of Shúsh, 380 km ESE of Baghdád.
- 6 Micah foretold the place of birth of Jesus. *“Out of Bethlehem, a ruler of Israel will arise.”* (Micah 5:2) Bethlehem is also the birthplace of King David.
- 7 The early followers of Jesus came from a Jewish tradition where it is forbidden to make images. Most pictures that we see of 'Jesus' have European features. Since they are a product of the imagination of painters, they can not show the true physical form of Jesus. He was rarely portrayed as a Jew during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. At that time, Jews were despised and persecuted in Western Europe. They were often blamed and held responsible for the death of Jesus on the cross.