

Bahá'í Bible Study

Part Two

The Image of God

The Bahá'í Bible Study Series

Bahá'í Bible Study Part One—The Nature of the Bible

Bahá'í Bible Study Part Two—The Image of God

Bahá'í Bible Study Part Three—Evil Concerns

Bahá'í Bible Study Part Two—The Image of God

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PART TWO—THE IMAGE OF GOD

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FOREWORD

In March 2005, the Bahá'í Faith's supreme body, the Universal House of Justice, gave to the Bahá'í world an amazing document—one written on its behalf and under its supervision. That document is titled *One Common Faith*.

In that powerful mandate, the House of Justice portrays humanity as undergoing a “universal awakening” that “greatly enhances the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh's message”. It identifies that awakening with people's growing ability—“given the chance”—to see how all of “humanity's sacred texts . . . speak with one voice” in foretelling the coming of God's Kingdom.

And how may Bahá'ís offer people that chance? According to the House of Justice, we can and must do so by inviting others to “explore familiar scriptural passages through the eyes of Bahá'u'lláh”.

JoAnn Borovicka's *Bahá'í Bible Study* workshops do exactly that: They help every reader explore familiar scriptural terrain through Bahá'u'lláh's eyes. Unfamiliar terrain, too! The Old and New Testaments are vast. Their prose, written thousands of years ago, can daunt the modern reader. But Bahá'u'lláh Himself delivers many of His most important teachings in the form of biblical commentary, insightfully geared to the modern mind.

In *One Common Faith*, the House of Justice shows how Bahá'u'lláh's explanations of the Bible and the Qur'án “elevate discussion of religious issues above sectarian and transient considerations” once we ourselves “gain an in-depth understanding of the issues involved”. Its stated goal: “amplifying enormously the Bahá'í community's contribution to public discourse on what has become the most demanding issue facing humankind”—the oneness of religion. *The Bahá'í Bible Study* workshops are a step forward in this learning process.

Gary Matthews
Knoxville, Tennessee

INTRODUCTION

The *Bahá'í Bible Study* project was initiated in the year 2000 in response to requests from several Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith in who wanted to improve their ability to engage in uplifting religious dialogue with their Christian family and friends. The first workshop was held in Lydia, South Carolina; it was a lively dialogue with many joyful and insightful moments and, surprisingly, lots of tears.

In this first workshop certain needs came to light, including the need for greater skill and comfort in using the Bible itself. Although most participants grew up in or still attended Christian churches, and all owned at least one Bible, few were comfortable reading or finding their way around its pages. It became evident that certain knowledge about and skills in using the Bible needed to be gained. Another need that arose, apparently connected to old fears or past unfortunate experiences, was the need for the participants to demonstrate absolute respect for biblical Scripture; that is, there was a degree of easy cynicism about certain biblical stories and Christian beliefs, a cynicism that was not compatible with the absolute respect shown the Old and New Testament Scripture, and the Christian religion as a whole, by the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Both these needs were evident in subsequent workshops as well. In response, “Part One: The Nature of the Bible” was developed—it explores the unity of the Bahá'í Faith and Christianity, establishes the Bible as ancient Scripture revered in the Faith, engages the participants in an overview of the Bible as a collection of sacred books with stories familiar to them, and offers instruction and practice in using the Bible reference system.

Additional needs were identified. The oneness of the Manifestations of God was recognized as a basic principle of the Faith, yet many participants from Christian backgrounds harbored fears that in joining the Bahá'í community somehow they had turned their back on Jesus; there were a lot of unexpected feelings about this. *Part Two: The Image of God* addresses this need; in it the participants study and dialogue about the unique spiritual station of the Manifestation, the oneness of the historical appearances of the Manifestation, and the oneness of the Manifestations' names and titles. Bahá'í interpretations of prophecies regarding the “Return” and guidance concerning the “Resurrection” are also explored. Other topics of great interest involved the issue of evil including Satan, antichrist, false prophets, sin, and hell, and these are explored in “Part Three: Evil Concerns.”

Each individual workshop is designed to be completed by a small group in sixty to ninety minutes. The purpose of the entire *Bahá'í Bible Study* series is to:


- Empower the participants with knowledge concerning Bahá'í teachings on biblical topics.
- Cultivate familiarity with and love of the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible.
- Engage in uplifting dialogue about Bahá'í understandings concerning biblical topics.

This series, still a work in progress, is for anyone interested in learning the Bahá'í perspective on biblical topics. Basic knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith is helpful before engaging in the study.

1. THE REALITY OF THE GODHEAD

KEY POINTS

- The created is necessarily on a lower plane than the Creator.
- The lower planes of existence cannot fully comprehend the higher planes of existence.
- Mankind cannot directly know the essence of God.

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1. In explaining the unknowable nature of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá begins by describing the different capacities of the planes of existence. He states:

The reality of the Godhead is beyond the grasp of the mind. When thou dost carefully consider this matter, thou wilt see that a lower plane can never comprehend a higher. The mineral kingdom, for example, which is lower, is precluded from comprehending the vegetable kingdom; for the mineral, any such understanding would be utterly impossible. (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 46*)

- a. Why is the reality of God beyond the grasp of the mind?
 - b. Precludes means prevents, stops and prohibits. What precludes a mineral from understanding a vegetable?
2. The vegetable and animal kingdoms are on different levels of existence.

In the same way, no matter how far the vegetable kingdom may develop, it will achieve no conception of the animal kingdom, and any such comprehension at its level would be unthinkable, for the animal occupieth a plane higher than that of the vegetable: this tree cannot conceive of hearing and sight. And the animal kingdom, no matter how far it may evolve, can never become aware of the reality of the intellect, which discovereth the inner essence of all things, and comprehendeth those realities which cannot be seen; for the human plane as compared with that of the animal is very high. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 46*)

- a. Why can't a vegetable understand hearing or sight?
- b. Why can't an animal understand a human being's planning for the future?
- c. How would you describe the difference in station between you and the chair that you are sitting in?

3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues:

And although these beings all co-exist in the contingent world, in each case the difference in their stations precludeth their grasp of the whole; for no lower degree can understand a higher, such comprehension being impossible. The higher plane, however, understandeth the lower. . . . (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 46)

- a. The word “contingent” means dependent, reliant, subject to and, conditional. What is meant by “the contingent world”?
- b. How is the contingent world different from the World of God?
- c. Why is a lower degree precluded from understanding a higher degree?

4. The essence of God is beyond the comprehension of humanity.

Then how could it be possible for a contingent reality, that is, man, to understand the nature of that pre-existent Essence, the Divine Being? The difference in station between man and the Divine Reality is thousands upon thousands of times greater than the difference between vegetable and animal. And that which a human being would conjure up in his mind is but the fanciful image of his human condition, it doth not encompass God's reality but rather is encompassed by it. That is, man graspeth his own illusory conceptions, but the Reality of Divinity can never be grasped: It, Itself, encompasseth all created things, and all created things are in Its grasp. That Divinity which man doth imagine for himself existeth only in his mind, not in truth. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 46)

- a. How much greater is the difference in station between man and God than between vegetable and animal?
- b. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe “**that which a human being would conjure up in his mind**” about God?
- c. Read the following Biblical passages and check the verses that you feel speak most directly to the point that “**the reality of Divinity can never be grasped**” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 46).

(a)_____ **“And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape.”** (John 5:37, KJV)

(b)_____ **“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** (1 Tim 1:17, KJV)

- (c) _____ **“[Jesus Christ] Who is the image of the invisible God....”** (1 Colossians 1:15, KJV)
- (d) _____ **“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”** (John 1:18, KJV)
- (e) _____ **“No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”** (1 John 4:12, KJV)

- d. Share your choice with your partner or group.
e. What caught your attention in the above exercise?

REVIEW

- a. Why is the reality of God beyond humanity's understanding?
- b. What is a biblical passage that describes the unknowable nature of God?
- c. What is a Baha'i passage that describes the unknowable nature of God?

2. THE HOLY MANIFESTATIONS

KEY POINTS

- The attributes of God are perfectly reflected in the Manifestation of God.
- Humankind knows God through knowledge of the Manifestation of God.
- Historical appearances of the Manifestation of God are united and agreed in purpose and teaching.



1. Abdu'l-Bahá explains that God can be known only through the Manifestation of God:

The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God; and if he be neglectful of the knowledge of the Holy Manifestations, he will be bereft of the knowledge of God. (Some Answered Questions, p. 222)

- a. What is apparent in the Manifestations of God?
- b. When is one bereft of the knowledge of God?

2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues:

To illustrate: the Sun of Truth dwelleth in a sky to which no soul hath any access, and which no mind can reach, and He is far beyond the comprehension of all creatures. Yet the Holy Manifestations of God are even as a looking-glass, burnished and without stain, which gathereth streams of light out of that Sun, and then scattereth the glory over the rest of creation. In that polished surface, the Sun with all its majesty standeth clearly revealed. Thus, should the mirrored Sun proclaim, "I am the Sun!" this is but truth; and should It cry, "I am not the Sun!" this is the truth as well. And although the Day-Star, with all its glory, its beauty, its perfections, be clearly visible in that mirror without stain, still It hath not come down from its own lofty station in the realms above, It hath not made its way into the mirror; rather doth It continue to abide, as It will forever, in the supernal heights of its own holiness. (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 50)

- a. How is God like the sun?
 - b. In what way is the image of a sun in a mirror both the sun and *not* the sun?
 - c. How is the Manifestation of God like a mirror?
 - d. In what way is the Manifestation of God the image of God?
3. The Epistle to the Corinthians states, **“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”** (2 Corinthians 4:4-5, KJV).
- a. How is Christ described in the above scripture?
 - b. Using ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s illustration of the Sun and mirror, explain how Christ is the image of God.
4. Bahá’u’lláh states that, **“In the kingdoms of earth and heaven there must needs be manifested a Being, an Essence Who shall act as a Manifestation and Vehicle for the transmission of the grace of the Divinity Itself, the Sovereign Lord of all”** (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 67).
- a. For what does the Manifestation of God act as a vehicle?
 - b. In what kingdoms are these Divine Beings manifested?
5. **“These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God”** (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 141).
- a. What do the Manifestations of God receive and reveal?
 - b. What do the Manifestations of God reflect?
6. Humanity is dependent on the Manifestation of God.

As to the Holy Manifestations of God, They are the focal points where the signs, tokens and perfections of that sacred, pre-existent Reality appear in all their splendour. They are an eternal grace, a heavenly glory, and on Them dependeth the everlasting life of humankind. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 49)

- a. On what does the “**everlasting life of humankind**” depend?
- b. What appears in the Manifestations of God?
- c. What are the Holy Manifestations of God?

7. **“Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of Their Will and move and have their being through the outpourings of Their grace”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 178).

- a. What lives by the Will of the Manifestations of God?
- b. What lives through the grace of the Manifestation of God?

REVIEW

- a. What is the spiritual station of the Manifestation of God?
- b. How can mankind know God?
- c. What is reflected in the Manifestation of God?

3. THE DOUBLE STATION

KEY POINTS

- The Manifestation of God has a twofold nature; the physical and the spiritual.
- The Manifestation of God also has a double station; the Voice of God and the human station.
- Knowledge of the double station of the Manifestation of God explains many mysteries regarding the person of the Manifestation and the relationship of the Manifestations of God to each other.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. Bahá'u'lláh describes the twofold nature of the Manifestation of God:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal..., He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XXVII*)

- a. Why has God ordained that “**a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest**”?
What is the twofold nature of the Manifestation of God?
 - b. Why do you think it is necessary for the Manifestation of God to take on a physical form?
2. In addition to a twofold nature, the Manifestation of God has a double station. Bahá'u'lláh states:

He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: “I am but a man like you.” (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XXVII*)

- a. Name the two stations of the Manifestation of God.
 - b. Who has conferred a double station on the Manifestation of God?
3. Explaining the unknowable nature of God and the station of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh says:

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days ... being thus closed in the face of all beings, He, the Source of infinite grace ... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 99)

- a. From where do the Luminous Gems of Holiness come?
 - b. In what form do the Manifestations of God appear on earth?
 - c. Why do the Manifestations of God appear in the world?
4. The Manifestations of God take on a physical human form and share in the human spirit. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that, **“The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally... and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind”** (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 151).
- a. What do the Manifestations of God share with mankind?
 - b. Once begun, how long does the spirit of man continue to exist?

5. In the first station, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the Manifestation of God can truthfully declare, “I am God!” He states:

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: “I am God!” He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 178)

- a. How are the attributes of God made manifest in the world?
- b. When a Manifestation of God says, “I am God,” this is a spiritual, not a literal truth. Why?
- c. Give some examples of the names and attributes of God.

6. Explaining the tests and difficulties experienced by the Manifestations of God, Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The Holy Manifestations of God possess two stations: one is the physical station, and one the spiritual. In other words, one station is that of a human being, and one, of the Divine Reality. If the Manifestations are subjected to tests, it is in Their human station only, not in the splendour of Their Divine Reality.
(Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 55)

- a. What are the two stations of the Manifestation of God?
- b. In what station are the Manifestations of God subjected to tests?

7. Abdu'l-Bahá continues:

And further, these tests are such only from the viewpoint of mankind. That is, to outward seeming, the human condition of the Holy Manifestations is subjected to tests, and when Their strength and endurance have by this means been revealed in the plenitude of power, other men receive instruction therefrom, and are made aware of how great must be their own steadfastness and endurance under tests and trials. For the Divine Educator must teach by word and also by deed....
(Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 55)

- a. How do the Holy Manifestations teach?
 - b. What does mankind become aware of from the tests and trials of the Manifestations of God?
 - c. Name some examples of tests and trials that have been endured by a Manifestation of God.
8. We find this double station in the recorded utterances and Writings of the Manifestations of God. Sometimes the Manifestation speaks from the perspective of the first station, sometimes from the perspective of the second station. To review:

* The first station emphasizes oneness with God, timeless and eternal existence, and inner divine reality.

* The second station emphasizes distinction from God, existence in the world of creation, and outer human reality.

- a. Keeping this distinction in mind, read the following quotations from Bahá'í and Biblical scripture and, for each verse, determine if (in your opinion) the

verse relates most to the first or second station of the Manifestation of God. Although the verses have many layers of meaning, identify which station you feel is most prominent in each quotation.

- (a) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am, verily, the All-Bountiful, the Ancient of Days.”**
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIV)
- (b) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I and My Father are one.”** (John 10:30, KJV)
- (c) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things “verily I am God....”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 234)
- (d) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father”** (John 14:9, KJV)
- (e) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“The Lord hath, in truth, inspired Me to proclaim: Verily, verily, I am God....”** (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 67)
- (f) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“And when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay.”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 234)
- (g) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God.”** (Luke 18:19, KJV)
- (h) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“Indeed, I am but a man like unto you.”** (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 50)
- (i) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am in the Father and the Father in Me.”** (John 14:11, KJV)
- (j) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am the All-Knowing.”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 246)
- (k) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”**
(Mark 15:34, KJV)
- (l) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I have been forsaken in a foreign land: Where are the emblems of Thy faithfulness, O Trust of the worlds?”**
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 217)

- (m) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son...He hath declared Him.”** (John 1:18, KJV)
- (n) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you.”**
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 178)
- (o) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I.”** (John 14:28, KJV)
- (p) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I am the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured.”** (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 12)
- (q) 1st _____ 2nd _____ **“I can of Mine own self do nothing...not My own will, but the will of the Father which has sent Me.”** (John 5:30, KJV)

- b. What caught your attention in the above exercise? Share your thoughts with your partner or group.
- c. Choose one of the above Bible verses and read it in the context of the entire chapter. What did you find most interesting in that chapter?

REVIEW

- a. What is the double station of the Manifestation of God?
- b. What is a biblical verse that demonstrates the Manifestation's oneness with God?
- c. What is a biblical verse that demonstrates the Manifestation's distinction from God?

4. UNITY IN DIVERSITY

KEY POINTS

- In the first station (the Voice of God) the Manifestations have essential unity.
- In the second station (the station of distinction) the Manifestations are distinguished by different names, titles and teachings.



1. Bahá'u'lláh explains that when one considers the first station of the Manifestations of God, all of the Manifestations are in perfect unity and are one in essence (spirit).

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God. . . . If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being. . . .
(Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 152)

- a. To what do the Manifestations of God summon the people of the earth?
 - b. In the station of pure abstraction the Manifestations of God can all be called by the same _____.
2. Bahá'u'lláh also explains that when one considers the second station of the Manifestations of God, each of the Manifestations can be seen as distinct (different). He explains:

The measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world, however, must differ. Each and every one of them hath been the Bearer of a distinct Message, and hath been commissioned to reveal Himself through specific acts. It is for this reason that they appear to vary in their greatness. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXXIV)

- a. Why do the Manifestations of God appear to vary in greatness?
- b. Why do you think different Messages are needed at different times in

history?

3. Bahá'u'lláh uses a comparison with the sun to describe how the Manifestations of God are distinctly different from each other and yet unified.

Thus it is that Jesus, Himself, declared: “I go away and come again unto you.” Consider the sun. Were it to say now, “I am the sun of yesterday,” it would speak the truth. And should it, bearing the sequence of time in mind, claim to be other than that sun, it still would speak the truth. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XIII*)

- a. In what sense is the sun of today the same as the sun of yesterday?
 - b. In what sense is sun of today “other than” the sun of yesterday?
 - c. What role does time play in our perception of the sun?
4. Bahá'u'lláh's explanation continues:

In like manner, if it be said that all the days are but one and the same, it is correct and true. And if it be said, with respect to their particular names and designations, that they differ, that again is true. For though they are the same, yet one doth recognize in each a separate designation, a specific attribute, a particular character. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XIII*)

- a. From the point of view of the sun, why are all of the days the same regardless of manmade designations or characteristics?
 - b. From the point of view of the sun, why are the terms “rising sun” and “setting sun” irrelevant?
5. Bahá'u'lláh continues in His explanation of distinction and unity with this statement about the Manifestations of God:

Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the Creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.... (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XIII*)

- a. Like the days of the week or the months of the year, the same sun shines in each and each is distinguished by different historical characteristics. In a similar sense, the Light of the Manifestation is unchanging while the historical expression differs.

Abraham Circa 1900 BC	Moses Circa 1300 BC	Krishna Circa 900 BC
Zoroaster Circa 600 BC	Buddha Circa 530 BC	Jesus Circa 26 AD
Muhammad Circa 600 AD	The Báb 1844 AD	Bahá'u'lláh 1863 AD

- b. Write into the above chart a few of the historical details that apply to these Manifestations, such as geographic location, teachings for which that Revelation is especially known, the name of the Book brought by that Manifestation, and specific titles associated with that Manifestation.

6. The Manifestation of God addresses the needs and capacities of humanity at all stages in mankind's evolution. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation has been vouchsafed to men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appears above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approaches its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declines until it reaches its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to

all created things. . . . In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty has bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXXVIII)

- a. What are the teachings of a Manifestation of God in proportion to?
 - b. How is the rising of the sun like Progressive Revelation?
7. Although we see differences in Their Revelations, the Manifestations are still essentially one. Shoghi Effendi explains:

Any variations in the splendor which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested. (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 165)

Bahá'u'lláh's claims are much greater because humanity is more mature and can afford to hear them. But He draws on the same Source that was accessible to all the Prophets, it is we who can now receive more. (*Unfolding Destiny* p. 406)

- a. To what should we attribute the variations of the Manifestations of God?
 - b. Why is Bahá'u'lláh's claim so great?
 - c. What is the one Source that all of the Manifestations of God have drawn upon?
8. **“The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching. Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are one in spirit and reality”** (*‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 197).
- a. What is the source of the various religious systems?
 - b. How do the Manifestations of God relate to each other in spirit and reality?

c. How do the purposes of the Manifestations of God compare?

Review

- a. What is the Manifestation's station of essential unity?
- b. What is the Manifestation's station of distinction?
- c. Using the analogy of the calendar, describe how all of the Manifestations of God are distinct and also essentially one.

5. THREE PLANES OF EXISTENCE

KEY POINTS

- The three planes of existence of the Manifestation of God are the physical reality, the Holy Reality, and the Word of God.
- The plane of the physical reality is the human state that perishes.
- The plane of the Holy Reality is resplendent and sanctified above all things.
- The plane of the Word of God is the divine appearance and is free from all of the limitations of the world of creation.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. The Gospel of John begins, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”** (John 1:1, KJV). **“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14, KJV). To understand more about mystery of the spiritual station of the Word of God, read ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation about the Manifestations’ three planes of existence.

We said that the Manifestations have three planes. First, the physical reality, which depends upon the body; second, the individual reality, that is to say, the rational soul; third, the divine appearance, which is the divine perfections, the cause of the life of existence, of the education of souls, of the guidance of people, and of the enlightenment of the contingent world. (Some Answered Questions, p. 154)

- a. What are the three planes of the Manifestations of God?
 - b. What is the cause of the life of existence?
 - c. What is the cause of the education of souls?
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues to explain more about the first and second planes of existence of the Manifestations of God:

The physical state is the human state which perishes because it is composed of elements, and all that is composed of elements will necessarily be decomposed and dispersed. But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason it is sanctified and, in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things. It is like the sun,

which by its essential nature produces light and cannot be compared to the moon, just as the particles that compose the globe of the sun cannot be compared with those which compose the moon. The particles and organization of the former produce rays, but the particles of which the moon is composed do not produce rays but need to borrow light. So other human realities are those souls who, like the moon, take light from the sun; but that Holy Reality is luminous in Himself. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 154).

- a. Review descriptors of the first and second planes of existence in the table below (quotes taken from quotation #1 and #2). What catches your attention?

<p style="text-align: center;">The First Plane of Existence of the Manifestation of God</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Second Plane of Existence Of the Manifestation of God</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “the physical reality” • “depends upon the body” • “perishes” • “is composed of elements” • “will . . . be decomposed” • “will . . . be dispersed” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “the individual reality” • “the rational soul” • “That Holy Reality” • “is sanctified” • “is distinguished from all other things” • “is luminous in Himself”

- b. Why does the physical state have to perish?
 c. How is the Holy Reality different from the human reality?
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the third plane of existence is the Word of God.

The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. It has neither beginning nor end, for these things are related to the world of contingencies and not to the divine world. For God the end is the same thing as the beginning. So the reckoning of days, weeks, months and years, of yesterday and today, is connected with the terrestrial globe; but in the sun there is no such thing -- there is neither yesterday, today nor tomorrow, neither months nor years: all are equal. In the same way the Word of God is purified from all these conditions and is exempt from the boundaries, the laws and the limits of the world of

contingency. Therefore, the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others and is like that of the sun. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 152)

- a. Why doesn't the Word of God have a beginning or end?
- b. How is the appearance of the Word of God like the rising of the sun?
- c. Review descriptors of the third plane of existence (derived from quotation #1 and #3):

The Third Plane of Existence of the Manifestation of God

- **“the divine appearance”**
- **“heavenly splendor”**
- **“the divine perfections”**
- **“the cause of . . . the education of souls”**
- **“the guidance of people”**
- **“the enlightenment of the contingent world”**
- **“the Word of God”**
- **“the Eternal Bounty”**
- **“the Holy Spirit”**
- **“exempt from the boundaries, limits, and laws of the world of contingency”**
- **“the Reality of Prophethood”**
- **“the perfect state of manifestation”**
- **“has neither beginning nor end”**

- d. What catches your attention in this information?

4. The Manifestations of God are one in Their station as the Word of God.

The Bearers of the Trust of God are made manifest unto the peoples of the earth as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Revealers of a new Message. Inasmuch as these Birds of the celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they, therefore, are regarded as one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness. (*Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 50)

In the Word of God there is still another unity, the oneness of

the Manifestations of God, His Holiness Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This is a unity divine, heavenly, radiant, merciful; the one reality appearing in its successive manifestations. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 192)

- a. What is the one reality that has appeared in successive manifestations?
 - b. In what sense are Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh “one soul and the same person”?
 - c. Use what you know about the third plane of existence of the Manifestations of God to describe something of the power of the Word of God.
5. Find and read these verses in your Bible. Identify what you feel are references to the first, second, and/or third planes of existence of the Manifestation of God.
- a. John 1:1
 - b. John 1:14
 - c. John 8:58
 - d. Hebrews 13:8
 - e. John 5:30

6. Abdu'l-Bahá states:

In the Gospel it is said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” Then it is evident and clear that Christ did not reach to the station of Messiahship and its perfections at the time of baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove. Nay, the Word of God from all eternity has always been, and will be, in the exaltation of sanctification. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 151)

- a. Why is it evident that Christ did not reach to the station of Messiahship at the time of His baptism?
- b. When is the Word of God in an exalted and sanctified condition?

REVIEW

- a. What is the first plane of existence of the Manifestation of God?
- b. What is the second plane of existence of the Manifestation of God?
- c. What is the third plane of existence of the Manifestation of God?
- d. What Bible verse would you choose as the best biblical evidence for the third plane of existence of the Manifestation of God?

6. NAMES, TITLES AND ATTRIBUTES

KEY POINTS

- The Manifestations of God reveal the attributes and names of God.
- The titles of the Manifestations of God are the attributes and names of God.
- In the station of distinction, the Manifestations of God may be called by different names/titles.
- In the station of essential unity, all of the Manifestations of God can be called by the same names/titles.



1. Bahá'u'lláh states that, **“These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God”** (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 142).
 - a. What are the Prophets the recipients of?
 - b. What do the Prophets of God reveal?
2. Bahá'u'lláh states that, **“By the revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 47).
 - a. Who are the Gems of Divine virtue?
 - b. How are the names and attributes of God made manifest?
3. The following list is a small sample of the names and attributes of God as quoted from the Bahá'í Writings, the Qur'an, and/or the Bible.
 - a. Read the following selection of names, titles, and attributes of God.

Names/Titles/Attributes of God*

Abiding One (BP 90)	Lord (AHW #24) (Is 40:28)
Allah (KA 25) (Sura 5:51)	Lord of Hosts (Amos 3:13)
All-Possessing (GWB 32)	Maker of All Names (ESW 40)
Almighty (ESW 1) (Sura 3:6) (Gen 17:1)	Merciful (Sura 63:1)
Beloved (GWB XXX)	Mighty (Sura 4:158)
Bounteous One (KA 30)	Most Exalted (ESW 45)
Compassionate God (Sura 1:1)	Most Merciful (GDM 3)
Compassionate Lord (KA 28)	Most Powerful (ESW 10)
Counselor (ESW 124)	Omnipotent (ESW 1) (Rev 19:6)
Creator (GDM 16) (Is 40:28)	Omniscient (ESW 124)
Eternal King (PB 60) (1 Tim 1:17)	One True God (ESW:13) (Sura 2:133)
Eternal Truth (TB 266)	Perfect Way (2 Kings 22:31)
Eternal (KI 16) (Deut 33:27)	Potent One (TB 103)
Everlasting (Is 63:15)	Powerful (SAQ 250) (Ps 29:4) (Sura 4:149)
Fashioner (GDM 16)	Refuge (BP 26) (2 Kings 22:1)
Forgiving (Sura 4:149)	Rising One (BP 92)
Gracious (KA 30)	Self-subsisting (GDM 15)
Healer (PMB 299)	Shepherd (JWTA 14) (Ps 23:1)
Holy (PB 25) (Rev 4:8)	Single One (BP 103)
Immortal King (KI 169) (1 Tim 1:17)	Sovereign (ESW 83) (Sura 59:23)
Jehovah (UDBC 432) (Ex 6:2)	Spirit (BP 91) (1 Cor 20:10)
King (PMB 25) (1 Tim 1:17)	True God (Sura 2:133) (Jer 10:10)
King of Glory (GWB CXLV) (Ps 24:8)	Wise God (BP 88) (1 Tim 1:17) (Sura 3:6)
Light (BP 91)	

* Key to abbreviations: AHW-Arabic Hidden Words; BP-Bahá'í Prayers; Cor-Corinthians; Deut- Deuteronomy; ESW-Epistle to the Son of the Wolf; Ex-Exodus; Is-Isaiah; JWTA-Japan Will Turn Ablaze; KA-Kitáb-i-Íqán; KI-Kitáb-i-Íqán; GDM-Gems of Divine Mystery; GWB- Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh; Jer-Jeremiah; PB-Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh; PMB-Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh; Ps-Psalms; SAQ-Some Answered Questions; TB-Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh; Tim-Timothy; UDBC-Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community

b. Share what caught your attention in the above list with your partner or group.

4. Bahá'u'lláh explains that in the first station of essential unity with God, all of the Manifestations can declare, "I am God":

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: 'I am God,' He, verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world.... (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 54)

- a. Why can all of the Manifestations of God truthfully declare: "I am God"?
 - b. How are the names and attributes of God made manifest to us?
 - c. Why can all of the Manifestations of God claim the same names and attributes?
5. In the station of essential unity, all of the names and attributes of all of the Prophets are shared. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

And were they all to proclaim, "I am the Seal of the Prophets," they, verily, utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. They are all the manifestation of the "Beginning" and the "End," the "First" and the "Last," the "Seen and the "Hidden" – all of which pertain to Him Who is the Innermost Spirit of Spirits and Eternal Essence of Essences. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXII)

- a. To what do the names and attributes of the Manifestations of God pertain?
 - b. Why are all of the Prophets the "Seal of the Prophets"?
 - c. To what does "Beginning" and "End" and "Seen" and "Hidden" pertain?
 - d. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the Manifestations of God are all _____ soul, _____ spirit, _____ being, _____ revelation.
6. The following three tables contain a small selection of names, titles and attributes of Bahá'u'lláh, Muhammad and Jesus Christ as quoted from the Bahá'í Writings, the Qur'an and/or the Bible.
- a. Read the names, titles and attributes of Bahá'u'lláh, Muhammad, and Jesus Christ and share what catches your attention.

Bahá'u'lláh

Ancient Beauty (GPB 94)
Christ Returned (GPB 93)
Comforter (GPB 95)
Daystar of Universe (GPB 94)
Everlasting Father (GPB 94)
Glory of the Lord (PT 78)
Great Announcement (GWB 116)
**He Who is the Revealer of
the Names of God** (GWB 32)
Jehovah (WOB 103)
King of Glory (GPB 94)
Lord (GPB 94)
Most Great Name (GWB 27)
Most Great Ocean (SLH 146)

Perfect Way (TB 103)
Preserved Treasure (GPB 94)
Prince of Peace (GPB 94)
Prophet (GPB 214)
**Rod come forth out of the
stem of Jesse** (GPB 94)
Savior (PDC 114)
Sifter of Men (GPB)
Speaker on Sinai (GPB 94)
Spirit of Truth (GPB 94)
Branch (GPB 94)
The Son (TAB 11)
The Way (KA 45)

Muhammad

All of the Prophets (GWB 51)
Apostle of God (ESW 52)
Bearer of Glad Tidings (Sura 33:45)
Daystar of Truth (KI 38)
Friend of God (BP 247)
Jesus (GWB 21)
Messenger of God (Sura 3:40)
Our First, Last, All (KI 153)

Prophet (Sura 33:56)
Seal of the Prophets (KI 40)
Spirit of Faith (Sura 26:193)
Spirit of Truth (Sura 26:193)
Sun of Prophethood (KI 49)
The Warner (Sura 33:45)
The Way of God (GWB 44)
Witness of God (Sura 33:45)

Jesus

Almighty (Revelation 1:8)
Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8)
Apostle of God (Sura 4:169) ©
Beginning and End (Revelation 1:8)
Christ of God (Luke 9:20)
Great Shepherd Hebrews 13:20)
Holy Spirit (ESW 47)
King of Kings (1 Timothy 6:13)
Light (John 14:5)
Lord (Matthew 17:4)
Messenger of Allah (Sura 4: 171)
Messenger of God (Sura 9:33)

Messiah (Sura 4:169)
One Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)
Only Begotten Son (John 4:9)
Perfect Way (TB 103)
Prophet (Matthew 13:54)
Savior (John 4:42)
Son of God (John 1:34)
Son of Man (Luke 19:10)
Spirit of God (GPB 93)
The Son (ESW 57)
The Truth (John 14:5)
The Way (John 14:5)

- b. How is the Manifestations' unity with God evident in these names, titles, and attributes?
 - c. Which of the names, titles, and attributes do you think best describes each Manifestation's oneness with God?
 - Bahá'u'lláh:
 - Jesus:
 - Muhammad:
 - d. Which of the names and attributes listed do you think best describes the specific mission of each of the Manifestations?
 - Bahá'u'lláh:
 - Jesus:
 - Muhammad:
7. Bahá'u'lláh states that the Manifestations of God can all be called by one name:

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: "No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers" [Qur'án 2:285]! For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 152)

- a. Do the Manifestations of God have essential unity in the human station or in the station of the Word of God?
 - b. Why can the Manifestations of God all be called by the same name?
8. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh refers to Muhammad as "the most distinguished of God's chosen Ones." He says, "**Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and the most distinguished of God's chosen Ones, hath likened the Dispensation of the Qur'án unto heaven, by reason of its loftiness, its paramount influence, its majesty, and the fact that it comprehendeth all religions**" (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 39).
- a. Using your knowledge of the unchangeable attributes and names of God, explain how all of the Manifestations of God are the "**most distinguished of God's chosen Ones**".
 - b. Using your knowledge of the first station of the Manifestation of God, explain why the names and attributes of one Manifestation of God

pertain to all of the Manifestations of God.

9. When pressed to explain healings that had occurred during his teaching, St. Peter declared,

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole (Acts 4:10, KJV). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12, KJV)

- a. According to the above scripture, how can mankind become saved?
- b. Using your knowledge of the essential unity of the Manifestations of God and Their shared names, titles and attributes, explain why every Manifestation of God is the way to salvation.

REVIEW

- a. In what sense do all of the Manifestations of God share the same names and titles?
- b. Why can all of the Manifestations of God proclaim “I am God”?

7. SON OF GOD TITLE

KEY POINTS

- a. Jesus Christ's title as the Son of God indicates something of His spiritual relationship with God.
- b. In the station of essential unity, all of the Manifestations of God can be regarded as Sons of God.
- c. The spiritual station of Christ is not dependent on His miraculous birth.



1. The Bahá'í Writings state that, **“As Christ found existence through the Spirit of God, He called Himself the Son of God”** (*Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions*, p. 63).
 - a. How did Christ find existence?
 - b. What did Christ call Himself?

2. Shoghi Effendi describes the Bahá'í view of the position of Christianity.

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its Divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the Divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed. . . . (*The Promised Day is Come*, p. 109).

- a. What is fearlessly asserted about Jesus Christ in the Bahá'í Faith?
 - b. What does the Bahá'í Faith confess (acknowledge) about the Virgin Mary?
3. The Bahá'í Writings explain the nature of the Son of God title:

It is true that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, but this, as explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Iqán*, does not indicate any physical relationship whatever. Its meaning is entirely spiritual, and points out the close relationship existing between Him and the Almighty God. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 492)

- a. What does the Son of God title point out?
 - b. What is the meaning of the Son of God title?

4. The Bahá'í explanation of the nature of the Son of God title continues:

Nor does it necessarily indicate any inherent superiority in the station of Jesus over other Prophets and Messengers. As far as their spiritual nature is concerned all Prophets can be regarded as Sons of God, as they all reflect His light, though not in an equal measure, and this difference in reflection is due to the conditions and circumstances under which they appear. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 492)

- a. Why can all Prophets be regarded as Sons of God?
 - b. Why do the Prophets appear to differ in Their reflection of the light of God?
 - c. That all the Manifestations of God can be regarded as Sons of God refers to the third plane of existence of the Manifestation of God. Why?
5. A traditional interpretation of the Son of God title has been that Jesus Christ is called the Son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and therefore is, in a literal sense, the “son” of God. However, the Bahá'í Writings explain that Jesus' spiritual station was not caused by or dependent upon His virgin birth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

A great man is a great man, whether born of a human father or not. If being without a father is a virtue, Adam is greater and more excellent than all the Prophets and Messengers, for He had neither father nor mother. That which causes honor and greatness is the splendor and bounty of the divine perfections. . . . the splendor and honor of the holy souls and the Divine Manifestations come from Their heavenly perfections, bounties and glory, and from nothing else. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 89)

- a. From what does the splendor and honor of the Manifestations come?
 - b. If being born without a physical father is the source of greatness, why would Adam be greater than Christ?
6. While clarifying that the Son of God title refers to the spiritual station of the Manifestation of God and Christ's close relationship to God the Bahá'í Writings also confirm that the virgin birth of Christ was a miracle. Read these statements on the Bahá'í position concerning the birth of Christ and mark what catches your attention.

In the light of what Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have stated concerning this subject it is evident that Jesus came into this

world through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, and that consequently His birth was quite miraculous. This is an established fact, and the friends need not feel at all surprised, as the belief in the possibility of miracles has never been rejected in the Teachings. Their importance, however, has been minimized. (Written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, *Lights of Guidance* p. 489)

Again with regard to your question relative to the birth of Jesus; . . . he wishes again to bring to your attention that miracles are always possible, even though they do not constitute a regular channel whereby God reveals His power to mankind. To reject miracles on the ground that they imply a breach of the laws of nature is a very shallow . . . argument, inasmuch as God Who is the Author of the universe can, in His Wisdom and Omnipotence, bring any change, no matter how temporary, in the operation of the laws which He Himself has created. (Written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 489)

What science calls a virgin birth [a scientific anomaly] we do not associate with that of Jesus Christ, which we believe to have been a miracle and a sign of His Prophethood. (Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavours*, p. 70)

- b. With your partner or group, share what caught your attention.

REVIEW

- a. Why is Jesus Christ called the Son of God?
- b. Does the Son of God title refer to the first or second station of the Manifestation of God?
- c. What is the significance of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?
- d. Why can every Manifestation of God be referred to as the Son of God?

8. THE WAY

KEY POINTS

- The Word of God is independent of past, present and future.
- The station of Christ is an eternal divine reality that appears, manifests and sets in every cycle.
- In a spiritual sense, there can never be any change in the essence of the Manifestation of God.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. The Bahá'í Writings state, **“The Word of God (the Reality of Christ) is sanctified from time. The past, the present, the future, all, in relation to God, are equal. Yesterday, today, tomorrow do not exist in the sun”** (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 116).
 - a. What is sanctified from time?
 - b. What is the Reality of Christ?
 - c. How do all of the Manifestations of God relate to the Reality of Christ?
2. The spiritual reality of the Manifestation of God does not change even though, from an earthly perspective (the point of view of time and space) there appears to be change. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains,

The Holy Manifestations have three conditions: one, the physical condition; one, that of the rational soul; and one, that of the manifestation of perfection and of the lordly splendor. The body comprehends things according to the degree of its ability in the physical world; therefore, in certain cases it shows physical weakness. For example: “I was sleeping and unconscious; the breeze of God passed over Me and awoke Me, and commanded Me to proclaim the Word” [Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 11]; or when Christ in His thirtieth year was baptized, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; before this the Holy Spirit did not manifest itself in Him. All these things refer to the bodily condition of the Manifestations; but Their heavenly condition embraces all things, knows all mysteries, discovers all signs, and rules over all things; before as well as after Their mission, it is the same. That is why Christ has said: “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Rev 22:13) -- that is to say, there has never been and never shall be any change

and alteration in Me. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 218, reference added)

- a. The Reality of Christ was the same before and after He was baptized just as the Reality of Bahá'u'lláh was the same before and after **“the breeze of God passed over”** Him in the Siyah Chal. Using your knowledge of the third plane of existence of the Manifestations, explain why there shall never be any change or alteration in the Manifestation of God.
 - b. What plane of existence does the apparent transformation of the Manifestation of God refer to?
 - c. Why did Christ say, **“I am Alpha and Omega”**?
 - d. Why can the Reality of the Manifestations of God never be dependent on or affected by Their physical form?
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that Christ is an eternal divine reality that appears, manifests and sets in every cycle.

Verily Christ came with His Kingdom from the beginning which hath no beginning and will come with His Kingdom to the eternity of eternities, inasmuch as in this sense Christ is an expression of the divine reality, the simple essence and heavenly entity which hath no beginning or ending. It hath appearance, arising and manifestation and setting in each of the cycles. (*Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 224)

- a. From where did Christ come with His Kingdom?
 - b. What is Christ an expression of?
 - c. The divine reality appears, arises, _____ and sets in each of the _____.
4. The Apostle Paul describes something of the eternal divine reality of Christ:

Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10, KJV)

- a. When was the grace of God **“given us in Christ Jesus”**?
- b. What was **“made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus**

Christ”?

- c. When Paul says that grace **“was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”**, is this referring to the first or second station of the Manifestation of God? Why?
5. To grasp the essential unity of Jesus Christ, Bahá'u'lláh, and all of the Manifestations of God, one must understand that the Divine Reality which is the Word of God is eternal and therefore exists independent of time and independent of any earthly form. The Bahá'í Faith and Christianity confirm this eternal reality of the Manifestation.

- a. Read the following scripture from the New Testament. Check the verse that you feel best states that the essence of Jesus Christ is beyond time and earthly form, then share what you chose with your partner or group.

_____ **“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am”** (John 8:58, KJV).

_____ **“And he [Christ] said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: yea are of this world; I am not of this world”** (John 8:23, KJV).

_____ Speaking of Jesus, John the Baptist said, **“He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all”** (John 3:31, KJV).

_____ **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever”** (Hebrews 13:8, KJV).

_____ Christ said, **“O Father, glorify me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”** (John 17:5, KJV).

_____ **“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”** (Revelation 1:8, KJV).

_____ Concerning the sublimity of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh says: **“It should, however, be borne in mind that God and His Manifestation can, under no circumstances, be dissociated from the loftiness and sublimity which They inherently possess”** (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX).

- a. Under what circumstances is a Manifestation of God a regular human

- being?
- b. When does the Manifestation of God attain to a sublime essence?
 - c. How long does the Manifestation of God retain the loftiness and sublimity of that station?
 - d. Choose one of the above Bible verses and read it in the context of its entire chapter. How does reading the entire chapter influence your understanding or appreciation of the verse?

REVIEW

- a. From what is the Word of God sanctified?
- b. What kind of intervention is necessary for humanity to understand its Creator's purpose?
- c. Why do you think it is important for humanity to recognize the eternal station of the Manifestation of God?

9. RETURN OF THE SPIRIT

KEY POINTS

- It was prophesied in the Book of Malachi that Elijah (Elias) was to return before the coming of the Messiah.
- Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elias although John the Baptist said that he was not Elias.
- The Bahá'í Writings explain that John the Baptist was the spiritual return of Elias.
- In His acknowledgement of John the Baptist as the return of Elias, Jesus demonstrates the spiritual meaning of “return.”

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. Elijah (in Greek, “Elias”) is an Old Testament prophet dating back to the 9th century BC who defended the worship of Yahweh over the Canaanite gods. The story of Elijah includes many miraculous happenings, including his finally being taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). In the last verses of the Old Testament, Malachi prophesied the return of Elijah before the coming of the Messiah.
 - a. In your Bible, read Malachi 4:5-6.
 - b. When was Elijah to be sent?
 - c. What would Elijah do?
2. In the Gospel of Luke we find that return of Elijah was announced by an angel. (Note that in the King James version of the Bible (like most versions) uses the Greek name for Elijah, “Elias”):

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah], to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the

disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. (Luke 1:11-17, KJV)

- a. How will John “go before” the Lord?
 - b. What does this scripture say that John will do?
 - c. How do these verses relate to Malachi 4:5-6?
3. When John the Baptist was teaching, he was confronted by the Pharisees who demanded to know whether or not he was the Christ or the return of Elias. John said that he WAS NOT Elias:

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. (John 1:19-24, KJV)

- a. Underline the verses where John the Baptist denies being Elias.
 - b. Who did John the Baptist say that he was?
4. Nevertheless, Jesus proclaimed that John the Baptist WAS Elias:

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 11:11-15, KJV)

And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples

understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist”
(Matthew 17:10-13, KJV).

- a. Underline the verses in which Christ identifies John the Baptist as Elias.
 - b. What do you think is meant by the phrase, **“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”**?
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains why John the Baptist said that he was not Elias and Jesus Christ said that John the Baptist was Elias.

They asked John the Baptist, “Are you Elias?” He answered, “No, I am not,” although it is said in the Gospel that John was the promised Elias, and Christ also said so clearly. Then if John was Elias, why did he say, “I am not”? And if he was not Elias, why did Christ say that he was?

The explanation is this: not the personality, but the reality of the perfections, is meant -- that is to say, the same perfections that were in Elias existed in John the Baptist and were exactly realized in him. Therefore, John the Baptist was the promised Elias. In this case not the essence, but the qualities, are regarded. For example.... When spring comes, we say last year's spring has come back because all that was found in last year's spring exists in this spring. That is why Christ said, “You will see all that happened in the days of the former Prophets.”

....In the same way, if we regard the return of the individual, it is another individual; but if we regard the qualities and perfections, the same have returned. Therefore, when Christ said, “This is Elias,” He meant: this person is a manifestation of the bounty, the perfections, the character, the qualities and the virtues of Elias. John the Baptist said, “I am not Elias.” Christ considered the qualities, the perfections, the character and the virtues of both, and John regarded his substance and individuality.... This subject is fully and clearly explained in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. (Some Answered Questions, p. 133)

- a. In what way was John the Baptist the return of Elias?
- b. In what way was John the Baptist *not* the return of Elias?

REVIEW

- b. Why did Christ say that John the Baptist was Elias (Elijah)?
- c. According to Jesus Christ, what is the spiritual meaning of “return”?

10. THE RETURN OF CHRIST

KEY POINTS

- a. Jesus instructed His followers to watch for the coming of the Son of Man.
- b. Jesus' prophecy that He would come and that another would come indicate the same Return.
- c. The Return of the Manifestation of God is like the return of the sun: in one sense it is a new sun and in another sense it is the same sun.
- d. Bahá'u'lláh claims to be the Return of Christ.



1. Jesus Christ instructed His followers to watch for His return. For example, read the following passage from the Gospel of Mark.

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (Mark 13:33-37, KJV)

- a. In this passage, what do you think is meant by “**watch and pray**”?
- b. What is the responsibility of every follower of the Son of Man?

2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the significance of the return of Christ:

Know that the return of Christ for a second time doth not mean what the people believe, but, rather, signifieth the One promised to come after Him. He shall come with the Kingdom of God and His power which hath surrounded the world. This power (or reign) is in the world of hearts and spirits and not in that of matter (or bodies). For the material world is not comparable to a single wing of a fly, or rather less in the sight of thy Lord, wert thou of those who know! Verily Christ came with His Kingdom from the beginning which hath no beginning and will come with His Kingdom to the eternity of eternities, inasmuch as in this sense Christ is an expression of the divine reality, the simple essence and heavenly entity which hath no beginning or ending. It hath appearance, arising and manifestation and

setting in each of the cycles. (*Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 224)

- a. What does the return of Christ signify?
 - b. Where did Christ come from?
 - c. What is “Christ”?
3. Bahá'u'lláh calls our attention to the prophetic words of Jesus that foretell His return, as well as the return of another.

To them that are endowed with understanding, it is clear and manifest that, when the fire of the love of Jesus... was made apparent and partially enforced, He, . . . the Revealer of the Unseen Beauty, addressing one day His disciples, referred unto His passing, and . . . said unto them: “I go away and come again unto you.” And in another place He said: “I go and another will come, Who will tell you all that I have not told you, and will fulfill all that I have said.” Both these sayings have but one meaning, were ye to ponder upon the Manifestations of the Unity of God with Divine insight. (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIII)

- a. Examine Christ’s statements that foretell His coming *and* the coming of another in the following chart.

I Will Come	He Will Come
<p data-bbox="256 1155 717 1264">“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you” (John 14:28, KJV).</p> <p data-bbox="256 1297 766 1440">“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father” (John 16:16, KJV).</p>	<p data-bbox="850 1155 1334 1339">“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7, KJV).</p> <p data-bbox="850 1373 1351 1625">“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26, KJV).</p>

- b. Referring to the above scripture, Bahá'u'lláh explains that, “**Both these sayings have but one meaning, were ye to ponder upon the Manifestations of the Unity of God with Divine Insight**” (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIII). Using your knowledge of the

essential unity of the Manifestations of God, explain why both prophecies have the same meaning.

4. Shoghi Effendi describes the station of Bahá'u'lláh:

He Who in such dramatic circumstances was made to sustain the overpowering weight of so glorious a Mission was none other than the One Whom posterity will acclaim, and Whom innumerable followers already recognize, as the Judge, the Lawgiver and Redeemer of all mankind, as the Organizer of the entire planet, as the Unifier of the children of men, as the Inaugurator of the long-awaited millennium, as the Originator of a new "Universal Cycle," as the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, as the Fountain of the Most Great Justice, as the Proclaimer of the coming of age of the entire human race, as the Creator of a new World Order, and as the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization.

To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the "Everlasting Father," the "Lord of Hosts" come down "with ten thousands of saints"; to Christendom Christ returned "in the glory of the Father," to Shí'ah Islam the return of the Imam Husayn; to Sunni Islam the descent of the "Spirit of God" (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Shah-Bahram; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha. (*God Passes By*, p. 94)

- a. The list below contains excerpts from the Bahá'í Writings that proclaim Bahá'u'lláh as the Return of the Spirit of Christ. Check the quotation that you think is the *strongest* statement that Bahá'u'lláh is the Return of the Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit of Christ Returned

- (a) _____ **“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”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLVII).
- (b) _____ **“And further We have said: ‘He Who is the Father is come, and the Son (Jesus Christ), in the holy vale, crieth out: 'Here am I, here am I, O Lord, my God!'...”** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 57).
- (c) _____ **“Say, Lo! The Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled! This is the Word which the Son concealed, when to those around Him He said: 'Ye cannot**

bear it now. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 11)

- (d) _____ **“The Hour which We had concealed from the knowledge of the peoples of the earth and of the favoured angels hath come to pass. Say, verily, He hath testified of Me, and I do testify of Him. Indeed, He hath purposed no one other than Me. Unto this beareth witness every fair-minded and understanding soul.”**
Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 11)
- (e) _____ **“To Israel He [Bahá'u'lláh] was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the ‘Everlasting Father,’ the ‘Lord of Hosts’ come down ‘with ten thousands of saints’; to Christendom Christ returned ‘in the glory of the Father’...”** (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 93).
- (f) _____ **“In accepting Bahá'u'lláh you have accepted Christ in His appearance as the Father, as He Himself so clearly foretold”**
(Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 473).
- (g) _____ **“The churches are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ; we believe He has come again in the Glory of the Father”** (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 159).

b. Explain your choice to your partner or group.

6. The following is an excerpt from Reverend Ronald Parson's letter to his parishioners upon his declaring his belief in Bahá'u'lláh:

To many of my brethren it may seem that I am turning away from Jesus by such an action, whereas for me it comes as the only way in which I can maintain my obedience to Him. Because I believe Bahá'u'lláh to be what He claims to be, the Return of Christ, the Promised Spirit of Truth, not to become His follower would be a betrayal of Jesus' teaching and a denial of God's Will in this Age.
(*Ministry of the Custodians*, p. 305)

- a. Why did Reverend Ronald Parson become a follower of Bahá'u'lláh?
b. With Reverend Parson's understanding, who did he feel he would betray if he did not declare his belief in Bahá'u'lláh?

REVIEW

- a. What is the Bahá'í understanding of Christ's statement that He would return and another would return?
b. Regarding the Return of Christ, what is Bahá'u'lláh's claim?

11. SUN AND STARS IN PROPHECY

KEY POINTS

- a. Christ prophesied that the sun would darken and the stars would fall at the coming of the Son of Man.
- b. Bahá'u'lláh states that in the Bahá'í Revelation the sun and moon have darkened and the stars have fallen.
- c. The terms sun and moon and stars have many meanings in scripture.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. Find and read Matthew 24:29-30 in your Bible.
 - a. What was foretold of the sun, moon, stars, and the powers of the heavens at the coming of the Son of Man?
 - b. What will all the tribes of the earth do?
2. The Bahá'í Writings declare that the prophecies concerning the coming of the Son of Man have been fulfilled. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

O people who are inhaling the scent of life from the Spirit of God! . . . the powers of heaven have been shaken, the corners of the earth have quaked, the sun has been darkened, the moon ceased to give light, the stars have fallen, the nations of the earth have lamented, and the Son of Man hath come upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. . . . (*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Volume One*, p. 145)

- a. Who is the Son of Man to Whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers?
 - b. Compare Christ's prophecy (#1) with the above declaration of fulfillment.
3. The meanings contained in Christ's prophecy are explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

And now, concerning His words -- "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give light, and the stars shall fall from heaven." By the terms "sun" and "moon," mentioned in the writings of the Prophets of God, is not meant solely the sun and moon of the visible universe. Nay rather, manifold are the

meanings they have intended for these terms. In every instance they have attached to them a particular significance. Thus, by the “sun” in one sense is meant those Suns of Truth Who rise from the dayspring of ancient glory, and fill the world with a liberal effusion of grace from on high. These Suns of Truth are the universal Manifestations of God in the worlds of His attributes and names. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 35)

- a. How many meanings are intended for the terms “sun” and “moon”?
- b. What is one meaning of “sun” described in the above quotation?

4. Bahá'u'lláh explains additional meanings of sun, moon, and stars:

In another sense, by these terms is intended the divines of the former Dispensation, who live in the days of the subsequent Revelations, and who hold the reins of religion in their grasp. If these divines be illumined by the light of the latter Revelation they will be acceptable unto God, and will shine with a light everlasting. Otherwise, they will be declared as darkened, even though to outward seeming they be leaders of men, inasmuch as belief and unbelief, guidance and error, felicity and misery, light and darkness, are all dependent upon the sanction of Him Who is the Day-star of Truth. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, . 37)

- a. What is an example of “divines of the former Dispensation” and the “latter Revelation”?
- b. How can a person be a leader of men and still be darkened?

5. Bahá'u'lláh explains why the term “sun” has been applied to religious leaders:

That the term “sun” hath been applied to the leaders of religion is due to their lofty position, their fame, and renown. Such are the universally recognized divines of every age, who speak with authority, and whose fame is securely established. If they be in the likeness of the Sun of Truth, they will surely be accounted as the most exalted of all luminaries; otherwise, they are to be recognized as the focal centers of hellish fire. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 37)

- a. What do you think is the nature of the fame of the divines whose “**fame is securely established**”?
- b. Who determines whether a divine is “**the most exalted of all luminaries**”?

6. **“In another sense, by the terms ‘sun’, ‘moon’, and ‘stars’ are meant such laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation, such as the laws of prayer and fasting....”**
(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 39)

- a. Why are the sun, moon and stars good metaphors for religious laws?
- b. What are some examples of different laws of prayer and fasting?

7. Bahá'u'lláh explains additional meanings for the sun and stars prophecy:

Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words ‘the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven’ is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of laws firmly established by divine Revelation, all of which, in symbolic language, have been foreshadowed by the Manifestation of God. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 41)

- a. What is foreshadowed by the Manifestation of God?
- b. What is an example of a religious law that was annulled in the Revelation of Jesus Christ?

REVIEW

- a. In what sense have the stars fallen?
- b. What are some of the symbolic meanings of “sun” and “moon”?

12. He Came in the Clouds

KEY POINTS

- a. Jesus prophesied that the Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven.
- b. Bahá'u'lláh explains that there are many meanings for the term clouds in scripture.
- c. Clouds can indicate those things that interfere with a person's recognition of the Manifestation of God.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. Read Matthew 24:29-31 in your Bible.
 - a. In what will the **“Son of man”** come?
 - b. With what will the **“Son of man”** come?
2. Bahá'u'lláh explains the mystery of **“the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”** (Matthew 24:31):

And now regarding His words that the Son of man shall “come in the clouds of heaven.” By the term “clouds” is meant those things that are contrary to the ways and desires of men.... These “clouds” signify, in one sense, the annulment of laws, the abrogation of former Dispensations, the repeal of rituals and customs current amongst men, the exalting of the illiterate faithful above the learned opposers of the Faith. In another sense, they mean the appearance of that immortal Beauty in the image of mortal man, with such human limitations as eating and drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking, and such other things as cast doubt in the minds of men, and cause them to turn away. All such veils are symbolically referred to as “clouds.” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 73)

- a. What is meant by the term clouds?
 - b. What are some examples of clouds?
 - c. What surprises you in the above explanation?
3. Continuing with the explanation of the term clouds, Bahá'u'lláh says:

It is evident that the changes brought about in every Dispensation constitute the dark clouds that intervene between

the eye of man's understanding and the divine Luminary which shineth forth from the dayspring of the divine Essence.

Consider how men for generations have been blindly imitating their fathers, and have been trained according to such ways and manners as have been laid down by the dictates of their Faith. Were these men, therefore, to discover suddenly that a Man, Who hath been living in their midst, Who, with respect to every human limitation, hath been their equal, had risen to abolish every established principle imposed by their Faith -- principles by which for centuries they have been disciplined, and every opposer and denier of which they have come to regard as infidel, profligate and wicked, -- they would of a certainty be veiled and hindered from acknowledging His truth. Such things are as “clouds” that veil the eyes of those whose inner being hath not tasted the Salsabil of detachment, nor drunk from the Kawthar of the knowledge of God.

(Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 73)

- a. In what way are the changes of every Dispensation “**dark clouds**”?
- b. According to this scripture, what qualities of the inner being are necessary for the eye of man’s understanding to see the Divine Luminary?
- c. What is an alternative to blind imitation?

4. Bahá’u’lláh states:

Thou beholdest in this day that although spiritual sustenance hath descended from the heaven of divine mercy, and been showered from the clouds of His loving kindness, and although the seas of life, at the behest of the Lord of all being, are surging within the Ridván of the heart, yet these people, ravenous as the dogs, have gathered around carrion, and contented themselves with the stagnant waters of a briny lake. Gracious God! How strange the way of this people. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 33)

- a. What is the meaning of the term “clouds” in this scripture?
- b. How is the meaning of the term “clouds” as used in the above scripture different from “clouds” as veils to understanding?

5. Bahá’u’lláh describes additional meanings of the word clouds:

Such bounty and revelation have been made manifest, that the revealed verses seemed as vernal showers raining from the

clouds of the mercy of the All-Bountiful. The Prophets “endowed with constancy,” whose loftiness and glory shine as the sun, were each honoured with a Book which all have seen, and the verses of which have been duly ascertained. Whereas the verses which have rained from this Cloud of divine mercy have been so abundant that none hath yet been able to estimate their number. . . . (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 216)

- a. What Cloud does Divine revelation shower from?
- b. How many verses have rained from the Cloud of divine mercy?

6. Bahá'u'lláh explains why prophecies are not literally fulfilled:

Were the prophecies recorded in the Gospel to be literally fulfilled; were Jesus, Son of Mary, accompanied by angels, to descend from the visible heaven upon the clouds; who would dare to disbelieve, who would dare to reject the truth, and wax disdainful? Nay, such consternation would immediately seize all the dwellers of the earth that no soul would feel able to utter a word, much less to reject or accept the truth. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 80)

- a. What is the literal meaning of ‘coming in the clouds of heaven’?
- b. What is one reason that the prophecy of “**coming in the clouds of heaven**” will never be literally fulfilled?

REVIEW

- a. List at least three symbolic meanings of “clouds” in scripture.
- b. In what way has Bahá'u'lláh come in the clouds as the Return of Christ?

13. A TRUE RESURRECTION

KEY POINTS

- The Resurrection of Christ is a spiritual fact.
- The Reality of Christ appeared to His disciples approximately three days after the crucifixion.

You will need a Bible to complete the work in this section.



1. Each of the four Gospels relates a story of the Resurrection of Christ after His crucifixion and burial. In your Bible, read the story of the Resurrection from the Gospel of Mark 16:1-20.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that: **“The texts of the Holy Books are all symbolical, needing authoritative interpretation”** (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 219). Following is the Bahá’í understanding of the biblical account of Christ’s Resurrection:

Therefore, we say that the meaning of Christ's resurrection is as follows: the disciples were troubled and agitated after the martyrdom of Christ. The Reality of Christ, which signifies His teachings, His bounties, His perfections and His spiritual power, was hidden and concealed for two or three days after His martyrdom, and was not resplendent and manifest. No, rather it was lost, for the believers were few in number and were troubled and agitated. The Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body; and when after three days the disciples became assured and steadfast, and began to serve the Cause of Christ, and resolved to spread the divine teachings, putting His counsels into practice, and arising to serve Him, the Reality of Christ became resplendent and His bounty appeared; His religion found life; His teachings and His admonitions became evident and visible. In other words, the Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body until the life and the bounty of the Holy Spirit surrounded it. Such is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ, and this was a true resurrection. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 104)

- a. In what way was the Cause of Christ like a lifeless body after the crucifixion?
- b. What **“became resplendent”** three days after the crucifixion of Christ?

- c. What became “**evident and visible**” to Christ’s disciples three days after the crucifixion?
3. Review the three planes of existence of the Manifestations of God:

We said that the Manifestations have three planes. First, the physical reality, which depends upon the body; second, the individual reality, that is to say, the rational soul; third, the divine appearance, which is the divine perfections, the cause of the life of existence, of the education of souls, of the guidance of people, and of the enlightenment of the contingent world. (Some Answered Questions, p. 154)

- a. Note the third planes of existence—the divine appearance. Describe what you feel would was the state of humanity when the divine appearance was “**hidden**”, “**concealed**” and “**lost**” to the world.
 - b. Using your knowledge of the third plane of existence of the Manifestation of God, explain why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the Resurrection of the “**spiritual power**” of Christ as a “**true resurrection**”?
4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides insight in the role of Mary Magdalene in the story of the Resurrection of Christ:

After the Lord Christ suffered, the disciples wept, and gave way to their grief. They thought that their hopes were shattered, and that the Cause was utterly lost, till Mary Magdalene came to them and strengthened them saying: “Do you mourn the body of Our Lord or His Spirit? If you mourn His Spirit, you are mistaken, for Jesus lives! His Spirit will never leave us!” Thus through her wisdom and encouragement the Cause of Christ was upheld for all the days to come. Her intuition enabled her to grasp the spiritual fact. (Abdu’l-Bahá in London, p. 105)

- a. What was the message that Mary Magdalene brought to Christ’s disciples after the crucifixion?
 - b. What was the spiritual fact that Mary Magdalene grasped?
 - c. How is the role of Mary Magdalene symbolized in the story of the Resurrection according to Mark?
5. The Universal House of Justice points out the essential truth of the Resurrection of Christ:

From a Bahá'í point of view the belief that the Resurrection was the return to life of a body of flesh and blood, which later rose from the earth into the sky is not reasonable, nor is it necessary to the essential truth of the disciples' experience, which is that Jesus did not cease to exist when He was crucified (as would have been the belief of many Jews of that period), but that His Spirit, released from the body, ascended to the presence of God and continued to inspire and guide His followers and preside over the destinies of His dispensation. (Letter to an individual dated 28 May 1984, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice; quoted in a memorandum dated 14 September 1987 by the Research Department)

- a. What would have been the belief of many Jews of that period about Jesus after His crucifixion?
 - b. What is the essential truth of the disciples' experience?
 - c. What did Jesus Christ continue to do after His Resurrection?
6. **“The ‘Risen Christ’ is the consciousness that came to His disciples, grieving over His death, of His living reality; it was not a physical thing but a spiritual realization.”** (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Antipodes*, p. 256)
- a. What is the “Risen Christ”?
 - b. What is a “spiritual realization”?
7. The importance of the life of the spirit (over the life of the body) were fundamental and, for many, *new* teachings in the Dispensation of Christ.
- a. Read the following verses from the New Testament concerning life and death. Mark which verse you feel best relates to the concept of the Resurrection of Christ as a true spiritual resurrection.
 - (a)_____ **“And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”** (Luke 9:59–60, KJV)
 - (b)_____ **“So also is the resurrection of the dead. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”**(1 Corinthians 15:42 & 44, KJV)
 - (c)_____ **“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”**

(John 3:5-6, KJV)

(d)_____ **“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”** (John 6:63, KJV)

(e)_____ **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”** (1 Peter 3:18, KJV)

b. With your partner or group, share your choice.

8. Bahá'u'lláh states:

Such things have come to pass in the days of every Manifestation of God. Even as Jesus said: “Ye must be born again.” [John 3:7] Again He saith: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” [John 3:5-6] The purport of these words is that whosoever in every dispensation is born of the Spirit and is quickened by the breath of the Manifestation of Holiness, he verily is of those that have attained unto “life” and “resurrection” and have entered into the “paradise” of the love of God. (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 117)

- a. What did Jesus mean when he said **“Ye must be born again”**?
- b. Who attains unto **“resurrection”**?
- c. When is the Day of Resurrection ushered in?

REVIEW

- a. What is the meaning of the Resurrection of Christ as explained in the Bahá'í Writings?
- b. How can one attain unto life and spiritual resurrection?

APPENDIX

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The following brief introduction to the Bahá'í Faith is excerpted from *The Bahá'ís: A Profile of the Bahá'í Faith and its Worldwide Community*, a publication of the Bahá'í International Community.

Founded a century and a half ago, the Bahá'í Faith is today among the fastest-growing of the world's religions. With more than five million followers, who reside in virtually every nation on earth, it is the second-most widespread faith, surpassing every religion but Christianity in its geographic reach. Bahá'ís reside in more than 100,000 localities around the world, an expansion that reflects their dedication to the ideal of world citizenship.

The Bahá'í Faith's global scope is mirrored in the composition of its membership. Representing a cross section of humanity, Bahá'ís come from virtually every nation, ethnic group, culture, profession, and social or economic class. More than 2,100 different ethnic and tribal groups are represented.

Since it also forms a single community, free of schism or factions, the Bahá'í Faith comprises what is very likely the most diverse and widespread organized body of people on earth.

The Faith's Founder was Bahá'u'lláh, a Persian nobleman from Tehran Who, in the mid-nineteenth century, left a life of princely comfort and security and, in the face of intense persecution and deprivation, brought to humanity a stirring new message of peace and unity.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be nothing less than a new and independent Messenger from God. His life, work, and influence parallel that of Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad. Bahá'ís view Bahá'u'lláh as the most recent in this succession of divine Messengers.

The essential message of Bahá'u'lláh is that of unity. He taught that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions represent stages in the revelation of God's will and purpose for humanity. In this day, Bahá'u'lláh said, humanity has collectively come of age. As foretold in all of the world's Scriptures, the time has arrived for the uniting of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated global society. "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," He wrote.

The youngest of the world's independent religions, the Faith founded by Bahá'u'lláh stands out from other religions in a number of ways. It has a unique system of global administration, with freely elected governing councils in nearly 10,000 localities.

It takes a distinctive approach to contemporary social problems. The Faith's Scriptures and the multifarious activities of its membership address virtually every important trend in the world today, from new thinking about cultural diversity and environmental conservation to the decentralization of decision

making; from a renewed commitment to family life and moral values to the call for social and economic justice in a world that is rapidly becoming a global neighborhood.

The Faith's most distinctive accomplishment by far, however, is its unity. Unlike every other religion—not to mention most social and political movements—the Bahá'í community has successfully resisted the perennial impulse to divide into sects and subgroups. It has maintained its unity despite a history as turbulent as that of any religion of antiquity.

In the years since Bahá'u'lláh lived, the process of global unification for which He called has become well advanced. Through historical processes, the traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation have steadily broken down. The forces at work, Bahá'u'lláh predicted, will eventually give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and assist in the creation of this new world.

For a global society to flourish, Bahá'u'lláh said, it must be based on certain fundamental principles. They include the elimination of all forms of prejudice; full equality between the sexes; recognition of the essential oneness of the world's great religions; the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth; universal education; the harmony of science and religion; a sustainable balance between nature and technology; and the establishment of a world federal system, based on collective security and the oneness of humanity. Bahá'ís around the world express their commitment to these principles chiefly through individual and community transformation, including the large number of small-scale, grassroots-based social and economic development projects that Bahá'í communities have launched in recent years.

In building a unified network of local, national, and international governing councils, Bahá'u'lláh's followers have created a far-flung and diverse worldwide community—marked by a distinctive pattern of life and activity—which offers an encouraging model of cooperation, harmony, and social action. In a world so divided in its loyalties, this is in itself a singular achievement.

For more information about the Bahá'í Faith visit www.bahai.org.
In the United States call 1-800-22-UNITE.

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