

Bahá'í Bible Study

Part Three

Evil Concerns

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

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PART THREE—EVIL CONCERNS

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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. FLESH AND SPIRIT

KEY POINTS

- All human beings have a higher and lower nature.
- The biblical fruits of the Spirit and works of the flesh describe the higher and lower natures.
- Evil exists as a negative existence.

1. In the following passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the higher and lower natures:

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. If a man's Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint. (*Paris Talks*, p. 60)

- a. What is the outcome of the lower nature of man?
- b. What are the attributes of mankind's divine nature?
- c. Think of a recent time when your divine nature had to struggle to dominate your material nature. How did that struggle look, sound or feel like to you?

2. Humanity is capable of both good and evil. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Man has the power both to do good and to do evil; if his power for good predominates and his inclinations to do wrong are conquered, then man in truth may be called a saint. But if, on the contrary, he rejects the things of God and allows his evil passions to conquer him, then he is no better than a mere animal. (*Paris Talks*, p. 60)

- a. When may man be called a saint?
- b. When is man no better than a mere animal?

3. **“The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man”** (*Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 294).
 - a. What does “the evil spirit” refer to?
 - b. What does “Satan” refer to?
 - c. What does “whatever is interpreted as evil” refer to?

4. Review the words that describe mankind’s lower and higher nature in the list below. These words are taken from the previous three quotations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Spiritual/ Higher Nature

“Approaches God”
“Justice”
“Love”
“Mercy”
“Truth”
“Kindness”
“Power to do good”
“Good habits”
“Noble qualities”
“Conquers inclinations to do wrong”
“Divine nature”
“Saint”

Material/ Lower Nature

“Lives for the world alone”
“Injustice”
“Cruelty”
“Sinful actions”
“Untruth”
“Rejects things of God”
“Power to do evil”
“All imperfections”
“No better than a mere animal”
“Evil passions conquer”
“Evil spirit”
“Satan”

- a. With your partner or group, share what catches your attention in the above lists.

5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: **“In the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite condition.”** (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 123)
 - a. What do good and evil exist as?
 - b. What are some other examples of “opposite conditions”?

6. The Bible also refers to humanity’s higher and lower natures. The terms “flesh” and “Spirit” are sometimes used to distinguish between the higher and lower nature. The Epistle to the Galatians states:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust

of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other. . . . Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:19-23, KJV)

- a. Who will inherit the kingdom of God?
 - b. In what ways are the spirit and the works of the flesh contrary to each other?
7. The works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit are briefly defined in the following list.

- a. Review the works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit by reading these brief definitions:

- Adultery: voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not his or her spouse
 - Fornication: voluntary sexual intercourse by an unmarried person
 - Uncleanness: disgustingly dirty; foul, filthy
 - Lasciviousness: lust; excessive or unrestrained sexual desire
 - Idolatry: excessive devotion to some person or thing
 - Witchcraft: black magic; evil purpose
 - Hatred: strong dislike or ill will
 - Variance: an active quarrel or dispute
 - Murders: premeditated killing of a person; killing with malice
 - Drunkenness: intoxicated, habitually intoxicated
 - Revellings: rebellious; rudeness
-
- Love: a feeling of brotherhood and good will toward other people; strong affection
 - Joy: the expression of happiness, pleasure or delight
 - Peace: freedom from disturbance or disorder, harmony, absence of mental conflict, serenity
 - Longsuffering: patient endurance of injury; insults or trouble
 - Gentleness: noble; generous; kind; serene
 - Goodness: the state of being good; virtue; excellence;

- kindness; generosity; benevolence
- Faith: belief in God, complete trust, confidence or reliance on God)
- Meekness: patient; gentle; mild; not inclined to anger or resentment
- Temperance: moderation; self-restraint in appetite; con or conduct

- b. How would you summarize the works of the flesh?
 - c. How would you summarize the fruits of the spirit?
 - d. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of the spiritual and material natures of humanity compare with the fruits of the Spirit and the works of the flesh?
8. The following quotation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He describes something of the nature of good and evil is sometimes misinterpreted as meaning that evil does not exist:

“This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness. Light is an existing thing, but darkness is nonexistent. Wealth is an existing thing, but poverty is nonexistent. Then it is evident that all evils return to nonexistence. Good exists; evil is nonexistent”(*Some Answered Questions*, p. 263).

- a. In what way is darkness nonexistent?
 - b. Poverty is the nonexistence of _____.
 - c. Good exists; evil is _____.
9. Other examples of things that have a negative existence are: hunger (the absence of food) sadness (the absence of happiness, baldness (the absence of hair), ignorance (the absence of knowledge).
- a. Name other examples of things that have a negative existence; that is, things that exist because they are the absence of something else.
10. Shoghi Effendi explains that in the above quotation the word “nonexistence” describes a negative existence:

We must never take one sentence in the Teachings and isolate it from the rest We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good, and if we see an evil person

is not influenceable by us, then we should shun his company for it is unhealthy. (*Unfolding Destiny*, p. 457)

- a. Darkness exists. In what way is darkness characterized by nonexistence?
- b. Evil exists. In what way is evil characterized by nonexistence?
- c. Give an example of a situation in which evil can be remedied by good.

REVIEW

- a. What are the higher and lower natures of mankind?
- b. What are the works of the flesh?
- c. What are the fruits of the spirit?
- d. How do the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible compare in their teachings on the good and evil nature of mankind?

2. SATAN

KEY POINTS

- a. Both the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible teach that evil comes from the lower nature of man.
- b. Both the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible use the imagery of "Satan" in teaching about evil.

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



1. Bahá'u'lláh states, **"Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves. Will ye not comprehend? This same truth hath been revealed in all the Scriptures..."** (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 149).
 - a. Where is every good thing from?
 - b. Where is every evil thing from?
 - c. What has been revealed in all the Scriptures?

2. The Bahá'í Writings and the Bible have unity on the teaching that evil comes **"from yourselves"** to the degree that unless one is familiar with the texts, once almost cannot tell the teachings apart. To get a sense of the unity of teaching on this point:
 - a. Read the following verses concerning evil from within without checking the sources and, for each verse, determine whether you think it is from the Bahá'í Writings or the Bible.

Evil from Within

- (1) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."**

- (2) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"Behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart."**

- (3) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly."**

- (4) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart. . . .”**
- (5) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil. . . .”**
- (6) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.”**
- (7) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“So long as one's nature yieldeth unto evil passions, crime and transgression will prevail.”**
- (8) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil.”**
- (9) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“We have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires.”**
- (10) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”**
- (11) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“Also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”**
- (12) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **“Cleanse thy heart from every blasphemous whispering and evil allusion.”**

- b. Check you answers with the answer key in the Appendix.
- c. What caught your attention in the above exercise?
- d. Choose one of the Bible verses, find it in your Bible, and read it in the context of the entire chapter. What do you find most interesting in that chapter?

3. The imagery of Satan as a single supernatural being who stands in opposition to God and lures people into evil behavior is commonly found in Scripture.

The purpose of the next exercise is to demonstrate how the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible are alike in their use of the term "Satan."

- a. Each of the following verses is from either the Bahá'í Writings or the Bible. For every verse, check whether you think that particular Scripture came from the Bahá'í Writings or the Bible.

Satan

- (1) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan."**
- (2) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"The whisperings of Satan have been breathed to every creature."**
- (3) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"Whoso shall withdraw from the remembrance of the Merciful, We will chain a Satan unto him, and he shall be his fast companion."**
- (4) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"We would have come unto you, . . . but Satan hindered us."**
- (5) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"The call of the All-Merciful hath been raised, and behind it the call of Satan."**
- (6) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"Satan waxed proud, refusing to submit to His Remembrance."**
- (7) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"The Kingdom of Christ cannot be upheld by destroying and disobeying it. The banners of His armies cannot lead the forces of Satan."**
- (8) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"God teacheth that conflicts and disputes are not allowable, not even with Satan himself."**
- (9) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."**
- (10) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."**
- (11) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"A world in which naught can be perceived save strife, quarrels and corruption is bound to become the seat of the throne, the very metropolis, of Satan."**
- (12) Bahá'í ____; Bible ____ **"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, . . . To open their eyes and to turn them from**

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

- b. Check your answers with the answer key in Appendix A.
 - c. How would you the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible compare in their use of the imagery of Satan?
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that **“Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man”** (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 294). Gary Matthews offers this question and theory: “Now the natural question is why... do both the Bible and the Bahá'í teachings most often portray Satan as a single individual distinct from ourselves? Because — at least this is my opinion — we must think and behave *as if* we are fighting an external adversary” (Gary Matthews, *The Metropolis of Satan*, p. 9).
- a. What is your opinion of the above theory? Why?
 - b. What, to you, is the value of the imagery of Satan in Scripture?

REVIEW

- a. What does “Satan” symbolize in Scripture?
- b. Why do you think both the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible use the term “Satan” in their Scriptures?
- c. What are some things that the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible have in common concerning teachings on the nature of evil?

3. SIN

KEY POINTS

- a. Sin is a consequence of the lusts of the physical world.
- b. The outcome of sin is spiritual death.
- c. Spiritual rebirth may be attained through prayer and following the Divine Teachings.

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



1. The New Testament describes sin as a consequence of lusts (desires). In your Bible, find and read James 1:14-15.
 - a. According to St. James, when is a person tempted?
 - b. When someone acts on his or her lust, what is brought forth?
 - c. What does sin bring forth?

2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains further the relationship between lusts (desires) and sin. He states:

This physical world of man is subject to the power of the lusts, and sin is the consequence of this power of the lusts, for it is not subject to the laws of justice and holiness. The body of man is a captive of nature; it will act in accordance with whatever nature orders. It is, therefore, certain that sins such as anger, jealousy, dispute, covetousness, avarice, ignorance, prejudice, hatred, pride and tyranny exist in the physical world. All these brutal qualities exist in the nature of man. A man who has not had a spiritual education is a brute. (Some Answered Questions, p. 119)

- a. What is subject to the power of the lusts?
 - b. Where does sin come from?
 - c. Where do brute qualities exist?
 - d. What is a brute?

3. The following chart lists some sins mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the above quotation. For each of these lower attributes, describe something that you feel a person would need to learn in his other spiritual education in order to

gain freedom from that brutal quality.

Sins	Spiritual Education Needed
Anger	
Jealousy	
Prejudice	
Pride	

4. In this passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the suffering of physical death is better than the suffering of sin. He states:

Know that there are two kinds of torment: subtle and gross. For example, ignorance itself is a torment, but it is a subtle torment; indifference to God is itself a torment; so also are falsehood, cruelty and treachery. All the imperfections are torments, but they are subtle torments. Certainly for an intelligent man death is better than sin, and a cut tongue is better than lying or calumny.

The other kind of torment is gross — such as penalties, imprisonment, beating, expulsion and banishment. But for the people of God separation from God is the greatest torment of all. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 265)

- a. Describe the two kinds of torments.
 - b. Why is the sin of cruelty is a subtle torment?
 - c. Why is it better to have a cut tongue than to lie?
 - d. Why is physical death preferable to sin?
5. One can be relieved of sin and spiritual death by turning toward the Word of God and receiving the bounties of the Manifestation of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá

explains:

When the sanctified breezes of Christ and the holy light of the Greatest Luminary (Bahá'u'lláh) were spread abroad, the human realities — that is to say, those who turned toward the Word of God and received the profusion of His bounties -- were saved from this attachment and sin, obtained everlasting life, were delivered from the chains of bondage, and attained to the world of liberty. They were freed from the vices of the human world, and were blessed by the virtues of the Kingdom. This is the meaning of the words of Christ, 'I gave My blood for the life of the world' (John 6:51) — that is to say, I have chosen all these troubles, these sufferings, calamities, and even the greatest martyrdom, to attain this object, the remission of sins (that is, the detachment of spirits from the human world, and their attraction to the divine world) in order that souls may arise who will be the very essence of the guidance of mankind, and the manifestations of the perfections of the Supreme Kingdom. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 124)

- a. How can one be saved from sin and “freed from the vices of the human world”?
 - b. What is “the remission of sins”?
 - c. What do the vices of the world have to do with sin?
6. It is possible to be freed from sin in this world and the next. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed.... As we have power to pray for these souls here, so likewise we shall possess the same power in the other world, which is the Kingdom of God. Are not all the people in that world the creatures of God? Therefore, in that world also they can make progress. As here they can receive light by their supplications, there also they can plead for forgiveness and receive light through entreaties and supplications. Thus as souls in this world, through the help of the supplications, the entreaties and the prayers of the holy ones, can acquire development, so is it the same after death. (*Some Answered Questions* p. 231).

- a. How can people “receive light” in this world?
 - b. If someone physically dies in a condition of sin, can he or she make progress “in the other world” through their own supplications? Through the supplications of others?
7. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ states,

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. (Matthew 12:31-32, KJV)

- a. What sin blasphemy will not be forgiven?
 - b. What sin and blasphemy can be forgiven?
8. The Bahá'í Writings explain the significance of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Ghost). To begin this explanation 'Abdu'l-Bahá reviews the nature of the Manifestation of God. He states:

The holy realities of the Manifestations of God have two spiritual positions. One is the place of manifestation, which can be compared to the position of the globe of the sun, and the other is the resplendency of the manifestation, which is like its light and radiance; these are the perfections of God -- in other words, the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is the divine bounties and lordly perfections, and these divine perfections are as the rays and heat of the sun. The brilliant rays of the sun constitute its being, and without them it would not be the sun. If the manifestation and the reflection of the divine perfections were not in Christ, Jesus would not be the Messiah. He is a Manifestation because He reflects in Himself the divine perfections. The Prophets of God are manifestations for the lordly perfections -- that is, the Holy Spirit is apparent in Them. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 126)

- a. How many spiritual positions do the Manifestations of God have and what are they?
 - b. Why is Jesus the Messiah?
 - c. What do the Prophets of God manifest?
9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues:

If a soul remains far from the manifestation, he may yet be awakened; for he did not recognize the manifestation of the divine perfections. But if he loathe the divine perfections themselves -- in other words, the Holy Spirit -- it is evident that he is like a bat which hates the light....

This is why many people who were the enemies of the Manifestations, and who did not recognize Them, when once they had known Them became Their friends. So enmity toward

the Manifestation did not become the cause of perpetual banishment, for they who indulged in it were the enemies of the light-holders, not knowing that They were the shining lights of God. They were not the enemies of the light, and when once they understood that the light-holder was the place of manifestation of the light, they became sincere friends of it.

The meaning is this: to remain far from the light-holder does not entail everlasting banishment, for one may become awakened and vigilant; but enmity toward the light is the cause of everlasting banishment, and for this there is no remedy.

(Some Answered Questions, p. 126)

- a. How is it possible for a soul to become awakened if he or she does not recognize the Manifestation of God?
- b. Why does enmity toward the Holy Spirit result in everlasting banishment?

REVIEW

- a. What is sin?
- b. What do the Bahá'í teachings and the Gospel have in common concerning the nature and effects of sin?
- c. What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?
- d. Why can't blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be forgiven?

4. HELL

KEY POINTS

- Hell is a condition within our own being.
- The hell of existence is found in all the worlds of God.
- Spiritual punishment is to be veiled from God and be characterized by dark qualities.
- Both Bahá'í and Biblical Writings use the imagery of a fiery hell.



1. A common view of hell is that it is a single, torturous and inescapable location where souls who have not been saved are sent after death. The Bahá'í Writings indicate that the nature of hell is different from this common view. 'Abdu'l-Bahá guides us to, **“Think ye of love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven, think ye of hostility and hatred as the torments of hell”** (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 245). Shoghi Effendi explains that **“Heaven and hell are conditions within our own beings”** (*High Endeavors*, p. 49).

- a. What is heaven?
- b. What is hell?

2. The Bahá'í Writings make it clear that hell exists both in this life and in the life beyond. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The immortality of the spirit is mentioned in the Holy Books; it is the fundamental basis of the divine religions. Now punishments and rewards are said to be of two kinds. Firstly, the rewards and punishments of this life; secondly, those of the other world. But the paradise and hell of existence are found in all the worlds of God, whether in this world or in the spiritual heavenly worlds.
(*Some Answered Questions*, p. 223)

- a. What is the fundamental basis of religion?
- b. Where are heaven (paradise) and hell found?

3. To possess evil character is to be in hell. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in

the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned. (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 136).

- a. What is the root cause of wrongdoing?
- b. What is the most fierce hell?
- c. What evidence have you seen in the world that good character must be taught?

4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the characteristics of the hell of this world. He states:

The spiritual punishment — that is to say, the torture and punishment of existence — is to be subjected to the world of nature; to be veiled from God; to be brutal and ignorant; to fall into carnal lusts; to be absorbed in animal frailties; to be characterized with dark qualities, such as falsehood, tyranny, cruelty, attachment to the affairs of the world, and being immersed in satanic ideas. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 222)

- a. What surprises you in the above quotation?
- b. How would you summarize the punishment (or hell) of this world?

5. Concerning reward and punishment, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be found in that dark and narrow place, and only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses of growth and development in that previous world become revealed — so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond. (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 185)

- a. How is death of the body like birth?
- b. What will “stand revealed in that other world beyond”?

6. Although hell is a condition within our own beings, in Scripture it is often referred to as a specific place.

- a. The following chart contains biblical and Bahá'í quotations that use the imagery of hell as a fiery location. For each quotation, mark “Bahá'í” or

“Bible” as the source.

Scripture Concerning Hell	Bahá'í	Bible
(1) “Paradise is decked with mystic roses, and hell hath been made to blaze with the fire of the impious.”		
(2) “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell.”		
(3) “Well is it with him that hath drunk from these springs, and washed in their waters, for God hath forbidden the fire of hell to touch him and his body on the Day of Resurrection.”		
(4) “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.”		
(5) “They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light.”		
(6) “Some have made haste to attain the court of the God of Mercy, others have fallen down on their faces in the fire of Hell.”		
(7) “These shall return to their abode in the fire of hell: wretched is the abode of the deniers!”		

- b. Check your answers with the answer key in Appendix A.
- c. What caught your attention in this exercise?

REVIEW

- a. Where is heaven and hell?
- b. What is spiritual punishment?
- c. When do humans experience spiritual punishment?
- d. How do the Bahá'í Writings and the Bible compare in their use of the imagery of hell?

5. DEATH

KEY POINTS

- Physical life is death when compared to eternal life in the Kingdom.
- Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, a person is lifeless.
- The Word of God is the cause of spiritual life.
- Sin is the cause of spiritual death.

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



1. **“From the days of Adam until the days of Christ, They spoke little of eternal life and the heavenly universal perfections”** (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 124).
 - a. What did the Prophets speak little about until the days of Christ?
 - b. What does “eternal life” mean?
 - c. What are “heavenly universal perfections”?
 - d. Why do you think the concept of eternal life was not spoken of very much until the time of Christ?
2. Along with the concept of eternal life, Christ introduced a different way to think about “death.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that: **“...physical life, in comparison with eternal life in the Kingdom, is considered as death. So Christ called the physical life death, and said: ‘Let the dead bury their dead [Matthew 8:22].’ Though those souls possessed physical life, yet in His eyes that life was death”** (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 126).
 - a. Compared to eternal life in the Kingdom, what is physical life?
 - b. In what sense could someone be physically alive but essentially dead?
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes spiritual needs of the human world:

Bahá’u’lláh has announced that no matter how far the world of humanity may advance in material civilization, it is nevertheless in need of spiritual virtues and the bounties of God. The spirit of man is not illumined and quickened through material sources. It is not resuscitated by investigating phenomena of the world of matter. The spirit of man is in need of the protection of the Holy Spirit. Just as he advances by

progressive stages from the mere physical world of being into the intellectual realm, so must he develop upward in moral attributes and spiritual graces. In the process of this attainment he is ever in need of the bestowals of the Holy Spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 288)

- a. How must mankind develop?
 - b. Is the spirit of mankind illumined through material sources?
4. The body and the spirit may be compared to the glass of a lamp and the light.

Material development may be likened to the glass of a lamp, whereas divine virtues and spiritual susceptibilities are the light within the glass. The lamp chimney is worthless without the light; likewise, man in his material condition requires the radiance and vivification of the divine graces and merciful attributes. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit he is lifeless. Although physically and mentally alive, he is spiritually dead. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 288)

- a. How is the spirit of man illumined?
 - b. When is a human being spiritually dead?
 - c. Why is spiritual death worse than physical death?
5. In your Bible, find and read Matthew 8:21-22.
- a. What did Jesus say when his disciple asked to leave to bury his father?
 - b. Using what you know about the concept of spiritual death, explain how it is possible for the dead to bury their dead.

6. There are many passages in the New Testament that relate sin to death. For example, in his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul states: **“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (Romans 6:23, KJV). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains how sins, or imperfections, are death. He states:

All sin comes from the demands of nature, and these demands, which arise from the physical qualities, are not sins with respect to the animals, while for man they are sin. The animal is the source of imperfections, such as anger, sensuality, jealousy, avarice, cruelty, pride: all these defects are found in animals but do not constitute sins. But in man they are sins. Adam is the cause of man's physical life; but the Reality of

Christ — that is to say, the Word of God — is the cause of spiritual life. It is “a quickening spirit,” meaning that all the imperfections which come from the requirements of the physical life of man are transformed into human perfections by the teachings and education of that spirit. Therefore, Christ was a quickening spirit, and the cause of life in all mankind. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 119).

- a. What is the source of sins (imperfections, defects)?
 - b. What are some examples of sins (imperfections, defects)?
 - c. What is the cause of spiritual life?
7. Using what you know about spiritual death, explain the meaning of “dead” and “alive” in this passage from the Epistle to the Romans: **“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** (Romans 6:11, KJV)
- a. “Dead indeed unto sin” means:
 - b. “Alive unto God” means:
8. Spiritual death continues to be a danger after physical death. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

The punishments of the other world — that is to say, the torments of the other world — consist in being deprived of the special divine blessings and the absolute bounties, and falling into the lowest degrees of existence. He who is deprived of these divine favors, although he continues after death, is considered as dead by the people of truth. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 222)

- a. What is the punishment of the spiritual world?
- b. Who is considered as dead in the spiritual world (by the people of truth)?

REVIEW

- a. In what sense can physical life actually be “death”?
- c. How can the life of the spirit be gained?
- d. What do the Bahá’í Writings and the Gospel have in common concerning the topic of death?

6. FALSE PROPHETS

KEY POINTS

- False prophets and false teachers are real spiritual dangers.
- There are scriptural criteria that we can use to help distinguish between false and true prophets and teachers.

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1. The Epistle of 2 Peter cautions against following false prophets and false teachers:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follo their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (2 Peter 2:1-2, KJV)

- a. What will false prophets bring in?
 - b. Who will false prophets deny?
 - c. Who will follow the pernicious (destructive) ways of false prophets?
2. The Bahá'í Writings confirm the danger of false prophets and teachers. Bahá'u'lláh proclaims that: **“Some heedless souls roam the lands in the name of God, actively engaged in ruining His Cause, and call it promoting and teaching the Word of God”** (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 58).
 - a. What kind of souls claim to promote the Word of God while being actively engaged in ruining it?
 - b. How do you think this scripture compares to 2 Peter 2:1-2 (#1 above)?

3. The Gospel of Matthew warns:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20, KJV)

- a. What is meant by “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”
 - b. How can a true prophet be distinguished from a false prophet?
 - c. Why do you think a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit?
4. The New Testament offers criteria for distinguishing between good and evil in the Epistle to the Galatians’ description of “the fruit of the Spirit” and “the works of the flesh”:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.... Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:19-23, KJV)

- a. What are the “works of the flesh”? Underline the works of the flesh in the above scripture.
 - b. What are the “fruits of the Spirit”? Underline the fruits of the Spirit in the above scripture.
 - c. Of what value are the “works of the flesh” and the “fruits of the Spirit” in evaluating the truth of claims to be a Manifestation from God?
5. False prophets are real spiritual dangers from which the people of God must protect themselves. However, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians cautions: **“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”** (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).
- a. What does 1 Thessalonians say to do regarding prophecy?
 - b. How should one respond to that which has been proven to be good?
 - c. What are some biblical criteria that we can use to determine whether or not something is good?
6. The Bahá’í Writings describe two kinds of Prophets: (1) independent Prophets Who bring Revelation from God and (2) non-independent Prophets who are followers and promoters of the teachings of the independent Prophets. Independent Prophets, also known in the Bahá’í Writings as the Manifestations of God, **“are the lawgivers and the founders of a new**

cycle” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 163). These are, “**for example, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh**” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 163). In addition to the many Writings which describe the spiritual characteristics of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh has given a specific time-based criterion which will assist humanity in distinguishing between true and false claims of independent Prophethood in the future. He states:

Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying imposter. We pray God that He may graciously assist him to retract and repudiate such claim. Should he repent, God will, no doubt, forgive him. If, however, he persisteth in his error, God will, assuredly, send down one who will deal mercilessly with him. Terrible, indeed, is God in punishing! Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of His mercy which encompasseth all created things. Fear God, and follow not your idle fancies. Nay, rather follow the bidding of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Wise. (Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 13)

- a. When can humanity expect that the next independent Prophet will arise with a Revelation from God?
- b. According to the Bahá'í Writings, is it possible that a Manifestation of God will come with a new Revelation from God in the year 2078?
- c. Who is “a lying imposter”?

REVIEW

- a. What is a false prophet?
- b. What are some of the characteristics of a false prophet?
- c. Does the Bible instruct Christians to deny all prophecy because of the danger of false prophets?
- d. How does the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh compare to the fruits of the spirit and the works of the flesh?

7. ANTICHRIST

KEY POINTS

- The Bahá'í Writings and the Bible both describe the spiritual dangers of Antichrist.
- Antichrist has always been in the world.
- Antichrist is specifically mentioned in two books of the Bible — the First and Second Epistles of John.

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



1. The Bahá'í Writings offer insight on the nature of Antichrist. Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Therefore, these wars and cruelties, this bloodshed and sorrow are Antichrist, not Christ. These are the forces of death and Satan, not the hosts of the Supreme Concourse of heaven.... Christ was a divine Center of unity and love. Whenever discord prevails instead of unity, wherever hatred and antagonism take the place of love and spiritual fellowship, Antichrist reigns instead of Christ. (*Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 6)

- a. Who or what is Antichrist ?
 - b. When does Antichrist reign?
2. Shoghi Effendi explains, **“Anyone who violently and determinedly sought to oppose the Manifestation could be called an ‘anti-Christ,’ such as the Vazir in the Báb’s day, Haji Mirza Aqasi”** (*High Endeavors*, p. 69).
 - a. Who could be called an Antichrist?
 - b. Who was an Antichrist in the Bábí Dispensation?
 3. The Bahá'í Writings identify Siyyid Muhammad as the Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation and Haji Mirza Aqasi as the Antichrist of the Bábí Revelation (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 164).
 - a. Who is identified as the Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation?
 - b. Why do you think that Shoghi Effendi uses the term “Antichrist” when referring to these enemies of the Bahá'í Faith?

4. The word “Antichrist” is used in only two books of the Bible: the First and Second Epistles of John. John 1 is a letter of warning to Christians who were in danger of being corrupted by Antichrist activities. The Epistle cautions against associating with certain former Christians whose teachings were deeply disturbing: They denied the real coming of Christ “in the flesh” and refused to identify Jesus as the Messiah. This group also refused to be bound by any moral standard. The Epistle affirms Jesus as the Messiah Who came in the flesh, and notes the Antichrist’s warped doctrine:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

But ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (1 John 2:18-23, KJV, definition added).

- a. In how many books of the Bible does the term Antichrist appear?
- b. Were there Antichrists at the time of the writing of this Epistle?
- c. According to John 1, how many Antichrists are there?
- d. Underline the criteria for Antichrist in the above scripture.

5. Continuing in John 1:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:1-3, KJV, definition added).

- a. Underline the criteria for Antichrist in the above scripture.
- b. What are biblical criteria that can be used to try or test the purity of the spirit?
- c. What in this passage indicates that the spirit of Antichrist was in the world at the time of the writing of this Epistle?

6. The Second Epistle of John continues with this theme:

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 7-11).

- a. How does John 2 describe a person who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh?
- b. Do the Bahá'í Teachings teach that Jesus Christ came in the flesh?
- c. Why should Christians and Bahá'ís be on their guard against Antichrist today?
- d. In your Bible, find and read the whole chapter of the above verse, 2 John 7. (Notice that this is the Second Epistle of John, not the Gospel of John.) What do you find most interesting in that chapter?

REVIEW

- a. What is Antichrist?
- b. How do the Bahá'í and biblical descriptions of Antichrist compare?
- c. What are the spiritual dangers of Antichrist?
- d. How can Antichrist be recognized?

8. THE BEAST

KEY POINTS

- The Book of Revelation includes prophecies about the Manifestations of God to come after the Christian Dispensation.
- Revelations 11:1-7 includes prophecies about the Revelation of Muhammad.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers interpretive guidance on some of the images in the Book of Revelation.



1. Among its many possible meanings, chapter eleven of the Book of Revelation is prophetic of the Dispensation to come after the Christian Dispensation. In *Some Answered Questions* 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains many of the symbolic allusions contained in this chapter. The focus of study for this section will be portions of Revelation 11:1-7 along with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations.

a. Read this selection of verses from Revelation 11:1-7.

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod. . . . And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. . . . And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Revelation 11:1-7)

b. Point out some of the imagery in the above passage.

c. What do you think some of these images symbolize?

2. Instructions for using each of the charts on the following pages:

a. Read the verses from the Book of Revelation listed on the left side of the chart.

b. Read the 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation in the column on the right.

c. Respond to the study questions that follow each chart.

Revelation 11:1	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i> , p. 45
<p>“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod”</p>	<p>“This reed is a Perfect Man...: when the interior of a reed is empty and free from all matter, it will produce beautiful melodies; and as the sound and melodies do not come from the reed, but from the flute player who blows upon it, so the sanctified heart of that blessed Being is free and emptied from all save God, . . . and is the companion of the Divine Spirit. Whatever He utters is not from Himself, but from the real flute player, and it is a divine inspiration. That is why He is likened to a reed; and that reed is like a rod — that is to say, it is the helper of every impotent one, and the support of human beings. It is the rod of the Divine Shepherd by which He guards His flock and leads them about the pastures of the Kingdom.”</p> <p>a. Who is the Perfect Man and the Divine Shepherd? b. How is the Perfect Man like a reed? c. How is the Perfect Man like a rod?</p>

Revelation 11:3	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i> , p. 48
<p>“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days.”</p>	<p>“These two witnesses are Muhammad the Messenger of God, and Ali*, son of Abu Talib. . . . The meaning of "a witness" is one by whose testimony things may be verified. The commands of these two witnesses were to be performed for twelve hundred and sixty days, each day signifying a year.” (footnote added)</p> <p>Note: The period of 1,260 years refers to the duration of the Islamic Dispensation (<i>Some Answered Questions</i>, pp. 46-52).</p> <p>a. Who are the two witnesses? b. In what sense are Muhammad and Ali “witnesses”? c. What does “twelve hundred and sixty days mean”?</p> <p>*Ali, son of Abu Talib, was the 4th Caliph of Islam</p>

<p>Revelation 11:3 continued</p>	<p>‘Abdu’I-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>, p. 48</p>
<p>“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days.”</p>	<p>“It is said they "are clothed in sackcloth," meaning that they, apparently, were to be clothed in old raiment, not in new raiment; in other words, in the beginning they would possess no splendor in the eyes of the people, nor would their Cause appear new; for Muhammad's spiritual Law corresponds to that of Christ in the Gospel, and most of His laws relating to material things correspond to those of the Pentateuch. This is the meaning of the old raiment.”</p> <p>a. What is the meaning of “old raiment” in Rev. 11:3? b. To what do the laws of Muhammad relate?</p>

<p>Revelation 11:4</p>	<p>‘Abdu’I-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>, p. 49</p>
<p>“These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth”</p>	<p>“These two souls are likened to olive trees because at that time all lamps were lighted by olive oil. . . . These lights of God were to radiate and shine; therefore, they are likened to two candlesticks: the candlestick is the abode of the light, and from it the light shines forth. In the same way the light of guidance would shine and radiate from these illumined souls.”</p> <p>a. In what way are Muhammad and Ali like candles? b. How is the Manifestation of God like an olive tree?</p>

Revelation 11:7	‘Abdu’l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>, p. 51
<p>And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Rev 11:1-7)</p>	<p>“This beast means the Umayyads who attacked them from the pit of error, and who rose against the religion of Muhammad and against the reality of Ali — in other words, the love of God.”</p> <p>a. Who does the beast symbolize? b. Who did the Umayyads attack? c. What do you think is meant by “the pit of error”?</p>

3. “The Umayyads” refers to people of the Umayyad clan of the Quraish tribe at the time of Muhammad. Historian Will Durant explains: “At the beginning of the sixth century the Quraish were divided into two factions: one led by the rich merchant and philanthropist Hashim [called Hashimites]; the other by Hashim’s jealous nephew Umayya [called Umayyads]; this bitter rivalry would determine much history” (Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, p. 62). The Prophet Muhammad was born into the Hashimite clan of the Quraish tribe.

The Quraish of Mecca were aristocrats, merchants, and managers of the lucrative Kaaba shrine — a site of idol worship and other pagan practices. When Muhammad began preaching monotheism and revolutionary social teachings He was met with violent opposition. “About the time that Muhammad was considering moving to Medina, Abu Sufyan, grandson of Umayya, became the head of the Meccan Quraish. Having been brought up in an odor of hatred for all descendents of Hashim, he renewed the persecution of Muhammad’s followers” (Durant p. 166).

After Muhammad’s passing, the Umayyad clan eventually usurped control of the caliphate, using its power and the charisma of Islam for selfish purposes. “The descendents of Muhammad were scandalized to see at the head of Islam an Umayyad clan that had included the most unyielding and last converted of the enemies of the Prophet; they were shocked by the easy morals, perhaps by the religious tolerance, of the Umayyad caliphs; they prayed for the day when Allah would send some savior to redeem them from this humiliating rule” (Durant, p. 195-196).

- a. Look over the chart on the next page and track the caliphs (caliph means Commander of the Faithful). These are the names presented by Will Durant—they may appear somewhat different in other historical recordings.

Quraish Tribe
Aristocrats, Merchants, and Managers of the Kaaba

<u>Hashimite Clan</u>	<u>Umayyad Clan</u>
<p>Muhammad Announced Prophethood in 610 Ascended 632</p> <p>Abu Kehr 1st Caliph of Islam 632-634</p> <p>Omar 2nd Caliph of Islam 634-644</p> <p>Ali Ibn Talib (cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) 4th Calip of Islam 656-661</p> <p>Hasaan 5th Caliph of Islam, briefly in 661</p>	<p>Abu Sufyan Chief Enemy of Muhammad</p> <p>Othman Ibn Affan 3d Caliph of Islam 644-656</p> <p>Muawiya 6th Caliph of Islam 661-680</p> <p>Abd-al-Malik 7th Caliph 685-705</p> <p>Walid I 8th Caliph 705-715</p> <p>Suleiman 9th Caliph 715-717</p> <p>Omar II 10th Caliph 717-720</p> <p>Yezid II 11th Caliph 720-724</p> <p>Hisham 12th Caliph 724-743</p> <p>Walid II 13th Caliph 743-744</p> <p>Yezid 14th Caliph, briefly in 744</p> <p>Ibrahim 15th Caliph, briefly in 744</p> <p>Merwan II 16th Caliph 744-751</p>

- b. At the time of Muhammad, who were the Hashimites and the Umayyads?
- c. What role did the Umayyads play in the early days of the Islamic Dispensation?

4. Read the Bible verses in the left column, then read the Bahá'í interpretation in the right column and respond to the questions.

Revelation 11:7	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i> , p. 51
<p>And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Rev 11:1-7)</p>	<p>“This beast means the Umayyads who attacked them from the pit of error, and who rose against the religion of Muhammad and against the reality of Ali — in other words, the love of God. It is said, ‘The beast made war against these two witnesses’ — that is to say, a spiritual war, meaning that the beast would act in entire opposition to the teachings, customs, and institutions of these two witnesses, to such an extent that the virtues and perfections which were diffused by the power of those two witnesses among the peoples and tribes would be entirely dispelled, and the animal nature and carnal desires would conquer.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who does the beast symbolize? b. Who did the Umayyads attack? c. What do you think is meant by “the pit of error”?

5. 'Abdu'l-Baha describes process of decline and renewal that characterize all religions:

These divine qualities, these eternal commandments [the virtues of humanity such as patience, benevolence, love of God] will never be abolished; nay, they will last and remain established for ever and ever. These virtues of humanity will be renewed in each of the different cycles; for at the end of every cycle the spiritual Law of God -- that is to say, the human virtues -- disappears, and only the form subsists.

Thus among the Jews, at the end of the cycle of Moses, which coincides with the Christian manifestation, the Law of God disappeared, only a form without spirit remaining. The Holy of Holies departed from among them, but the outer court

of Jerusalem -- which is the expression used for the form of the religion -- fell into the hands of the Gentiles. In the same way, the fundamental principles of the religion of Christ, which are the greatest virtues of humanity, have disappeared; and its form has remained in the hands of the clergy and the priests. Likewise, the foundation of the religion of Muhammad has disappeared, but its form remains in the hands of the official 'ulama.

These foundations of the Religion of God, which are spiritual and which are the virtues of humanity, cannot be abrogated; they are irremovable and eternal, and are renewed in the cycle of every Prophet. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 46)

- a. What disappears at the end of every religious cycle?
- b. How can a religious law have “a form without spirit”?
- c. What is renewed in the cycle of every Prophet?
- d. What role did the “beast” play in the cycle of the religion of Muhammad?

REVIEW

- a. What does the “beast” mentioned in Revelation 11 symbolize?
- b. Who were the Umayyads?
- c. Who are the “two witnesses” mentioned in Revelation 11?
- d. In what way are Mohammed and Ali like olive trees?

For a more detailed interpretation of Revelation 11, see “*Some Answered Questions*” pages 45 through 61 .

APPENDIX A — ANSWER KEY

Chapter “2. Satan” Question #2: “Evil from Within”

- (1) “For out of the heart,…” (Bible — Matthew 15:19)
- (2) “Behold, ye walk …” (Bible — Jeremiah 16:12)
- (3) “The source of all…” (Bahá’í Writings — *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* p. 156)
- (4) “Beware that there …” (Bible — Deuteronomy 5:9)
- (5) “And God saw…” (Bible — Genesis 6:5)
- (6) “And he did evil, …” (Bible — 2 Chronicles 12:14)
- (7) “So long as one’s …” (Bahá’í Writings — *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* p. 70)
- (8) “A good man out …” (Bible — Luke 6:45)
- (9) “We, verily, have …” (Bahá’í Writings — *Kitáb-i-Íqán* p. 19)
- (10) “For from within, …” (Bible — Mark 7:21-23)
- (11) “Also the heart of…” (Bible — Ecclesiastes 9:3)
- (12) “Cleanse thy …” (Bahá’í Writings — *Gems of Divine Mysteries* p. 23)

Chapter “2 Satan” Question #3: “Satan”

- (1) “And He was …” (Bible — Mark 1:13)
- (2) “The whisperings of …” (Bahá’í — *Fire Tablet*)
- (3) “Whoso shall withdraw …” (Bahá’í — *Kitáb-i-Íqán* p. 257)
- (4) “We would have …” (Bible — 1 Thessalonians 2:18)
- (5) “The greatest of …” (Bahá’í — *The Summon of the Lord of Hosts* p. 52)
- (6) “Satan waxed proud, …” (*Selections from the Writings of the Báb* p. 64)
- (7) “The Kingdom …” (Bahá’í — *Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 6)
- (8) “God teacheth …” (Bahá’í — *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* p. 275)
- (9) “Behold, Satan hath …” (Bible — Luke 22:31)
- (10) “And the God …” (Bible — Romans 16:20)
- (11) “A world in …” (Bahá’í — *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* p. 177)
- (12) “I have appeared …” (Bible — Acts 26:16-18)

Chapter “4. Hell” Question #6: “Scripture Concerning Hell”

- (1) “Paradise is …” (Bahá’í — *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 133)
- (2) “Fear him …” (Bible — Luke 12:5)
- (3) “Well is it …” (Bahá’í — *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 177)
- (4) “And if thy …” (Bible — Mark 9:43)
- (5) “They hasten…” (Bahá’í — *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, XVII)
- (6) “Some have …” (Bahá’í — *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, XVII)
- (7) “These shall …” (Bahá’í — *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, CXXIX)

APPENDIX B

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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