

Bible Stories and Themes in the Bahá'í Writings and Guidance

A personal compilation, 2021

Creation and early times	3
Adam and Eve	4
The Rejection of the Manifestations of God in Every Age.....	5
Exile.....	6
Noah.....	6
Abraham.....	7
Sacrifice of Abraham	8
Joseph.....	8
Moses.....	9
Journey of the Israelites	10
Job	11
Jonah	11
Christ.....	11
Christ as Son of God	12
Birth of Christ.....	13
The Holy Spirit.....	13
True baptism.....	14
The Miracles of Christ.....	14
The Bread and the Wine.....	16
Trial and Martyrdom of Christ.....	17
Sin and Atonement	18
Birth, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.....	19
The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles	21
The Meaning of Speaking in Tongues.....	22
The Trinity.....	22
The Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgement.....	23
The decline and renewal of religion	24
The Holy of Holies and the Holy City	25
On Good and Evil.....	26
The Wisdom of Fasting	28

... investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words. ... The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning. For instance, in the book of Solomon's songs you will read about the bride and bridegroom. It is evident that the physical bride and bridegroom are not intended. Obviously, these are symbols conveying a hidden and inner significance. In the same way the Revelations of St. John are not to be taken literally, but spiritually. These are the mysteries of God. It is not the reading of the words that profits you; it is the understanding of their meanings.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 137.1

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 233

Creation and early times

... the statement that God created the heaven and the earth in six days is symbolic. ... The texts of the Holy Books are all symbolical, needing authoritative interpretation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 79.6

As for the story of Adam, the Father of Mankind, which is recorded in the Sacred Scriptures, this requireth explanation and interpretation. By "genesis" is intended a spiritual creation and heavenly existence; for otherwise the most cursory reflection would be sufficient to convince even a child that this boundless universe, the world of being—this infinite cosmos, this prodigious system, this mighty and primordial workshop—is far more than six thousand years old, as hath in fact been realized in this illumined age by scientists and men of learning, on the basis of decisive proofs and evidences founded on both reason and discovery. In recent times remains have come to light which have been definitely and conclusively established to be more than ten thousand years old. Through the science of geology this hidden secret hath been grasped—that the age of the world surpasseth man's conception.

Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks - Extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

We Bahá'ís do not believe in Genesis literally. We know this world was not created in seven days, or six, or eight, but evolved gradually over a period of millions of years, as science has proved.

*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer,
October 28, 1949, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1658*

And now regarding thy question, "How is it that no records are to be found concerning the Prophets that have preceded Adam, the Father of Mankind, or of the kings that lived in the days of those Prophets?" Know thou that the absence of any reference to them is no proof that they did not actually exist. That no records concerning them are now available, should be attributed to their extreme remoteness, as well as to the vast changes which the earth hath undergone since their time. ...

Our purpose in revealing these words is to show that the one true God hath, in His all-highest and transcendent station, ever been, and will everlastingly continue to be, exalted above the praise and conception of all else but Him. His creation hath ever existed, and the Manifestations of His Divine glory and the Daysprings of eternal holiness have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God. That the names of some of them are forgotten and the records of their lives lost is to be attributed to the disturbances and changes that have overtaken the world.

Mention hath been made in certain books of a deluge which caused all that existed on earth, historical records as well as other things, to be destroyed. Moreover, many cataclysms have occurred which have effaced the traces of many events. Furthermore, among existing historical records differences are to be found, and each of the various peoples of the world hath its own account of the age of the earth and of its history. Some trace their history as far back as eight thousand years, others as far as twelve thousand years. ...

Please God thou wilt turn thine eyes towards the Most Great Revelation, and entirely disregard these conflicting tales and traditions.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 87.1, 6-8

Adam and Eve

Man is a generic term applying to all humanity. The biblical statement "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" does not mean that woman was not created. The image and likeness of God apply to her as well. In Persian and Arabic there are two distinct words translated into English as man: one meaning man and woman collectively, the other distinguishing man as male from woman the female. The first word and its pronoun are generic, collective; the other is restricted to the male. This is the same in Hebrew.

To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition. ... Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 32.6-7

... in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favored, whether man or woman

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l Bahá, 38.3

... It is recorded in the Torah that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and tend it, and said to Him: "Eat freely of every tree of the garden, save for the tree of good and evil, for if thou wert to eat thereof thou wouldst surely die." Then it is said that God caused Adam to sleep, took a bone from His ribs, and created a woman to be His companion. Further on it is said that the serpent tempted the woman to eat of the tree, saying: "God has forbidden you to eat from the tree, that your eyes may not be opened and that you may not discern good from evil." Then Eve ate from the tree and gave unto Adam, who also ate. Whereupon their eyes were opened, they found themselves naked, and they covered their nakedness with leaves. God then reproached them, saying to Adam: "Hast Thou eaten of the forbidden tree?" Adam answered: "Eve tempted Me." God then reproved Eve, who said: "The serpent

tempted me.” For this the serpent was cursed, and enmity was established between the serpent and Eve and between their descendants. ...

If we were to take this account according to the literal meaning of the words as indicated by their common usage, it would indeed be exceedingly strange, and human minds would be excused from accepting, affirming, or imagining it. ... The account of Adam and Eve, their eating from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise are therefore symbols and divine mysteries. They have all-embracing meanings and marvellous interpretations ...

We will explain one of them and will say that by “Adam” is meant the spirit of Adam and by “Eve” is meant His self. For in certain passages of the Sacred Scriptures where women are mentioned, the intended meaning is the human self. By “the tree of good and evil” is meant the material world, for the heavenly realm of the spirit is pure goodness and absolute radiance, but in the material world light and darkness, good and evil, and all manner of opposing realities are to be found.

The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the material world. This attachment of the spirit to the material world led to the banishment of the self and spirit of Adam from the realm of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the kingdom of Divine Unity to the world of human existence. When once the self and spirit of Adam entered the material world, He departed from the paradise of freedom and descended into the realm of bondage. He had abided in the heights of sanctity and absolute goodness, and set foot thereafter in the world of good and evil. ...

This is but one of the meanings of the biblical account of Adam. Reflect, that you may discover the others.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 30.2-6, 13

The Rejection of the Manifestations of God in Every Age

When Abraham was sent forth, however much He expounded the truth, established the religion of God, disseminated new teachings, and explained the divine mysteries, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans would say, “This is but an idle fancy and an empty tale, a mere figment of the imagination. It will never come to pass.” Even more, they called it sheer ignorance and counted themselves among the exponents of reason and understanding. But before long it became clear that what Abraham had proclaimed was indeed the truth, and that it was their own thoughts that were the idle fancies. For after a short time the teachings of Abraham were realized in the world: The Holy Land was given to His descendants; the foundations of the religion of God were established; Isaac and Jacob came into the world; Joseph became ruler in Egypt; Ishmael was blessed and illumined Mount Paran; Moses the Interlocutor appeared, beheld in the desert of Sinai the blazing fire of God in the Burning Bush, rescued the Israelites from their oppression and captivity at the hands of the Egyptians, led them to the Holy Land, and, through His teachings and His religion, which were consonant with the needs of the age, founded a mighty nation. Thus did the deniers fully experience their error, yet they were not chastened or admonished.

On the contrary, when Moses appeared they erred anew, for Pharaoh's people regarded the teachings and the law of Moses as mere fancy and accorded them no importance, considering their own ideas to represent the truth. But after a short time it became clear and evident that what Moses had proclaimed was indeed the truth and had come to pass, that the religion of God had been put into full effect and had secured the honour and advancement of all Israel, and that it was the thoughts and imaginations of the Egyptians that were the idle fancies. This was the second experience and yet the people were still not admonished and awakened, but rather persisted in their ignorance until Jesus appeared with a beauteous countenance and an eloquent tongue, and spread abroad the sweet savours of the rose-garden of divine mysteries and imparted the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The people, notwithstanding their two previous experiences wherein their error had been established, claimed again that the teachings of the glorious Gospel were idle fancies—that they were mere thoughts and imaginations, that they were devoid of all reality, and that they lacked in philosophical substance. “These are but vain and idle thoughts,” they would say, “whereas we possess true knowledge and lofty ideas, we have wisdom and discernment, and we know the ways of sound governance.” But before long their error was exposed, for what Jesus had said was sound and true: It was heavenly thoughts and divine teachings, whereas the prevailing thoughts of the tribes and nations of the earth were the vain and idle fancies. ...

Twelve Table Talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká

Exile

... Abraham departed from His native land, but His departure became the cause of joy. Moses was sent far from His homeland, but that exile led Him to behold the Fire upon Sinai. Joseph was made a homeless wanderer in Egypt, but He rose from the depths of the pit to reach the apex of heaven. Jesus was forced to leave the Holy Land for Egypt, but this separation became the cause of blessings. ... All these successive banishments became the cause of the illumination of the East and the West.

Light of the World: Selected Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 29.2

Noah

Among the Prophets was Noah. ... He prayerfully exhorted His people and summoned them to the haven of security and peace. None, however, heeded His call. Each day they inflicted on His blessed person such pain and suffering that no one believed He could survive. How frequently they denied Him, how malevolently they hinted their suspicion against Him! ...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 7

The Ark and the Flood we believe are symbolical.

*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 28, 1949:
Bahá'í News, No. 228, February 1950, p. 4, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1716*

The years of Noah are not years as we count them, and as our teachings do not state that this reference to years means His dispensation, we cannot interpret it this way ...

*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 25,
1950,
in Lights of Guidance, no. 1659*

Abraham

He invited the people of the earth to the light of righteousness. The more passionately He exhorted them, the fiercer waxed the envy and waywardness of the people, except those who wholly detached themselves from all save God, and ascended on the wings of certainty to the station which God hath exalted beyond the comprehension of men. It is well known what a host of enemies besieged Him, until at last the fires of envy and rebellion were kindled against Him. And after the episode of the fire came to pass, He, the lamp of God amongst men, was, as recorded in all books and chronicles, expelled from His city.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 11

... Abraham was born in Mesopotamia of a family that was ignorant of the oneness of God; He opposed His own people and government, and even His own kin; He rejected all their gods; and, alone and single-handed, He withstood a powerful nation. ...

These people believed not in one God but in many gods, to whom they ascribed miracles, and hence they all rose up against Abraham. No one supported Him except His nephew Lot and one or two other individuals of no consequence. At last the intensity of His enemies' opposition obliged Him, utterly wronged, to forsake His native land. In reality He was banished that He might be reduced to naught and that no trace of Him might remain. Abraham then came to these regions, that is, to the Holy Land.

My point is that His enemies imagined that this exile would lead to His destruction and ruin. And indeed, if a man is banished from his native land, deprived of his rights, and oppressed from every side, he is bound—even if he be a king—to be reduced to naught. But Abraham stood fast and showed forth extraordinary constancy, and God changed His exile into abiding honour, till at last He established the oneness of God, for at that time the generality of mankind were idol worshippers.

This exile became the cause of the progress of Abraham's descendants. This exile resulted in their being given the Holy Land. This exile resulted in the diffusion of Abraham's teachings. This exile resulted in the appearance of a Jacob from the seed of Abraham, and of a Joseph who became ruler in Egypt. This exile resulted in the appearance of a Moses from that same seed. This exile resulted in the appearance of a being such as Christ from that lineage. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 4.1-4

Sacrifice of Abraham

The meaning of the term "sacrifice" in the dispensation of Abraham referreth to the station of relinquishment, not the acts of butchery and bloodshed. Such is the mystery of sacrifice, and in this mystery are meanings countless and without limit. Among them are the meanings of freedom from self and passion, sacrifice in the path of guidance, and detachment from all else but God. Among these meanings is also the annihilation of the seed, and its appearance in the form of the tree and the fruit thereof in every respect. In reality, that seed hath offered itself up for that tree, for if the seed had not disintegrated to outward seeming, the tree—along with its branches, its fruits, its leaves, and its blossoms—would have never materialized in the realm of existence. Among the additional meanings of the mystery of sacrifice is that the Point of truth is eminently manifest in every writing, ordinance, deed, and any other thing attending both the universal Manifestations of God and their dependent prophets,[†] which is to say that the souls derive their radiance from the splendors of that Point and the hearts are illumined with its light. In accordance with their rank, this mystery of sacrifice is clearly apparent in every one of the holy Realities, exalted Beings, and Embodiments of light. They are all sacrifices; they have all given up their lives in the path of God, and hastened to the altar of love. Hence, Isaac and Ishmael are both sacrifices, as are all the servants of God. This station is one of many which are prerequisites for the stars of unity—and beyond this, where the station of oneness is concerned, Isaac and Ishmael are one and the same. It is permissible to call one by the name of the other, but in the Torah, the name of Isaac is mentioned, and in the traditions of Muḥammad, there is mention of both Isaac and Ishmael.

Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, provisional translation

Joseph

... In this journey the seeker reacheth a station wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see searching after his Joseph, how many a lover will he behold hastening towards the Well-Beloved; a world of adoring souls will he witness tracing the path of the Adored One! At every moment he findeth

a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a new mystery; for he hath severed his heart from both worlds and set out for the Kaaba of the Beloved. At every step, aid from the invisible Realm will attend him and the fervour of his search will grow. ...

And if, by the help of the Creator, he findeth on this journey a trace of the traceless Friend, and inhalet the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly herald, he shall straightway step into the Valley of Love and be consumed in the fire of love. In this city the heaven of rapture is upraised, and the world-illuminating sun of yearning shineth, and the fire of love is set ablaze; and when the fire of love is ablaze, it burneth to ashes the harvest of reason. ...

Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never gaze upon the Joseph-like beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never find thyself in true yearning's embrace. ...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Call of the Divine Beloved: The Seven Valleys ¶ 9, 14, 17

Moses

Armed with the rod of celestial dominion, adorned with the white hand of divine knowledge, and proceeding from the Párán of the love of God, and wielding the serpent of power and everlasting majesty, He shone forth from the Sinai of light upon the world. He summoned all the peoples and kindreds of the earth to the kingdom of eternity, and invited them to partake of the fruit of the tree of faithfulness. Surely you are aware of the fierce opposition of Pharaoh and his people, and of the stones of idle fancy which the hands of infidels cast upon that blessed Tree. So much so that Pharaoh and his people finally arose and exerted their utmost endeavor to extinguish with the waters of falsehood and denial the fire of that sacred Tree, oblivious of the truth that no earthly water can quench the flame of divine wisdom, nor mortal blasts extinguish the lamp of everlasting dominion. Nay, rather, such water cannot but intensify the burning of the flame, and such blasts cannot but ensure the preservation of the lamp, were ye to observe with the eye of discernment, and walk in the way of God's holy will and pleasure.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 12

At a time when the Israelites had multiplied in Egypt and were spread throughout the whole country, the Coptic Pharaohs of Egypt determined to strengthen and favor their own Coptic peoples and to degrade and dishonor the children of Israel, whom they regarded as foreigners. Over a long period, the Israelites, divided and scattered, were captive in the hands of the tyrannical Copts, and were scorned and despised by all, so that the meanest of the Copts would freely persecute and lord it over the noblest of the Israelites. The enslavement, wretchedness and helplessness of the Hebrews reached such a pitch that they were never, day or night, secure in their own persons nor able to provide any defense for

their wives and families against the tyranny of their Pharaohic captors. Then their food was the fragments of their own broken hearts, and their drink a river of tears. They continued on in this anguish until suddenly Moses, the All-Beauteous, beheld the divine Light streaming out of the blessed Vale, the place that was holy ground, and heard the quickening voice of God as it spoke from the flame of that Tree “neither of the East nor of the West,” and He stood up in the full panoply of His universal prophethood. In the midst of the Israelites, He blazed out like a lamp of divine guidance, and by the light of salvation He led that lost people out of the shadows of ignorance into knowledge and perfection. He gathered Israel’s scattered tribes into the shelter of the unifying and universal Word of God, and over the heights of union He raised up the banner of harmony, so that within a brief interval those benighted souls became spiritually educated, and they who had been strangers to the truth, rallied to the cause of the oneness of God, and were delivered out of their wretchedness, their indigence, their incomprehension and captivity and achieved a supreme degree of happiness and honor. They emigrated from Egypt, set out for Israel’s original homeland ...

The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 75-76

Moses was for a long time a shepherd in the wilderness. To outward seeming He was a man Who had been reared in the bosom of tyranny, had become reputed among men as a murderer, had taken up the shepherd’s staff, and was fiercely hated and reviled by Pharaoh’s government and people. It was such a man Who freed a great people from the fetters of captivity and persuaded them to leave Egypt and settle in the Holy Land.

That people had sunk to the depths of degradation and were lifted up to the heights of glory. They were captives and were set free. They were the most ignorant of peoples and became the most learned. ... Moses established laws and ordinances that conferred new life upon the people of Israel and led them to attain the highest degree of civilization at that time. ...

Were He not assisted by a divine power, He would never have been able to carry out such a mighty task. ...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 5.1-2, 5

... it is said that God appeared as a pillar of fire. Now, that which is intended is not a sensible form but an intelligible reality that has been expressed in such a form.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 16.6

Journey of the Israelites

It was both spiritual and physical. They journeyed to the Promised Land and geography and history both prove that this was a physical journey.

Moses viewed the Promised Land but died before it was reached, having given over his charge to Joshua.

The crossing of the Red Sea has a spiritual meaning. It was a spiritual journey, through and above the sea of corruption and iniquity of the Pharaoh and his people, or army. By the help of God through Moses, the Israelites were able to cross this sea safely and reach the Promised Land (spiritual state) while Pharaoh and his people were drowned in their own corruption.

The Egyptian History recorded even trifling events. Had such a wonderful thing happened as the parting of the physical sea it would also have been recorded.

*Abdu'l-Bahá: Daily Lessons Received at Akka, p. 45, 1979 ed.,
in Lights of Guidance, no. 1678*

Job

Job proved the fidelity of his love for God by being faithful through his great adversity, as well as during the prosperity of his life.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, 14.5

Jonah

As ... Jonah ... became familiar with the interior of the "great fish" of nature and its elements, and suffered from the darkness of the depths of the sea of the world, so he was separated from the World of the Kingdom of Existence where are the Lights of the Placeless, and became a dweller in the world of place. Therefore the real meaning of Jonah is his reality (the essence of man); the fish is the corporeal body, the human temple and his outward form; the sea is the contingent world and the natural, dark qualities. As he was cast into this narrow and dark condition, he cried out from the bottom of his heart: "O Thou Holy Being! Verily I repent unto Thee!" (This caused him to be saved.)

Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, provisional translation

Christ

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, and the primacy of

Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. The Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the 'Spirit of God,' is proclaimed as the One Who 'appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost,' and is even extolled as the Essence of the Spirit. His mother is described as 'that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful countenance,' and the station of her Son eulogized as a 'station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth' ...

Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, pp. 109-110

... Briefly, this Man, Who appeared lowly in the eyes of all, arose nonetheless with such power as to abrogate a fifteen-hundred-year-old Dispensation, notwithstanding that the least deviation from its laws would expose the offender to grave danger and bring about his death and annihilation. Moreover, in the time of Christ the general morals and manners of the Israelites had become entirely confused and corrupted, and Israel had fallen into a state of utmost degradation, misery, and bondage. At one time they fell captive to the Chaldeans and the Persians; at another they were under the yoke of the Assyrian Empire. One day they became the subjects and vassals of the Greeks; another they were subjugated and humiliated by the Romans.

This young Man, Christ, through an extraordinary power abrogated the ancient Mosaic Law and undertook to reform the morals of the people. He once again laid the foundation of eternal honour for the Israelites—nay, He undertook to rehabilitate the fortunes of the entire human race—and spread abroad teachings that were not reserved for Israel alone but formed the basis for the universal happiness of human society. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 6.2-3

Christ as Son of God

As regards your questions concerning the station of Jesus Christ, and His return as explained in the Gospel. It is true that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, but this, as explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Iqan*, does not indicate any physical relationship whatever. Its meaning is entirely spiritual, and points out to the close relationship existing between Him and the Almighty God. 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.

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 29, 1937, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1644

Regarding the passage you enclosed about the Qur'an: In reality there is no contradiction at all; when the Qur'an denies Christ is the Son of God it is not refuting His Words but the false interpretation of them by the Christians who read into them a relationship of an almost corporeal nature, whereas Almighty God has no parents or offspring. What is meant by Christ, is His spirit's relation to the Infinite Spirit, and this the Qur'an does not deny. It is in a sense attributable--this kind of Sonship--to all the Prophets.

*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 19, 1945,
in Lights of Guidance, no. 1652*

Birth of Christ

Likewise, reflect upon the state and condition of Mary. So deep was the perplexity of that most beautiful countenance, so grievous her case, that she bitterly regretted she had ever been born. To this bear witness the text of the sacred verse wherein it is mentioned that after Mary had given birth to Jesus, she bemoaned her plight and cried out: "O would that I had died ere this, and been a thing forgotten, forgotten quite!" I swear by God! Such lamenting consumeth the heart and shaketh the being. Such consternation of soul, such despondency, could have been caused by no other than the censure of the enemy and the cavilings of the infidel and perverse. Reflect, what answer could Mary have given to the people around her? How could she claim that a Babe Whose father was unknown had been conceived of the Holy Ghost? Therefore did Mary, that veiled and immortal Countenance, take up her Child and return unto her home. No sooner had the eyes of the people fallen upon her than they raised their voice saying: "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of wickedness, nor unchaste thy mother."

And now, meditate upon this most great convulsion, this grievous test. Notwithstanding all these things, God conferred upon that essence of the Spirit, Who was known amongst the people as fatherless, the glory of Prophethood ...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶159

The Holy Spirit

... the dove which descended upon Christ was not a physical dove but a spiritual condition expressed, for the sake of comprehension, by a sensible figure.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 16.6

... the Holy Spirit is the manifold grace and perfections of God, and these divine perfections are even as the rays and heat of the sun. Now, the sun is the sun by virtue of its effulgent rays; without these rays it would not be the sun. If the perfections of God were not revealed and manifested in Jesus, He would not be Christ. He is a Manifestation of God precisely

because the divine perfections are revealed in Him. The Prophets of God are Manifestations, and the divine perfections—that is, the Holy Spirit—are that which is manifested in Them.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 31.2

True baptism

... The essence of baptism is purification by repentance. John admonished and exhorted the people, caused them to repent, and then baptized them. It is evident then that this purification is a symbol of repentance from all sin, as though one were saying: "O God! Just as my body has been cleansed and purified from material defilements, so cleanse and purify my spirit from the defilements of the world of nature, which are unworthy of Thy divine threshold." Repentance is the return from rebelliousness to obedience. It is after experiencing remoteness and deprivation from God that man repents and purifies himself. Thus, this purification is a symbol saying: "O God! Render my heart goodly and pure, and cleanse and sanctify it from all save Thy love." ...

... What is meant here by "water" is not material water, for elsewhere it is explicitly stated that baptism must be with spirit and with fire, and the latter makes it clear that the intention is not material fire and water, since baptism with fire is impossible.

Therefore, by "spirit" is meant divine grace; by "water", knowledge and life; and by "fire", the love of God. For material water cleanses not the heart of man but his body. Rather, the heavenly water and spirit, which are knowledge and life, cleanse and purify the heart of man. In other words, the heart that partakes of the outpouring grace of the Holy Spirit and becomes sanctified is made goodly and pure. The purpose is that the reality of man be purified and sanctified from the defilements of the world of nature, which are vile attributes such as anger, lust, worldliness, pride, dishonesty, hypocrisy, deceit, self-love, and so on.

Man cannot free himself from the onslaught of vain and selfish desires save through the confirming grace of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said that baptism must be with the spirit, with water, and with fire—that is, with the spirit of divine grace, the water of knowledge and life, and the fire of the love of God. It is with this spirit, this water, and this fire that man must be baptized, that he may partake of everlasting grace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 19.3, 5-7

The Miracles of Christ

... The Manifestations of God are sources of miraculous deeds and marvellous signs. Any difficult or impossible matter is to Them possible and permitted. For They show forth extraordinary feats through an extraordinary power, and They influence the world of nature through a power that transcends nature. From each one of Them, marvellous things have appeared.

But in the Sacred Scriptures a special terminology is used, and in the sight of the Manifestations of God these marvels and miracles are of no importance, so much so that They do not even wish them to be mentioned. For even if these miracles were considered the greatest of proofs, they would constitute a clear evidence only for those who were present when they took place, not for those who were absent. ...

These outward miracles are of no importance to the followers of truth. For example, if a blind man is made to see, in the end he will again lose his sight, for he will die and be deprived of all his senses and faculties. Thus, causing the blind to see is of no lasting importance, since the faculty of sight is bound to be lost again in the end. And if a dead body be revived, what is gained thereby, since it must die again? What is important is to bestow true insight and everlasting life, that is, a spiritual and divine life; for this material life will not endure and its existence is tantamount to non-existence. Even as Christ said in reply to one of His disciples: "let the dead bury their dead"; for "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Consider that Christ reckoned as dead those who were nonetheless outwardly and physically alive; for true life is life eternal and true existence is spiritual existence. Thus if the Sacred Scriptures speak of raising the dead, the meaning is that they attained everlasting life; if they say that one who was blind was made to see, the meaning of this seeing is true insight; if they say that one who was deaf was made to hear, the meaning is that he acquired an inner ear and attained spiritual hearing. This is established by the very text of the Gospel where Christ says that they are like those of whom Isaiah once said, They have eyes and see not, they have ears and hear not; and I heal them.

Our meaning is not that the Manifestations of God are unable to perform miracles, for this indeed lies within Their power. But that which is of import and consequence in Their eyes is inner sight, spiritual hearing, and eternal life. Thus, wherever it is recorded in the Sacred Scriptures that such a one was blind and was made to see, the meaning is that he was inwardly blind and gained spiritual insight, or that he was ignorant and found knowledge, or was heedless and became aware, or was earthly and became heavenly.

As this inner sight, hearing, life, and healing are eternal, so are they truly important. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 22.2-3, 6-9

Transfiguration of Christ

... when it is written in the Gospel that Moses and Elijah came to Christ on Mount Tabor, it is clear that this was not a material communion but a spiritual condition that has been expressed as a physical meeting.

... conversation or communication with spirits is of two kinds: One is sheer delusion, and the other, which consists in the visions mentioned in the Bible, such as those of Isaiah and John and the meeting of Christ with Moses and Elijah, is real. The latter exert a marvellous effect upon minds and thoughts and produce powerful attractions in the hearts.

The Bread and the Wine

Question: Christ said: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." What is the meaning of this utterance?

Answer: By this bread is meant the heavenly sustenance of divine perfections. In other words, whoso partakes of this sustenance—that is, whoso acquires the outpouring grace of God, draws illumination from His light, and obtains his portion of the perfections of Christ—will attain everlasting life. What is meant by blood, likewise, is the spirit of life, which consists in divine perfections, heavenly splendours, and eternal grace. For all the parts of the body acquire the substance of life from the circulation of the blood.

In John 6:26 it is said: "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." It is evident that the loaves of which the disciples ate, and with which they were filled, were the heavenly grace, for in verse 33 of the same chapter it is said: "For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." It is evident that the body of Christ did not descend from heaven but came from the womb of Mary: What descended from the heaven of God was the spirit of Christ. ...

Consider how evident it is that what Christ intended by the heavenly bread was His spirit, His manifold grace, His perfections, and His teachings; for in verse 63 of the aforementioned chapter it is said: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

It has therefore been made evident that the spirit of Christ was a celestial bounty which descended from heaven, and that whosoever receives the outpourings of this spirit—that is, embraces its heavenly teachings—will attain everlasting life. Thus it is said in verse 35: "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

Observe that He expresses "coming to Him" as eating, and "believing in Him" as drinking. It is therefore clearly established that the heavenly sustenance consists in the divine bounties, spiritual splendours, heavenly teachings, and all-embracing truths of Christ, and that to eat means to draw nigh unto Him and to drink means to believe in Him. For Christ had both an elemental and a heavenly body. The elemental body was crucified, but the heavenly one is alive, eternal, and the source of everlasting life. The elemental body was His human nature and the heavenly body His divine nature. ...

The purport of these words is that, through the manifestation of Christ, the sacred teachings, which are everlasting grace, were spread abroad, the lights of guidance shone forth, and the spirit of life was conferred upon human realities. Whosoever was guided aright found life, and whosoever remained astray was overtaken by everlasting death. That bread which came down from heaven was the celestial body of Christ and His spiritual elements, of which the disciples ate and through which they attained everlasting life.

The disciples had taken many meals from the hand of Christ; why then did the last supper come to be distinguished? It is thus evident that by the heavenly bread is meant not this material bread but the divine sustenance of the spiritual body of Christ, that is, the divine grace and the heavenly perfections of which His disciples partook and with which they were filled.

Consider likewise that when Christ blessed the bread and gave it to His disciples, saying, "this is My body", He was visibly and distinctly present with them in person and in body, and was not transformed into bread and wine. Had He become the bread and wine itself, He could not have remained distinctly present before them in body and in person.

It is therefore clear that the bread and wine were symbols, meaning: My grace and My perfections have been given you, and since you have partaken of this manifold grace, you have attained everlasting life and received your share and portion of the heavenly sustenance.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 21.1-8

Trial and Martyrdom of Christ

... call thou to mind the day when the Jews, who had surrounded Jesus, Son of Mary, were pressing Him to confess His claim of being the Messiah and Prophet of God, so that they might declare Him an infidel and sentence Him to death. Then they led Him away, He Who was the Daystar of the heaven of divine Revelation, unto Pilate and Caiaphas, who was the leading divine of that age. The chief priests were all assembled in the palace, also a multitude of people who had gathered to witness His sufferings, to deride and injure Him. Though they repeatedly questioned Him, hoping that He would confess His claim, yet Jesus held His peace and spake not. Finally, an accursed of God arose and, approaching Jesus, adjured Him saying: "Didst thou not claim to be the Divine Messiah? Didst thou not say, 'I am the King of Kings, My word is the Word of God, and I am the breaker of the Sabbath day'?" Thereupon Jesus lifted up His head and said: "Beholdest thou not the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and might?" These were His words, and yet consider how to outward seeming He was devoid of all power except that inner power which was of God and which had encompassed all that is in heaven and on earth. How can I relate all that befell Him after He spoke these words? ...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 144

... The crucifixion as recounted in the New Testament is correct. The meaning of the Qur'anic version is that the spirit of Christ was not crucified. There is no conflict between the two.

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 14, 1943, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1646

... most of the miracles attributed to the Prophets have an inner meaning. For instance, it is recorded in the Gospel that upon the martyrdom of Christ darkness fell, the earth shook, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, and the dead arose from their graves. If this had outwardly come to pass, it would have been a stupendous thing. Such an event would have undoubtedly been recorded in the chronicles of the time and would have seized with dismay the hearts of men. At the very least the soldiers would have removed Christ from the cross or would have fled. But as these events have not been recorded in any history, it is evident that they are not to be understood literally but according to their inner meaning. Our purpose is not to deny, but merely to say that these accounts do not constitute a decisive proof, and that they have an inner meaning—nothing more. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 10.5

Sin and Atonement

... Know that there are two natures in man: the material and the spiritual. The material nature is inherited from Adam, while the spiritual nature is inherited from the reality of the Word of God, which is the spirituality of Christ. The material nature is born of Adam, but the spiritual nature is born of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The material nature is the source of every imperfection, and the spiritual nature is the source of all perfection.

Christ sacrificed Himself so that mankind might be freed from the imperfections of the material nature and endowed with the virtues of the spiritual nature. This spiritual nature, which has come to exist through the grace of the divine Reality, is the sum of all perfections and proceeds from the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine perfections; it is light, spirituality, guidance, exaltation, high-mindedness, justice, love, generosity, kindness to all, and charitable deeds: It is life upon life. This spiritual nature is an effulgence of the splendours of the Sun of Truth.

Christ is the focal centre of the Holy Spirit; He is born of the Holy Spirit; He has been raised up by the Holy Spirit; He descends from the Holy Spirit—that is, His Reality does not proceed from the lineage of Adam but is born of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:22 where it says: “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” is therefore as follows: Adam is commonly referred to as the “father of man”; that is, He is the cause of the material life of mankind and holds the position of material fatherhood. He is a living, though not a life-giving, soul, whereas Christ is the cause of the spiritual life of man, and with regard to the spirit He holds the position of spiritual fatherhood. Adam is a living soul; Christ is a life-giving spirit. ...

... the majority of the Christians believe that Adam sinned and transgressed by eating from the forbidden tree, that the dire and disastrous consequences of this transgression were inherited for all time by His descendants, and that Adam has thus become the cause of the death of man. This explanation is irrational and clearly mistaken, for it implies that all men, even the Prophets and Messengers of God, through no fault or sin of their own, and for no other reason than their descent from Adam, became guilty sinners and suffered the torments

of hell until the day of Christ's sacrifice. This would be far from the justice of God. If Adam was a sinner, what was the sin of Abraham? What was the fault of Isaac and of Joseph? What was the transgression of Moses?

But Christ, Who was the Word of God, sacrificed Himself. This has two meanings—an outward meaning and a true meaning. The outward meaning is this: Since Christ intended to promote a Cause that entailed the education of the human race, the quickening of the children of men, and the enlightenment of all humanity, and since promoting such a mighty Cause—a Cause that would antagonize all the peoples of the earth and withstand the opposition of every nation and government—was bound to bring about the spilling of His blood and to lead to His crucifixion and death, therefore at the moment He revealed His mission He offered up His life, welcomed the cross as His throne, regarded every wound as a balm and every poison as sweetest honey, and arose to instruct and guide the people. That is, He sacrificed Himself that He might bestow the spirit of life, and perished in body that He might quicken others in spirit.

However, the second meaning of sacrifice is this: Christ was like a seed, and this seed sacrificed its form so that the tree might grow and develop. Although the form of the seed was destroyed, its reality manifested itself, in perfect majesty and beauty, in the outward form of the tree.

The station of Christ was that of absolute perfection. Those divine perfections shone even as the sun upon all believing souls, and the outpourings of that light became manifest and resplendent in their realities. That is why He says: "I am the bread which came down from heaven; whosoever shall eat of this bread will not die"; that is, whosoever partakes of this divine sustenance will gain eternal life. Thus, whoever partook of this grace and acquired a share of these perfections found eternal life, and whoever sought illumination from His ancient grace was delivered from the darkness of error and illumined by the light of guidance.

The form of the seed was sacrificed for the tree, but its perfections were revealed and manifested by virtue of this sacrifice: For the tree, its branches, its leaves, and its blossoms were latent and hidden within the seed, but when the form of the seed was sacrificed, its perfections were fully manifested in the leaves, blossoms, and fruit.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 29.2-4, 9-13

Birth, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ

... The resurrection of the Manifestations of God is not of the body. All that pertains to Them—all Their states and conditions, all that They do, found, teach, interpret, illustrate, and instruct—is of a mystical and spiritual character and does not belong to the realm of materiality.

Such is the case of Christ's coming from heaven. It has been explicitly stated in numerous passages of the Gospel that the Son of man came down from heaven, or is in heaven, or will

go up to heaven. Thus in John 6:38 it is said: “For I came down from heaven”, and in John 6:42 it is recorded: “And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?”, and in John 3:13 it is stated: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

Consider how it is said that the Son of man is in heaven, even though at that time Christ was dwelling upon the earth. Consider likewise that it explicitly says that Christ came from heaven, although He came from the womb of Mary and His body was born of her. It is therefore clear that the assertion that the Son of man came down from heaven has a mystical rather than a literal meaning, and is a spiritual rather than a material event. The meaning is that though in appearance Christ was born of the womb of Mary, yet in reality He came from heaven, the seat of the Sun of Truth that shines in the divine realm of the supernal Kingdom. And since it is established that Christ came from the spiritual heaven of the divine Kingdom, His disappearance into the earth for three days must also have a mystical rather than a literal meaning. In the same manner, His resurrection from the bosom of the earth is a mystical matter and expresses a spiritual rather than a material condition. And His ascension to heaven, likewise, is spiritual and not material in nature.

Aside from this, it has been established by science that the material heaven is a limitless space, void and empty, wherein countless stars and planets move.

We explain, therefore, the meaning of Christ's resurrection in the following way: After the martyrdom of Christ, the Apostles were perplexed and dismayed. The reality of Christ, which consists in His teachings, His bounties, His perfections, and His spiritual power, was hidden and concealed for two or three days after His martyrdom, and had no outward appearance or manifestation—indeed, it was as though it were entirely lost. For those who truly believed were few in number, and even those few were perplexed and dismayed. The Cause of Christ was thus as a lifeless body. After three days the Apostles became firm and steadfast, arose to aid the Cause of Christ, resolved to promote the divine teachings and practise their Lord's admonitions, and endeavoured to serve Him. Then did the reality of Christ become resplendent, His grace shine forth, His religion find new life, and His teachings and admonitions become manifest and visible. In other words, the Cause of Christ, which was like unto a lifeless body, was quickened to life and surrounded by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Such is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ, and this was a true resurrection. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 23.2-7

... We do not believe that there was a bodily resurrection after the Crucifixion of Christ, but that there was a time after His Ascension when His disciples perceived spiritually His true greatness and realized He was eternal in being. This is what has been reported symbolically in the New Testament and been misunderstood. His eating with His disciples after the resurrection is the same thing.

*From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 9, 1947,
in Lights of Guidance, no. 1648*

The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles

The descent of the Holy Spirit is not like the entrance of air into the human body. It is a metaphor and an analogy rather than a literal image or account. That which is intended is like the descent of the sun into a mirror, that is, when its splendour is reflected therein.

After the death of Christ the Apostles were troubled and diverged in their thoughts and opinions; later they became steadfast and united. At Pentecost they gathered together, detached themselves from the world, forsook their own desires, renounced all earthly comfort and happiness, sacrificed body and soul to their Beloved, left their homes, took leave of all their cares and belongings, and even forgot their own existence. Then was divine assistance vouchsafed and the power of the Holy Spirit manifested. The spirituality of Christ triumphed and the love of God took hold. On that day they received divine confirmations, and each departed in a different direction to teach the Cause of God and unloosed his tongue to set forth the proofs and testimonies.

Thus the descent of the Holy Spirit means that the Apostles were attracted by the messianic Spirit, attained constancy and steadfastness, found a new life through the spirit of God's love, and saw Christ to be their ever-living helper and protector. They were mere drops and became the ocean; they were feeble gnats and became soaring eagles; they were all weakness and became endowed with strength. They were like mirrors that are turned towards the sun: It is certain that the rays and the effulgence of the sun will be reflected therein.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 24.2-4

By "the Holy Spirit" is meant the outpouring grace of God and the effulgent rays that emanate from His Manifestation. Thus Christ was the focal centre of the rays of the Sun of Truth, and from this mighty centre—the reality of Christ—the grace of God shone upon the other mirrors which were the realities of the Apostles.

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles means that that glorious and divine grace cast its light and splendour upon their realities. For otherwise egress and regress, descent and inherence are characteristics of bodies and not of spirits—that is, egress and inherence pertain only to sensible realities, not to intelligible subtleties; and intelligible realities, such as reason, love, knowledge, imagination, and thought, do not enter, exit, or inhere, but rather denote relationships.

For example, knowledge, which is a form acquired by the mind, is an intelligible thing, and to speak of entering into the mind or exiting from it is absurd. Rather, it is a relationship of acquisition, even as images are reflected in a mirror.

Thus, as it is evident and established that intelligible realities do not enter or inhere, it follows that it is in no wise possible for the Holy Spirit to ascend, descend, enter, exit, commingle, or inhere. At most it appears as the sun appears in a mirror.

Moreover, in certain passages of the Sacred Scriptures where allusion is made to the Spirit, a specific person is intended, as it is conventionally said in speech and conversation that such-and-such a person is spirit personified, or is the embodiment of mercy and generosity. In this case the focus is not upon the lamp but upon the light.

For instance, in reference to the Promised One that must come after Christ, it is said in John 16:12: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak."

Now consider carefully that the words "for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak" clearly imply that the Spirit of truth is embodied in a Man Who has a soul, Who has ears to hear and a tongue to speak. Likewise Christ is called the "Spirit of God", in the same way that we speak of the light and yet mean both the light and the lamp.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 25.2-8

The Meaning of Speaking in Tongues

... The meaning is that the Apostles taught in a spiritual tongue, a tongue that embraces all tongues. For the Word of the Kingdom comprises spiritual meanings and divine mysteries, and whoso attains to this Word will find the realities and mysteries of creation to be clear and evident. The divine inner meanings are the all-encompassing reality of all tongues.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit endowed the Apostles with the tongue of the Kingdom, and they spoke with all peoples as if in their own tongue; that is, whenever they conversed with a person of any faith or nation, it was as though they were speaking his own tongue...

Twelve Table Talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká

The Trinity

The reality of the Divinity is sanctified and exalted beyond the comprehension of all created things, can in no wise be imagined by mortal mind and understanding, and transcends all human conception. That reality admits of no division, for division and multiplicity are among the characteristics of created and hence contingent things, and not accidents impinging upon the Necessary Being.

The reality of the Divinity is sanctified above singleness, then how much more above plurality. For that divine reality to descend into stations and degrees would be tantamount to

deficiency, contrary to perfection, and utterly impossible. It has ever been, and will ever remain, in the loftiest heights of sanctity and purity. All that is mentioned regarding the manifestation and revelation of God pertains to the effulgence of His light and not to a descent into the degrees of existence.

God is pure perfection and the creation is absolute imperfection. For God to descend into the degrees of existence would be the greatest of imperfections; rather, His manifestation, dawning, and effulgence are even as the appearance of the sun in a clear, bright, and polished mirror.

... Thus the reality of Christ was a bright and polished mirror of the greatest purity and clarity. The Sun of Truth, the Essence of the Divinity, appeared in that mirror and manifested its light and heat therein, yet it did not descend from the heights of holiness and the heaven of sanctity to reside within it. No, it continues to abide in its loftiness and sublimity, but has been revealed and manifested in the mirror in all its beauty and perfection.

Now, if we were to say that we have beheld the Sun in two mirrors—one Christ and the other the Holy Spirit—or, in other words, that we have seen three Suns—one in heaven and two upon the earth—we would be speaking the truth. And if we were to say that there is only one Sun, that it is absolute singleness, and that it has no peer or partner, we would again be speaking the truth.

The purport of our words is that the reality of Christ was a clear mirror wherein the Sun of Truth—that is, the divine Essence—appeared and shone forth with infinite perfections and attributes. It is not that the Sun, which is the Essence of the Divinity, was ever divided or multiplied—for it remains one—but it became manifest in the mirror. That is why Christ said, “The Father is in the Son”, meaning that that Sun is manifest and visible in this mirror.

The Holy Spirit is the outpouring grace of God which was revealed and manifested in the reality of Christ. Prophethood is the station of the heart of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the station of His spirit. It is thus evident and established that the Essence of the Divinity is absolute oneness and has no peer, equal, or likeness. ...

Now, this explanation clarifies the meaning of the three Persons of the Trinity and establishes at the same time the oneness of God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 27.2-8, 10

The Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgement

It is recorded in the Sacred Scriptures that Christ will return and that His return is conditioned upon the fulfilment of certain signs: When He returns, He will be attended by those signs. Among them: “The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.” At that time “all the tribes of the earth” shall “mourn” and lament, and “the sign of the Son of man” shall appear “in heaven”, “and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. Bahá’u’lláh has

provided a detailed interpretation of these verses in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, and it need not be repeated here. Refer to it and you will grasp their meaning.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 26.1

... 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.”

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 79

The decline and renewal of religion

... 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. None except the righteous shall partake of this cup, none but the godly can share therein. “The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain.”

It is unquestionable that in every succeeding Revelation the “sun” and “moon” of the teachings, laws, commandments, and prohibitions which have been established in the preceding Dispensation, and which have overshadowed the people of that age, become darkened, that is, are exhausted, and cease to exert their influence...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 41-42

In this material world, time has changing cycles and place is subject to varying conditions. Seasons follow one another and individuals progress, regress, and develop. At one point it is springtime and at another the autumn season; at one point it is summer and at another it is winter. ... The spiritual cycles associated with the Prophets of God proceed in like manner. ... The spiritual cycles of the Sun of Truth, like the cycles of the physical sun, are in a state of perpetual motion and renewal. The Sun of Truth can be likened to the material sun, which rises from many different points. ...

Thus the Sun of Truth at one time shed its rays from the sign of Abraham; later it dawned above the sign of Moses and illumined the horizon; and later still it shone forth with the utmost power, heat, and radiance from the sign of Christ. ... Were the sun to rise from the west, it would still be the sun. Indeed, from whatever point the sun may rise, it is still the sun.

One must not take its appearance to be confined to a single point and regard the other points as deprived. ...

Some Answered Questions, 14.1, 7, 12, 13, 15

The Holy of Holies and the Holy City

That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel ... In these cities spiritual sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been ordained. The food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing. Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, ¶ 219

The religion of God consists of two parts: One is the very foundation and belongs to the spiritual realm; that is, it pertains to spiritual virtues and divine qualities. This part suffers neither change nor alteration: It is the Holy of Holies, which constitutes the essence of the religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, and which will endure throughout all the prophetic Dispensations. It will never be abrogated, for it consists in spiritual rather than material truth. It is faith, knowledge, certitude, justice, piety, high-mindedness, trustworthiness, love of God, and charity. It is mercy to the poor, assistance to the oppressed, generosity to the needy, and upliftment of the fallen. It is purity, detachment, humility, forbearance, patience, and constancy. These are divine qualities. ...

Those foundations of the religion of God ... are never subject to abrogation but are eternal and everlasting, and are renewed in every prophetic Dispensation.

The second part of the religion of God, which pertains to the material world and which concerns such things as fasting; prayer; worship; marriage; divorce; manumission; legal rulings; transactions; and penalties and punishments for murder, assault, theft, and injury, is changed and altered in every prophetic Dispensation and may be abrogated—for policies, transactions, punishments, and other laws are bound to change according to the exigencies of the time.

Briefly, what is meant by the term "Holy of Holies" is that spiritual law which can never be changed or abrogated, and what is meant by the "Holy City" is the material law which may indeed be abrogated ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 11.7, 9-11

... the religion of God is described as the Holy City or the New Jerusalem. Clearly, the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven is not a city of stone and lime, of brick and mortar, but is rather the religion of God which descends from heaven and is described as new. For it is obvious that the Jerusalem which is built of stone and mortar does not descend from heaven and is not renewed, but that what is renewed is the religion of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 13.3

... The body of the world can be compared to that of a man, and the Prophets and Messengers of God to able physicians. A human being does not remain always in the same condition: Different ailments occur and each calls for a specific remedy. ...

In brief, our meaning is that the change and transformation in the conditions and exigencies of the times is the cause of the abrogation of religious laws, for the time comes when those earlier commandments no longer suit the prevailing conditions. ...

... after the lapse of many centuries, that which is called for at the present time will no longer be suited to the needs of that future age, and change and transformation will be inevitable.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 20.4, 6

On Good and Evil

... Know that created things are of two kinds: material and spiritual, sensible and intelligible. That is, some are perceptible to the senses, while others are only perceived by the mind.

Sensible realities are those which are perceived by the five outer senses: So, for example, those outward things which the eye sees are called sensible. Intelligible realities are those which have no outward existence but are perceived by the mind. For example, the mind itself is an intelligible reality and has no outward existence. Likewise, all human virtues and attributes have an intelligible rather than a sensible existence; that is, they are realities that are perceived by the mind and not by the senses.

Briefly, intelligible realities such as the praiseworthy attributes and perfections of man are purely good and have a positive existence. Evil is simply their non-existence. So ignorance is the want of knowledge, error is the want of guidance, forgetfulness is the want of remembrance, foolishness is the want of understanding: All these are nothing in themselves and have no positive existence.

4As for sensible realities, these are also purely good, and evil is merely their non-existence; that is, blindness is the want of sight, deafness is the want of hearing, poverty is the want of wealth, illness is the want of health, death is the want of life, and weakness is the want of strength.

Evil consists merely in non-existence. For example, death is the absence of life: When man is no longer sustained by the power of life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: When light is no more, darkness reigns. Light is a positively existing thing, but darkness has no positive existence; it is merely its absence. Likewise, wealth is a positively existing thing but poverty is merely its absence.

It is thus evident that all evil is mere non-existence. Good has a positive existence; evil is merely its absence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 74.1-3, 6-7

... capacity is of two kinds: innate and acquired. The innate capacity, which is the creation of God, is wholly and entirely good—in the innate nature there is no evil. The acquired capacity, however, can become the cause of evil. ...

In the innate nature of things there is no evil—all is good. This applies even to certain apparently blameworthy attributes and dispositions which seem inherent in some people, but which are not in reality reprehensible. For example, you can see in a nursing child, from the beginning of its life, the signs of greed, of anger, and of ill temper; and so it might be argued that good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and that this is contrary to the pure goodness of the innate nature and of creation. The answer is that greed, which is to demand ever more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is displayed under the right circumstances. Thus, should a person show greed in acquiring science and knowledge, or in the exercise of compassion, high-mindedness, and justice, this would be most praiseworthy. And should he direct his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, this too would be most praiseworthy. But should he display these qualities under other conditions, this would be deserving of blame. ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 57.9-10

As to the question of evil spirits, demons and monsters, any references made to them in the Holy Books have symbolic meaning. What is currently known among the public is but sheer superstition."

From a Tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá: Spiritualism and Psychic Phenomena, p. 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. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other the expression of the spiritual realm. The world of nature is defective. Look at it clearly, casting aside all superstition and imagination... God has never created an evil spirit; all such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly nature of man. It is an essential condition of the soil of earth that thorns, weeds and fruitless trees may grow from it. Relatively speaking, this is evil; it is simply the lower state and baser product of nature.

Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 294-295

Regarding your question relative to the condition of those people who are described in the Gospel as being possessed of devils: This should be interpreted figuratively; devil or satan is symbolic of evil and dark forces yielding to temptation."

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 20, 1938, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1738

The Wisdom of Fasting

... There is many a divine wisdom in fasting. Among them is this: that, in the days when He Who is the Dayspring of the Sun of Truth engages, through divine inspiration, in revealing the verses of God, in establishing His religion, and in setting forth His teachings, He is so enraptured and enkindled as to find no time for food or drink. For example, when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to establish the religion of God, He fasted for forty days; and fasting was therefore enjoined upon the Israelites to awaken and admonish them. Likewise Christ, at the beginning of the foundation of His divine religion, the establishment of His teachings, and the formulation of His admonitions, disregarded for forty days all physical necessities and refrained from food and drink. The Apostles and early Christian believers also fasted, but this fast was changed by the Church Councils to abstinence from certain foods. Similarly, the Qur'án was revealed during the month of Ramaḍán and therefore the fast was enjoined during that period. In the same way, in the beginning of His manifestation, the Báb would be so overcome with emotion at the revelation of the divine verses that for days He would confine himself to drinking tea. Likewise, in the days when He was instituting the divine teachings, and when the divine verses would be sent down continuously, Bahá'u'lláh would be so overwhelmed with the intensity of their influence and the emotions surging within His heart that He would take but little food.

Our meaning is that it has been enjoined upon the generality of the people to fast likewise for a few days, that they might follow the example of the divine Manifestations and call to mind Their state and condition. As history records, the Christians would in the early days observe a complete fast. For every sincere soul who has a beloved aspires to whatever condition his beloved is experiencing: If the beloved were sad he would wish for sorrow, and if joyous he would aspire to joy; if the beloved were at ease he would seek comfort, and if troubled he would desire the same. Now, since in those days the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would abstain from food and drink, or would partake of only the least amount, it became incumbent upon Their loved ones to follow Their example. Even as it is said in the Tablet of Visitation: "... who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden". This is but one of the wisdoms of fasting.

The second wisdom is that fasting is conducive to spiritual awareness. One's heart grows more tender, one's spirituality is increased, and as a result one's thoughts become purely focused on the remembrance of God. Such awareness and awakening leads inexorably to spiritual progress.

The third wisdom is this. There are two kinds of fast: material and spiritual. The material fast consists in abstaining from food and drink, that is, refraining from satisfying the physical appetites. But the true and spiritual fast is for man to forsake covetous desires, heedlessness, and evil and animalistic attributes. The material fast is therefore a symbol of that spiritual fast. It is like saying: "O Divine Providence! As I am abstaining from bodily desires and from all occupation with food and drink, even so purify and sanctify my heart from the love of anyone save Thyself, and shield and protect my soul from corrupt inclinations and satanic qualities, that my spirit may commune with the breaths of holiness and fast from the mention of all else besides Thee."

Twelve Table Talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká