

# The Discerner

“Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”  
1 John 4:6

The Voice of the Religion Analysis Service

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## A NON-DENOMINATIONAL QUARTERLY EXPOSING UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

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**O**ur website ([www.ras.org](http://www.ras.org)) has been recently revised and updated. Now you can access the ff.:

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2. Complete listing of books in our catalog with prices, descriptions, and an order form.
3. Links to books, periodicals, and other literature pertaining to the cults.
4. Links to other countercult ministries.

## DEAR READER

As I write these words, the air waves and the television screens are filled with Christmas music and messages. It is the joyous time of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The incarnation message that God in Christ came to us and dwelt among us makes our hearts and minds “rejoice with exceeding great joy.” God has visited us with salvation through His beloved Son. This glorious message is accompanied with a culture of “faith, hope and love” for all who truly receive the Christ of God as their personal Savior.

Such is not the case of those who deny the virgin birth of Christ, His deity, His supernatural miracles, the redemption through the substitutionary/vicarious death of our Savior, and His glorious resurrection from the dead. Theirs is a culture of death, gloom and hopelessness. They may concoct their own religion and even exhibit remarkable virtues and good works. But the pallor of death hovers over them, and the wrath of God remains in their hearts (John 3:36). To them, Christmas remains a legend or a myth (Secularism), a fanciful story replete with esotericism and hidden meaning (Mysticism), or even an inspiring but unrealistic ideology/theology (Rationalism/Liberalism).

But we do not “follow cleverly invented devised fables” (2.Peter 1:16). We believe that Christmas declares and demonstrates God’s great act in human history. The first stanza of the enduring hymn: “One Day” by J. Wilbur Chapman captures the immensity, grandeur and efficacy of the true Christmas message and culture:

One day when heaven was filled with His praises,  
One day when sin was as black as could be;  
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin,  
Dwelt among men, my example is He!

Living, He loved me; dying He saved me!  
Buried, He carried my sins far away!  
Rising, He justified freely forever!  
One day He’s coming - O glorious day!

Wishing you and yours God’s richest blessings in 2006,

Laurence J. Sutherland

## WITH THIS ISSUE

**O**ur Lord Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, asked His disciples: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13) and a moment later, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter, surely in accord with the thinking of the other disciples, answered boldly: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, (Matthew 16:16). Peter’s confession has been the testimony of the church throughout the centuries. Today, however, there are those who espouse different views about Jesus. Dr. Roy Knuteson, pastor, author, and member of the RAS’ Board of Reference, submits poignant and graphic descriptions of these varying viewpoints in our first article.

After a short break, RAS President, Dr. Ron McRoberts, continues his primer on Dispensationalism. This is his fifth installment in a series of six parts. (If you do not have the first four parts, you may wish to receive photocopies of them from our office for \$5.00, which includes postage). Dr. McRoberts will conclude the series with the next issue in 2006.

Finally, the second article on Bahaim by Pastor Steve Lagoon, a member of the RAS’ Board, completes a detailed analysis of the essential teachings of Bahaim, a religion “made in Persia/Iran”. This scholarly and well-documented study should be a real boon to college students and those who are confronted by the various world religions/cults.

Your feedback on the above articles is welcomed by the authors.  
Laurence J. Sutherland

P. S. Please do not overlook our newly-revised website:  
and note also our GIANT BOOK SALE (now at 60% reductions!)  
which has been extended to Jan. 31, 2006.

# ANOTHER JESUS?

*By Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.*

**I**n Second Corinthians 11:4, the Apostle Paul warned the believers at Corinth of the danger of believing in “another Jesus” — one different from the Jesus he had preached to them. The same danger exists today. Who is the Jesus of the Scriptures and how does He differ from the other Jesus’ being preached today? Just because someone says they believe in Jesus does not mean that their faith is authentic and their Jesus is biblical.

## **The Biblical Jesus**

The Bible clearly states that Jesus is God (Hebrews 1:8), co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:6). He existed from all eternity (John 1:1), and “appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up to glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). The Jesus of Scripture was born of a virgin (Luke 1:35), lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21), and was crucified for the sins of the world. After three days He raised Himself from the dead (John 2:19) and forty days later, He ascended on high to await His return to this planet for the completion of the Father’s plan of the ages (Hebrews 9:28).

## **The Islamic Jesus**

Muslims outrightly deny the deity of Jesus and demote Him to the level of a prophet on a par with Moses and Elijah, whereas Mohammed is considered the greatest prophet of all time. Therefore, Jesus is not the Savior of the world, nor did He die for our sins, thereby providing the complete atonement for our redemption. Like all the religions of the world Islam denies the grace of God and has substituted a works system for human salvation and thus is condemned by God as a spurious “faith”. Islam is taking giant strides across the world and making disciples wherever it goes, teaching the millions to deny the one who said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Obviously, the Jesus of the Muslims is a tragic substitute for the real person of the Scriptures.

## **The Jehovah’s Witness’ Jesus**

Jehovah’s Witnesses vehemently deny the doctrine of the Triune Godhead and condemn it as “of the Devil” (Let God Be True, p.82).

Therefore, the deity of Jesus is not acceptable to them and our Lord is relegated to a lesser position as “a god” — a created God and not the Almighty God of Scripture. To support this heresy, they have their own unique “New World Translation” which translates John 1:1 to read: “and the word was a god”. This is not the Jesus of Scripture and therefore must be exposed as a fraudulent Christ. In their book “From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained” (p. 176), they state that the Archangel Michael of Revelation 12:7-9 is “really Jesus Christ in heaven”. What blasphemy! Jehovah’s Witnesses also deny the literal resurrection of Jesus and His promised and personal return. Instead, they believe that Jesus returned in 1914 “not as a human, but as a glorious spirit creature” “Let God Be True” (p.185). These statements, plus many others, reveal that the Jesus of the Watchtower is not the Jesus of the Bible.

### **The Mormon Jesus**

Believing in a multiplicity of gods, Mormons are taught that Jesus is not God, but instead is a “spirit brother of Satan” “Gospel Through The Ages” (p. 15). More than that, they also believe that Jesus was a polygamist who was married to both Marys and Martha in order that he could see his physical seed before he was crucified. In the “Journal of Discourses” (Vol. 2, p. 82) Jesus is said to be “the bridegroom” at the marriage of Cana of Galilee! In “The Seer”, Orson Pratt says: “We have also proved most clearly that the Son followed the example of his Father and became the Great Bridegroom to whom King’s daughters and many honorable wives were to be married” (p. 172). Mormons do believe in a literal Second Coming of Jesus, but they also teach that the Jews will be gathered in Palestine while the Mormons will be supernaturally gathered in Missouri when the judgment of God is poured out on the earth “Doctrines and Covenants” (Section 29, Verses 9-11). Many Latter-Day Saints are unaware of the many false doctrines regarding our Lord and simply assume that the Jesus they talk about is the Jesus of the Bible, which He clearly is not.

### **The Masonic Jesus**

Freemasonry is a religion without a savior, a religion that denies the shed blood of Christ, and refuses to call Him “Lord”. In fact, Masons are forbidden to pray “in Jesus’ Name” at any of their lodge meetings. The name of Jesus is also stricken from the Scripture passages used in their rituals where the name of Christ occurs in the Bible. Masons sense no need for Jesus and the new birth. Moreover, with their emphasis on salvation by good works and lodge membership, they have made void the grace of God and thereby deny salvation by the blood of Christ for undeserving sinners. Clearly, the Jesus of

the Masonic Lodge is “another Jesus” and not the Jesus of the Bible.

### **The Christian Science Jesus**

A prominent trait of all non-Christian religions and cults is the universal denial of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ. Christian Science ranks high in this category as it loudly denies the full deity of Jesus and the Trinity of the Godhead. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of this cult, said: “The theory of three persons in one God suggests heathen gods” “Science and Health” (p. 152). “Jesus is not God”, she wrote, “He was born of the Virgin Mary’s thought”. In addition to this heresy, Christian Science teaches that Jesus did not die physically on the cross, nor was He physically resurrected. Jesus’ ascension and Second Coming are also denied. Obviously, the Christian Science Jesus is not the Jesus of Scripture who is described in Hebrews 1:3 as “the radiance of God’s glory, and the exact representation of His being”.

### **The Roman Catholic Jesus**

While professing to believe in the full deity of Jesus, Papal decrees have elevated Mary to a position of sinlessness, whereby she almost usurps the place of our Savior as a “Co-Redeemer”, one considered more sympathetic to humans. Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary is not considered complete and final since the Mass is regarded as a continual re-crucifixion of Him. The doctrine of purgatory was proclaimed as a dogma of faith by the Council of Florence in 1439 to finish the work of redemption by physical suffering for an unknown duration of time. Release is dependent on priestly prayers and masses on behalf of the deceased. The doctrine of justification by faith in the finished work of Jesus is also rejected as being incomplete. The Roman Catholic Jesus, as defined by the church, is not the Jesus of the Bible as far as His redemptive work is concerned, and to that extent, He is “another Jesus”.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing illustrations, it is very obvious that a Christian must not be naive or gullible concerning the person and work of the Savior, as taught by others. We must never assume, as many do, that the mention of Jesus’ name means the same to them, as it does for us. The use of Bible terminology alone, does not guarantee orthodoxy. Therefore, the Word of God exhorts us to “test everything, hold on to the good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Then, and only then, will we be protected against the many “winds of teaching” (Ephesians 4:14), that are blowing all around us.

All Scripture quotations are from The New International Version

# **A PRIMER ON CLASSIC DISPENSATIONALISM**

## **PART V: CONTINUING THE EXAMINATION OF THE DISPENSATIONS**

*By Ronald E. McRoberts, PhD*

### **Introduction and Review**

Part I of this series (McRoberts 2004-2005) focused on the hermeneutical principles underlying dispensationalism with an emphasis on literal or normal interpretation; Part II focused on the definitions and characteristics of dispensations with an emphasis on stewardship relationships; and Part III focused on the identification and labeling of the seven commonly accepted dispensations. Part IV provided preparatory background material on the progressive nature of dispensations and examined the first three dispensations: Innocence, Conscience, and Human Government.

The discussion of the progressive nature of dispensations is intended to counter the mindset among some dispensationalists that truth revealed before the present dispensation is irrelevant. More specifically, the intent is to illustrate how key Biblical concepts are developed and refined through the dispensations. The illustration focuses on four concepts: covenants, sacrifice, faith that is counted as righteousness, and the means God uses to foster obedience. The use of the term *progressive* to describe this process should be distinguished from its use as a label for an errant movement known as progressive dispensationalism.

### **The Dispensations (continued)**

**Dispensation of Patriarchal Rule** (Genesis 11:10-Exodus 18:27). The dispensation of Patriarchal Rule departs radically from its two predecessors, the dispensations of Conscience and Human Government. First, God called out a single man, Abraham, from all of mankind and invited this man to follow Him exclusively. This calling and invitation exemplifies the Biblical concepts of election and separation. Further, unlike Noah who is recorded as having been a righteous man who walked with God (Gen. 6:9), Abraham is not recorded as having been either particularly righteous or Godly. In fact,



Abraham's father, and presumably the entire family, practiced idolatry (Josh. 24:2). In addition, there were others of Abraham's day who would seem to have been better choices, e.g., Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). Nevertheless, God called Abraham, an act of unmerited favor exemplifying the Biblical concept of grace.

The second radically new feature of this dispensation is the unique, specific, promises that God gave to Abraham. The promises, which are part of the new revelation given to initiate the dispensation, have three components: (1) personal promises that God would grant Abraham great blessings and make his name great; (2) national promises: (a) that the descendants of this old, as yet, childless man would become a great nation, (b) that his descendants would receive as an everlasting possession a land the boundaries of which would extend from the river of Egypt (not the Nile River but rather Wadi el-Arish) to the Euphrates River, and (c) that kings would descend from Abraham; and (3) universal promises that the nations of the earth would be blessed through a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18). Although the promises themselves were unconditional, God first required that Abraham exercise faith with respect to three points of obedience: Abraham was required to separate himself from his country, probably the most advanced culture of the day; from his relatives; and from the authority of his father's household in Haran and to place himself exclusively under God's authority. Following satisfaction of all three points of obedience, God restated the promises in the form of an unconditional covenant (Gen. 15:18).

The importance of this Abrahamic Covenant for dispensationalists cannot be overemphasized. First, the covenant included unconditional promises to the physical descendants of Abraham that can neither be negated nor transferred to other peoples. Some groups spiritualize the promises and argue that because of the disobedience of Abraham's descendants, the promises were transferred to the Church. However, application of the literal hermeneutic makes it clear that the covenant promises were unconditional and did not depend on obedience. Although the Church may be grafted into the spiritual descent of Abraham and receive covenant spiritual blessings (Rom. 11:17-18), it does not replace Abraham's physical descendants as the beneficiaries of the promises of a land, a nation, and an everlasting kingdom (Gal. 3:16-19; Rom. 11:24). Thus, dispensationalists maintain a strict distinction between Israel and the Church. Second, because not all aspects of the covenant promises have been literally fulfilled, dispensationalists understand there to be a unique future role for Israel in God's plan.

The practice of sacrifice continues as in previous dispensations. The fundamental idea is one of substitution in which the act of giving a portion of the results of one's labors represents the surrender of the person making the sacrifice. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, his son, on whom the literal fulfillment of the covenant promises depended, represents Abraham's complete surrender.

Abraham is renowned as one whose faith was counted as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). It is always faith in God that is counted as righteousness. However, following the definition of faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), it is not inappropriate to ask for more specificity regarding the *things* which are the unseen objects of hope. The *things* included God's previous promise that a descendant of Adam would bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). In addition, for Abraham and his descendants, the *things* included God's new promises of a great name, descendants, a promised land, and universal blessings. Faith in these unfulfilled promises is the basis for righteousness throughout this and the next dispensation.

As in both previous and subsequent dispensations, man was expected to do well and master sin. The roles of conscience and human government continued from previous dispensations. In addition, a positive incentive for obedience was initiated in this dispensation. If Abraham's descendants remained in the promised land, exercised faith in the covenant promises, and served God, blessings would be theirs.

In terms of test, failure, and judgment, the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were paramount. The test was to remain in the promised land and to serve God; the failure was that Jacob did not return from Egypt to the promised land at the end of the famine; and the judgment was centuries of slavery in Egypt.

**Dispensation of Mosaic Law** (Exodus 19:1-Acts 1:26). The dispensation of Mosaic Law continues in some aspects the dispensation of Patriarchal Rule. God continued to focus on the descendants of Abraham; the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant underlaid the exercise of faith; and the primary covenants clarified the national promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The new dispensational revelation given to Moses at Mount Sinai consisted of 613 commandments known as the Mosaic Law and covered many aspects of individual and national life in minute detail. One feature distinguishing the new and previous dispensation was the fundamental nature of the Mosaic Law itself: the Law was not of

faith and could not provide righteousness. Paul notes that no one is justified by the Law, because the purpose of the Law is only to bring knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Further, unlike the unconditional promised blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant, the promised blessings associated with the Mosaic Law were conditional on obedience. In addition, the Mosaic Law promised terrible judgments for disobedience (Lev. 26: 14-39).

Despite the exacting nature of the Mosaic Law, God brought hope to Israel by clarifying the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant via another series of covenants. First, the Palestinian Covenant confirmed the land component of the Abrahamic Covenant (Deut. 30 :1-10). Although God prescribed dispersion from the land for disobedience, He also gave an unconditional promise that at a future date He would create the spiritual conditions leading to the repentance and conversion necessary for Israel fully and finally to possess the entire promised land. Further, God promised that Israel's oppressors would be judged and that the nation would prosper in the land. Second, the Davidic Covenant confirmed and clarified the component of the Abrahamic Covenant that promised that kings would descend from Abraham (2 Sam. 7:12-16). God promised to establish David's house, throne, and kingdom forever and promised that one of David's descendants would occupy that throne. Third, Jeremiah's New Covenant clarified the Abrahamic Covenant (Jer. 31: 1-9) by providing new and specific details: (1) the covenant would be fulfilled following the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7) which is included in the Tribulation (Jer. 31:33; Mt. 24:21); (2) God would divinely enable Israel to walk in obedience by writing His law on the hearts of the people; and (3) all men would know the Lord. Israel understood that complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant required continuation of the nation, final possession of the promised land, political and military independence, spiritual repentance and conversion, and a Messiah who, as a descendant of David, would sit on David's throne and rule his everlasting kingdom. Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant became the great hope of Israel, particularly during the later years of the dispensation of Mosaic Law.

The *things* of faith that counted as righteousness in this dispensation had nothing to do with the practice of the Mosaic Law because it was not of faith and did not lead to righteousness. The *things* of faith were, as in the previous dispensation, God's promise that a descendant of Adam would bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15) and the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, albeit clarified in this dispensation.

The Mosaic Law expanded the practice of sacrifice. During previous dispensations sacrifices were generally the spontaneous expression of reverence and faithfulness to God. In this dispensation, however, sacrifice became a covenant obligation with the materials, procedures, and timing prescribed in detail. The purpose of sacrifice was to recognize God's special relationship with Israel and His deliverance of the nation from Egypt. In this dispensation, the prescribed covenantal sacrifices, if offered in obedience and gratitude, would yield covenant blessings. Although the life of an animal was known in previous dispensations to be regarded by God as in the blood (Gen. 9:4), this dispensation was the first in which Scriptures revealed that a blood sacrifice was necessary to atone for sin (Lev. 17:11).

As previously, man was expected to do well and master sin and, also as previously, God fostered obedience via conscience and human government. In this dispensation, the Law, like human government, functioned as a negative incentive. First, the Law, in its role as teacher, revealed sin, and second, it prescribed penalties for disobedience. As in all previous dispensations, obedience was primarily accomplished in one's own personal strength.

Israel's responsibility, and the inherent test in the dispensation of Mosaic Law, was to obey God on the basis of conscience, human government, and promise, and to do all that the Law required. The history of the dispensation is replete with failures which culminated in the rejection and crucifixion of the long-awaited Messiah. The judgments generally consisted of military defeats, sometimes resulting in forced captivities outside the land, and finally a worldwide dispersion.

**Dispensation of Grace** (Acts 2:1-Rev. 19:21). With the initiation of the dispensation of Grace, the conditional Mosaic Law ended and was replaced with an unconditional offer of grace (Mt. 26:28). The defining characteristic of this dispensation is that righteousness is freely available to all mankind on the basis of faith in the efficacy of Messiah's ultimate blood sacrifice. (It merits noting at this point that the Greek word *Christ* is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Messiah*.) Care must be exercised to determine which portions of the revelation given by Messiah and subsequently by His followers pertain to the old dispensation of Mosaic Law, the new dispensation of Grace, and the future dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom. Generally, all that is said of Messiah's gospel and of the Church in Acts and the Epistles may confidently be regarded as revelation for the dispensation of Grace. Crucial aspects of that revelation include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) Jesus' ministry, death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled Messianic prophecies; (2) Messiah's death

satisfied once and for all the requirement for a blood sacrifice; (3) there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles as they exercise faith in Messiah's sacrifice; (4) the Holy Spirit was given to empower obedience; and (5) the Church was established with characteristics and attributes as follows: (a) it began at Pentecost; (b) it is empowered for growth by the Holy Spirit, (c) it is a spiritual body of which Messiah is the head, (d) it is called out of the world; (e) it is called to evangelize the world; and (f) it is to maintain moral and doctrinal purity.

Two of these items require additional comment. First, although the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are abolished as they pertain to the Church, they are not abolished with respect to fulfillment of the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. The physical descendants of Abraham are yet to realize total repentance and conversion, complete restoration to the promised land, and establishment of Messiah on David's everlasting throne. Fulfillment of these promises is yet future and contributes to explaining the strict distinction dispensationalists maintain between national Israel and the Church.

Second, the role of the Holy Spirit in the new dispensation must be specifically noted. In previous dispensations God fostered obedience through the positive and negative incentives of conscience, human government, promise, and Law. Despite these incentives, obedience was always primarily a matter of personal strength and will. In the new dispensation, however, God not only continues to provide these incentives, but He now provides supernatural power via the indwelling Holy Spirit to accomplish His will. This unique feature of the dispensation of Grace must not be minimized.

Understanding covenants and relationships among them in the dispensation of Grace is difficult. Four references to covenants are pertinent: (1) Jeremiah's New Covenant (Jer. 31: 31-34), (2) the covenant that Messiah announced (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 20:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), (3) the new covenant Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3:6), and (4) the covenant discussed in Hebrews (Heb. 9:15). Dispensationalists agree that all these covenants are to be distinguished from the Mosaic Law and that fulfillment of their promises are enabled by Messiah's sacrifice. Further, complete fulfillment of Jeremiah's New Covenant is intended for Israel, and it is yet future because the time of Jacob's trouble and worldwide knowledge of the Lord have not occurred. The issues, then, are the degree to which these are all the same covenant, the degree to which Jeremiah's New Covenant is now being fulfilled, and the degree to which the Church

participates in any fulfillment.

Even the giants of classical dispensationalism are not in complete agreement on these issues. Darby was a proponent of the view that there is no new covenant for the Church but rather that the Church is related only to Messiah's blood sacrifice (Pentecost 1958, p. 123; Walvoord 1959, p.214 ). Ryrie (1995, p.170-174) seems to be a proponent of a similar view, arguing that redemption on the basis of Messiah's sacrifice and the ministry of the Holy Spirit do not constitute even partial fulfillment of Jeremiah's New Covenant. Ryrie (2005, p. 91) does, however, leave open the possibility that the Church participates in a second new covenant. Scofield (1988, Jer. 31:31 note), Pentecost (1958, p. 127; 1984, p. 173-176), and Walvoord (1990, p.140-141) subscribed to the view that although the new covenant is for Israel, believers in the dispensation of Grace still derive blessings from or participate in it. Pentecost (1958, p. 127) and Ryrie (2005, p. 46) further argued that that the redemption that is now available to all peoples on the basis of Messiah's sacrifice is at least partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all peoples of the earth would be blessed through him. The third view is that Israel and the Church have separate covenants. Chafer (1975, Vol. IV, p. 49) advocated this view, and Ryrie not only acknowledged its possibility (Ryrie 1995, p. 170-174) but presented a supporting argument (Ryrie 2005, p. 91-104).

None of these three views is inconsistent with the principles of dispensationalism. The only inconsistent views are those that deny ultimate fulfillment to national Israel. Regardless of the views taken on the details of the issue, several conclusions may be drawn. First, Messiah's blood sacrifice at the end of the dispensation of Mosaic Law is the enabling act necessary for complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and Jeremiah's New Covenant. Second, Israel will be the primary beneficiary of these covenant promises, and third, complete fulfillment of them is yet future. Fourth, the same act that enables fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel also makes it possible for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike, to obtain redemptive blessings as a result of grace, regardless of whether the blessings even partially fulfill any covenant.

In the dispensation of Grace, the *things* of faith and the concept of sacrifice converge. The things of *faith* are no longer promises awaiting future fulfillment but are specifically identified as Messiah's ultimate blood sacrifice, the blood sacrifice that paid sin's penalty once and for all. Further, there are no other *things* of faith that lead to righteousness (Acts 4:12). Thus, the practice of blood sacrifice has



ended among believers, because the ultimate blood sacrifice has been made and it is efficacious for all men for all time. Nevertheless, Paul calls on believers “to present their bodies, a living and holy sacrifice, ..., a spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

The test for mankind in this dispensation is to obey God on the basis of conscience, human government, promise, and grace. Specifically, men are to exercise faith in the efficacy of Messiah’s once and for all blood sacrifice. However, prophecy reveals that by the end of the dispensation, the vast majority of individual Jews and Gentiles will have refused the offer of grace and that apostasy will characterize most groups claiming to be Messiah’s spiritual body on earth (Rev. 17). A 7-year period of judgment, known as the Tribulation (Dan. 9: 24-27; Rev. 4:1-19:21) and which includes the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), marks the end of the dispensation and includes the destruction of the apostate church and the judgment of the world. However, the Church does not experience this earthly judgment because just before the Tribulation, Messiah returns for the believers who are supernaturally “caught up ... to meet the (Him) in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). Following the Tribulation Messiah returns with His saints and is victorious at the battle of Armageddon, and Satan is bound and consigned to the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-3).

**Dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom** (Rev. 20:1-6). The seventh and final dispensation begins following Messiah’s return to earth and ends just before Satan’s release from the bottomless pit. Although presumably new revelation will be given to initiate this dispensation, God has already revealed much about it: (1) the dispensation will span the 1,000 years that Satan is confined to the bottomless pit; (2) all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled including Israel’s restoration to the promised land, Jeremiah’s New Covenant, and the personal, earthly reign of Messiah from the throne of His ancestor, David; and (3) a world order characterized by peace and righteousness will be established. Dispensationalists regard the kingdom Messiah offered at His first advent and His kingdom as established in this dispensation to be the everlasting kingdom of David promised in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants.

The *things* of faith leading to righteousness, as in the dispensation of Grace, will be the blood sacrifice of Messiah at the end of the dispensation of Mosaic Law. Presumably Paul’s encouragement to believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices continues in the Messianic Kingdom. In the new dispensation, multiple new factors combine to foster obedience. First, only believers enter into the

Millennial Kingdom; second, Satan is bound; third, disobedience is swiftly punished; fourth, Messiah is personally present on earth; fifth, God will not only make His laws known, but He will write them on the hearts of His people, Israel (Jer. 31:33); and sixth, all men will know the Lord (Jer. 31:34).

The test for those living in this dispensation will be, as always, to conform to the will of God. Although only believers enter the Millennial Kingdom and Satan is bound, there will still be rebellion. Following his release at the end of the dispensation, Satan will lead these rebels in an attack on the reigning Messiah. The rebels will be devoured by fire, and Satan will be condemned to the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20: 7-10).

Next: The next and final installment of this series will consist of three sections: (1) a summary of the progressive nature of dispensationalism, (2) a brief survey of errant forms of dispensationalism, and (3) a response to the question, "What difference does it make?"

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# **THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH: EXCHANGING DARKNESS FOR LIGHT PART II<sup>1</sup>**

*By Steve Lagoon*

## **Miracles**

**W**ilson reports that Abdul-Baha denied the reality of Christ's miracles:

“The miracles of Christ were spiritual teachings, not literal”  
(Wilson, 103).

Esslemont states:

“Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha regard the descriptions of Heaven and Hell given in some of the older religious writings as symbolic like the Biblical story of the Creation, and not as literally true”  
(Esslemont, 195).

So, the biblical account of creation is not, according to Baháism, “literally true.” Esslemont also stated:

“On the other hand, who amongst our religious teachers would still declare . . . that the world was made in six days, or that the description of the plagues in Egypt as given in the Book of Exodus is literally true, or that the sun stood still in the heavens (that is, that the earth stopped its rotation) to let Joshua pursue his enemies . . . Such beliefs may still be repeated in form, but who accepts them in their literal sense . . . The religious world owes a debt of gratitude to the men of science who helped to tear such worn-out creeds and dogmas to tatters and allowed the truth to step forth free” (Esslemont, 205).

## **Sin and evil**

Baháism does not deny the reality of evil and sin, but definitely attaches meanings to the terms that are unbiblical, and which serve to downplay their true significance.

For instance, they deny the existence of the class of beings the Bible calls angels whether good or evil, affirming only the existence of God, mankind, and the Holy Spirit.

“Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá taught that there are no levels of being other than the three discussed above: human beings, the

<sup>1</sup> Part I is in Volume 25, Number 3 July-September 2005

Manifestations, and God. There is no hierarchy of demons, angels, and archangels. Insofar as these terms have any significant meaning, they are seen as symbolic of varying stages of human development, imperfection being demonic and spirituality being angelic” (web article, “Baha’i Topics, Who Are the Prophets?”, <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-0-3.html>).

So, for Baha’is there is no personal and real Devil.

Wilson relates:

“Of his temptation it says, ‘the devil signifies the human nature of Christ, through which He was tempted” (Wilson, 103).

“This brings us to the Bahá’í concept of the relationship between good and evil in man. `Abdu’l-Bahá describes it thus: In creation there is no evil, all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality . . . The Bahá’í Faith does not therefore accept the concept of ‘original sin’ or any related doctrine which considers that people are basically evil or have intrinsically evil elements in their nature. All the forces and faculties within us are God-given and thus potentially beneficial to our spiritual development. In the same way, the Bahá’í teachings deny the existence of Satan, a devil, or an ‘evil force.’ Evil, it is explained, is the absence of good; darkness is the absence of light; cold is the absence of heat. Just as the sun is the unique source of all life in a solar system, so ultimately is there only one force or power in the universe, the force we call God.

However, if a person, through his own God-given free will, turns away from this force or fails to make the necessary effort to develop his spiritual capacities, the result is imperfection. Both within the individual and in society, there will be what one might term “dark spots.” These dark spots are imperfections, and `Abdu’l-Bahá has said that “evil is imperfection.” (Baha’i Topics, On Good and Evil, “<http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-0-9.html>”).

It can be seen that the Baha’i view of sin and evil is quite unbiblical. Rather than seeing mankind as guilty sinners who have violated God’s law, and who are in need of the saving work of Christ, they see mankind as basically good, but in need of working toward their own perfection.

### **Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife**

In this scenario, there is no biblical hell that unsaved sinners go to for eternity. Rather, mankind is on a journey to God. Hell is simply

redefined.

“Baha’u’llah and Abdul-Baha regard the descriptions of Heaven and Hell given in some of the older religious writings as symbolic like the Biblical story of the Creation, and not as literally true. According to them, Heaven is the state of perfection, and Hell that of imperfection . . . It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed . . . Therefore in that world also they can make progress” (Esslemont, 195-196).

In another place, they state:

“The soul does not die; it endures everlastingly. When the human body dies, the soul is freed from ties with the physical body and the surrounding physical world and begins its progress through the spiritual world. Bahá’ís understand the spiritual world to be a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe—and not some physically remote or removed place” (From Heaven and Hell: A Baha’i View of Life After Death <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-5-2.html>).

“The body will not be needed in the next stage of our development, and we discard it on leaving this life as a traveler discards the vehicle which has taken him to his destination” (Faizi, Gloria, The Baha’i Faith: An introduction, Baha’i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, 1971, 1992, p. 60).

### **Salvation**

Salvation, in the Baha’i system is simply progressing spiritually, both now and in the afterlife.

According to Bahaism, in order to make “spiritual progress” one must follow the messenger for today, Baha’u’llah:

“In the final analysis, heaven can be seen partly as a state of nearness to God; hell is a state of remoteness from God. Each state follows as a natural consequence of individual efforts, or the lack thereof, to develop spiritually. The key to spiritual progress is to follow the path outlined by the Manifestations of God” (Heaven and Hell: A Baha’i View of Life After Death <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-5-2.html>).

So, not only do Baha’is advocate a works-based system of salvation, but the works must be commanded by the “Manifestation of God” for today which they claim is Baha’u’llah.

Note also this similar statement by Baha’i writer Gloria Faizi:

“If we wish for spiritual health, it is necessary first to recognize the Messenger of God and then to obey His instructions” (Faizi, Gloria, *The Baha’i Faith: An introduction*, Baha’i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, 1971, 1992, pp. 61-62).

So, in this Baha’i view, Christians then do not enjoy “spiritual health” since we do not recognize Baha’u’llah.

This contradicts the clear biblical teaching that we must believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ in this life, or we cannot go to heaven (John 3:5; Acts 4:12, 16:31, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Further, if we die in unbelief, we cannot escape the everlasting judgment of God. Hebrews 9:27 says, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Jesus said in John 14:6 “I am the Way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Baha’is have heard this so many times that they have developed a couple of ways of responding to it. In a tract based on this verse (John 14:6) they take the approach that Baha’u’llah actually is Jesus Christ. I have shown this idea to be untenable in the section above on Jesus Christ.

The other answer you might here is this; “Yes, Jesus was the way to God in his era,’ but now it is the ‘era’ of Baha’u’llah. This is also clearly refuted by Jesus’ claim that He himself will return to earth, and that He would be “with you always, unto the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

### **Bahaism and Christianity**

So how does Bahaism really view Christianity? Well, if you want to be recognized as a Baha’i, you must leave the Christian Church.

“If we abandon these timeworn blind imitations and investigate reality, all of us will be unified” (*Baha’i: Teachings For The New World Order; Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 6*).

Also, Baha’u’llah taught that when the Universal House of Justice takes control of the government of the world, all other religions will be suppressed. He said that:

“Diversity of religion should cease” (Faizi, Gloria, *The Baha’i Faith: An introduction*, Baha’i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, 1971, 1992, p. 16).

Baha’u’llah also said:

“That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union

of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common faith” (Ibid, p. 50).

The Baha’i goal is not to promote a diversity of religions, but the elimination of all save Bahaism itself.

“When you join a Baha’i assembly, you are required to withdraw from membership in any church or religious organization. You cannot be a Baha’i and a member of a Christian Church at the same time” (Petersen, William J. *Those Curious New Cults*. New Canaan, CT: Keats Publishing, Pivot Edition, 1975, p. 216).

One tract is very pernicious in its attempt to lure unsuspecting Christians into its fold:

“No matter what Christian denomination you belong to, you will find you have much in common with Baha’is . . . With all of that in common, you might be even more surprised at how little we disagree. In fact, you might find that you have more beliefs in common with Baha’is than you do with some other Christians! So relax. Baha’is may have a strange sounding name, but we still love and worship the same God you do” (do you belong to one of the churches that agrees with the Baha’i Faith? Baha’i tract).

So, Christians are told that they should “relax!” How can a Christian “relax” when everything they believe is under assault by Baha’is who wish to deceive unsuspecting Christians?

In a personal letter to me, one Baha’i stated:

“Dear Steve, First I want again to emphasize to you that the Baha’is are no threat to Christians or the followers of any other religion. We believe in their prophets and respect their beliefs” (personal letter on file).

We have seen that Baha’is reject nearly every important belief of Christians, and claim that Bahaism is the only way to God. How then can they make such misleading claims?

### **Is Bahaism Unified**

One often hears Baha’is claim that they are a unified religion in distinction from other religions. We should, however, remember the historical roots of Bahaism. The Shi’ites are a sect of Islam. The Shaykhis are a sect of Shi’ites. Out of the Shaykhis came the Bab and the Babis. Out of the Babis came two new sects; the Azals led by Mirza Yahya, and the Baha’is, led by Mirza Yahya’s half-brother Baha’u’llah.

Researcher David Barrett’s comment is to the point:

“There was also factionalism after Baha’u’llah’s death, with Abdul-Baha’s half-brother Mirza Muhammad Ali claiming to be the legitimate successor. Baha’is often say that unlike every other religion the Baha’i faith does not have any offshoots or sects. In fact, there have been several” (Barrett, David V. *The New Believers*. London: Xassell & Co, 2001, p.246).

Barrett then goes on to lay out the historical record regarding all the factions and battles for control throughout the history of the Bahai faith.

### **The Equality of Women**

Baha’is proclaim their strong support for the equality of women. For instance:

“Women: unambiguous equality. For the first time in history, the founder of a major world religion has explicitly stated that women and men are equal.” (Profile, p. 29).

As was noted earlier, one of the basic Baha’i principles is “the equality of women and men” (Profile, back cover).

In another place they state:

“In this Revelation of Baha’u’llah, the women go neck and neck with the men. In no movement will they be left behind. Their rights with man are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs” (The Baha’i Faith and Family Life).

The same Profile (p. 29) shows a graph of the involvement of women on the Baha’i governing bodies which ranges from around 15 to 45 percent. It also shows a picture of one of these “Baha’i National Assemblies” with several women in place.

But the picture painted is somewhat misleading. What is not stated is that women are specifically prohibited from serving on the highest governing body of Bahaism, the Universal House of Justice. For instance, in the Profile (p. 51), there is a picture of the members of the first Universal House of Justice that was elected in 1963. One is immediately struck by the fact that all the members are men. This is not an anomaly, but the established practice of Bahaism. The Baha’i Reference Library thus states:

“It has been elucidated in the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi that, while the membership of the Universal House of

Justice is confined to men, both women and men are eligible for election to Secondary and Local Houses of Justice (currently designated as National and Local Spiritual Assemblies)” (Baha’i Reference Library, Kitab-I-Aqdas , comment on law 52, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-97.html>, see also Wilson, p. 175-176).

It seems strange that while women are considered equal in marriage, can serve on local and secondary levels of Baha’i governing bodies, yet they are prohibited from serving on the Universal House of Justice.

Another disturbing fact of Baha’i history is the question of polygamy. The record of Scripture and history regarding polygamy is clear. It is not a happy place for women who live in it. The Bible never displays it in a positive light, but rather in a negative one.

A passage from Baha’u’llah lays down the rule for marriage. A man is not to take more than two wives, and does better by taking only one. Baha’u’llah said:

“God hath prescribed matrimony unto you. Beware that ye take not unto yourselves more wives than two. Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both he and she shall live in tranquility”(Baha’u’llah, Kitab-I-Aqdas, No 63, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-5.html#gr63>).

Now, certainly a limit of two wives is better than the four that Islam allows. But the biblical ideal is one man and one woman. Baha’is today do not interpret this passage to allow for polygamy, and do not practice it themselves. They have reinterpreted it in such a way that actually changes the intent of their own prophet. Here is their explanation:

“While the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas appears to permit bigamy, Bahá’u’lláh counsels that tranquility and contentment derive from monogamy. In another Tablet, He underlines the importance of the individual’s acting in such a way as to ‘bring comfort to himself and to his partner’. Abdu’l-Bahá, the authorized Interpreter of the Bahá’i Writings, states that in the text of the Aqdas monogamy is in effect enjoined. He elaborates this theme in a number of Tablets, including the following: ‘Know thou that polygamy is not permitted under the law of God, for contentment with one wife hath been clearly stipulated. Taking a second wife is made dependent upon equity and justice being upheld between the two wives, under all conditions. However, observance of justice



and equity towards two wives is utterly impossible. The fact that bigamy has been made dependent upon an impossible condition is clear proof of its absolute prohibition. Therefore it is not permissible for a man to have more than one wife.'

Polygamy is a very ancient practice among the majority of humanity. The introduction of monogamy has been only gradually accomplished by the Manifestations of God. Jesus, for example, did not prohibit polygamy, but abolished divorce except in the case of fornication; Muhammad limited the number of wives to four, but making plurality of wives contingent on justice, and reintroducing permission for divorce; Bahá'u'lláh, Who was revealing His Teachings in the milieu of a Muslim society, introduced the question of monogamy gradually in accordance with the principles of wisdom and the progressive unfoldment (sic. unfolding) of His purpose. The fact that He left His followers with an infallible Interpreter of His Writings enabled Him to outwardly permit two wives in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but uphold a condition that enabled 'Abdu'l-Bahá to elucidate later that the intention of the law was to enforce monogamy" (The foregoing is the Baha'i explanation of Kitab-I-Aqdas No 63, note 89, at web address, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-106.html>).

It is utterly dishonest for Abdul-Baha to reinterpret the clear statement of his father, Baha'u'llah, on this matter. It seems deceptive for Abdul-Baha and other Baha'i apologists to make no mention of the fact that Baha'u'llah himself had two wives, and perhaps a third. Samuel Wilson lays out the historical record:

"Baha Ullah, like Mohammed, surpassed his own law. He had three wives, or two wives and a concubine. Baha'i writers generally omit this information in describing his life and character" (Wilson, p. 159).

One wonders which 'prophet' to listen to. Baha'u'llah, who gave the law that a man can have two wives, as he himself did, or Abdul-Baha, who gave the law that a man can have only one wife. If Abdul-Baha was correct in saying that it is impossible to treat two wives with equal justice, then he is saying that his father, Baha'u'llah, the supreme Manifestation, practiced injustice in his taking multiply wives.

## **War and Government**

Bahaism strongly affirms the desire for world peace and unity. Certainly, this is a laudable goal. But their solution to the problems of hatred and war fall short, because they fail to face squarely the prob-



lem of human sin. Since Baha'is are big supporters of a one-world government, one wonders why they do not have much to say in support of the United Nations. The reason for this is that Bahaism teaches that its own "Universal House of Justice" will be the agency to bring about world Peace (or as Baha'is call it the Most Great Peace or Covenant). Amazingly, Baha'is believe that one day the Universal House of Justice will rule all the governments of the world. In the meantime, they are to be good citizens of their own country while they strive to implement the laws of Baha'u'llah:

"The administrative Order of Baha'u'llah...is destined to evolve into the Baha'i World Commonwealth which is both in theory and in practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions" (Baha'i: Teachings For The New World Order, Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 55).

"The Baha'i Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will come to be regarded not only as the nucleus but as the very pattern of the New World Order, destined to embrace, in the fullness of time, the whole of mankind" (Faizi, Gloria, The Baha'i Faith: An Introduction, Baha'i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, 1971, 1992, p. 96).

As to war, the idea is that all the governments of the world would limit their military power and only use force to stop an aggressive nation.

"The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on the earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government" (Baha'i: Teachings For The New World Order, Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 4).

They also say:

"In like manner, the size of the armaments of every Government should be strictly limited" (Baha'i: Teachings For The New World Order, Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 4).

Now, the immediate question arises; What if someone fails to comply with these limits? Well, of course, the answer is more war!

I am not sure how this is an improvement on today, in that their

so-called solution to war is a world war!

### **Economics**

Baha'is have an interesting view of economics that does not wipe out private property, but regulates the extremes of poverty and wealth:

“The rich will enjoy the privilege of this new economic condition as well as the poor, for owing to certain provisions and restrictions they will not be able to accumulate so much as to be burdened by its management, while the poor will be relieved from the stress of want and misery” (Baha’i: Teachings For The New World Order, Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 9).

I am not sure “the rich will enjoy” being relieved of the burden of managing their money. One wonders how it will be decided how much money is too much or too little. That the Universal House of Justice will have control of the economic systems of the world is a chilling thought indeed.

### **Baha’i Worship**

“In these Houses of Worship, readings are taken from all the Sacred Scriptures of the world. As there are no priests in the Baha’i Faith, the programme of readings is arranged by a committee and carried out by ordinary men and women. No one gives a sermon or conducts any form of ceremony or ritual. Lectures, discussions, or study classes on the Baha’i Faith and other religions must take place elsewhere because the House of Worship is reserved for prayer and meditation” (Faizi, Gloria, The Baha’i Faith: An introduction, Baha’i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, 1971, 1992, p. 115).

### **Prayer for the Dead?**

“For the Departed.- The Prayer for the dead is to be used for Baha’is over the age of fifteen. It is the only Baha’i obligatory prayer which is to be recited in the congregation” (Baha’i: Teachings For The New World Order, Compiled by Mouhebat Sobhani, Waldorf Enterprises, New York, USA, 1992, p. 42).

### **Mental Healing**

“Healing by Nonmaterial Means.- He (Baha’u’llah) teaches that there are also many methods of healing without material means . . . Of another form of mental healing ‘Abdul-Baha writes that it results:—from the entire concentration of the mind of a strong

person upon a sick person, when the latter expects with all of his concentrated faith that a cure will be effected from the spiritual power of the strong person, to such an extent that there will be a cordial connection between the strong person and the invalid . . . From the effect of these mental impressions an excitement of the nerves is produced, and this impression and this excitement of the nerves will become the cause of the recovery of the sick person.—“Some Answered Questions” (Esslemont, J. E., *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, Wilmette IL, Baha’i Books, 1923, Revised edition 1970, 1976, 1978 edition, p. 117-118).

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