

The Old and New Testaments

Extracts by Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and Universal House of Justice

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

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. To any one that hath read the book of Juk it is clear and evident how much the accounts given by the various books have differed.

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", 2nd. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 174-175)

The Four Gospels were written after Him [Christ]. John, Luke, Mark and Matthew - these four wrote after Christ what they remembered of His utterances.

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

...the Torah that God hath confirmed consists of the exact words that streamed forth at the bidding of God from the tongue of Him Who conversed with Him (Moses).

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Know ye that the Torah is that which was revealed in the Tablets to Moses, may peace be upon Him, or that to which He was bidden. But the stories are historical narratives and were written after Moses, may peace be upon Him.

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

Know ye that the Torah is that which was revealed in the Tablets unto Moses, may peace be upon Him, and in that which He was commanded to do... The glorious Book, the Mighty Decree, is what was in the Tablets which Moses, upon Him be peace, brought from Mount Sinai, and that which He proclaimed unto the Children of Israel, in accordance with the explicit text of those Tablets.

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

...What is intended by the creation of heaven and earth in six days is a spiritual creation and a divine day, as prior to the creation of this heaven and earth there were no days and nights.

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

The disciples of Christ taught His Faith with the language of the Kingdom. That language conformeth to all languages, for it consisteth of celestial meanings and divine mysteries. For the one who becometh conversant with that language the realities and secrets of creation stand unveiled before him. Divine truths are common to all languages. The Holy Spirit, therefore, taught the disciples the language of the Kingdom, and they thus were able to converse with the people of all nations. Whenever they spoke to those of other nations of the world, it was as if they conversed in their tongues. The well-known and outstanding languages of the world number about a thousand. It was necessary for the disciples to have written the Gospels in at least one of the languages of other nations. Thus, as it is known, the Gospels

were written only in Hebrew and Greek, and not even in the language of the Romans, although it was at the time the official language. As the disciples were not well-versed in it, the Gospels were not written in that language.

(From a previously untranslated Tablet)

From Letters Written on Behalf of the Guardian:

...The Bible is not wholly authentic, and in this respect is not to be compared with the Qur'an, and should be wholly subordinated to the authentic writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

(28 July 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

...we cannot be sure how much or how little of the four Gospels are accurate and include the words of Christ and His undiluted teachings, all we can be sure of, as Bahá'ís, is that what has been quoted by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master must be absolutely authentic. As many times passages in the Gospel of St. John are quoted we may assume that it is his Gospel and much of it accurate.

(23 January 1944 to an individual believer)

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet.

(11 February 1944 to an individual believer)

We cannot be sure of the authenticity of any of the phrases in the Old or the New Testament. What we can be sure of is when such references or words are cited or quoted in either the Quran or the Bahá'í writings.

(4 July 1947 to an individual believer)

We have no way of substantiating the stories of the Old Testament other than references to them in our own teachings, so we cannot say exactly what happened at the battle of Jericho.

(25 November 1950 to an individual believer)

Except for what has been explained by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we have no way of knowing what various symbolic allusions in the Bible mean.

(31 January 1955 to an individual believer)

From letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice:

The interpretation of biblical prophecies has long been the subject of controversy and speculation among religious scholars. As Bahá'ís, we know that we must turn to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi for authoritative guidance in these matters. When a subject has not been mentioned or explained in the Sacred Writings, we are free to consult other books and to consider the opinions of scholars if we wish to do so. This principle is affirmed in the following excerpts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian by his secretary to individual believers:

As regards what Mirza Abu'l-Fadl has said concerning the seven religions of the past. Shoghi Effendi wishes to emphasize that what is truly authoritative are the Master's words. In all such cases we should try and find out what He has said and abide by His words, even though they seem conflicting with the findings of modern scholars. If He does not say anything on the subject then the individual is free to accept or refute what scholars such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl say. Through the discussions of these the truth will ultimately be found. But at no time should their decision be considered as final.

As regards Confucianism, the Teachings contain no data on this subject, and the Guardian would therefore advise that you refer to authoritative books regarding the history and teachings of this Faith.

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to recommend your continued study of "Some Answered Questions" since this book contains the interpretations given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the meaning of some of the passages you mention from the Book of Daniel as well as other subjects found in the Old and New

Testaments. You will note that in addition to giving His explanations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages personal initiative in unravelling divine mysteries. For example, at the end of Chapter XX on “The Necessity of Baptism” He says: “This subject needs deep thought. Then the cause of these changes will be evident and apparent.” And at the end of Chapter XXX on “Adam and Eve”, after setting forth His own interpretation of the subject, He goes on to say: “This is one of the meanings of the Biblical story of Adam. Reflect until you discover the others.”

(17 January 1978 to an individual believer)

You ask for elucidation of the statement made on behalf of the Guardian in this letter of 11 February 1944, “When 'Abdu'l-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet.” Is it not clear that what Shoghi Effendi means here is that we cannot categorically state, as we do in the case of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, that the words and phrases attributed to Moses and Christ in the Old and New Testaments are Their exact words, but that, in view of the general principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh in the “Kitab-i-Iqan” that God's Revelation is under His care and protection, we can be confident that the essence, or essential elements, of what these two Manifestations of God intended to convey has been recorded and preserved in these two Books?

(19 July 1981 to an individual believer)

In studying the Bible Bahá'ís must bear two principles in mind. The first is that many passages in Sacred Scriptures are intended to be taken metaphorically, not literally, and some of the paradoxes and apparent contradictions which appear are intended to indicate this. The second is the fact that the text of the early Scriptures, such as the Bible, is not wholly authentic.

(28 May 1984 to an individual believer)

The Bahá'ís believe what is in the Bible to be true in substance. This does not mean that every word recorded in that Book is to be taken literally and treated as the authentic saying of a Prophet. A striking example is given in the account of the sacrifice which Abraham was called upon to make. The Guardian of the Faith confirms that the record in the Qur'an and the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, namely that it was Ishmael, and not Isaac as stated in the Old Testament, whom Abraham was to sacrifice, is to be upheld. In one of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to this discrepancy, and explains that, from a spiritual point of view, it is irrelevant which son was involved. The essential part of the story is that Abraham was willing to obey God's command to sacrifice His son. Thus, although the account in the Torah is inaccurate in detail, it is true in substance....

...The Bahá'ís believe that God's Revelation is under His care and protection and that the essence, or essential elements, of what His Manifestations intended to convey has been recorded and preserved in Their Holy Books. However, as the sayings of the ancient Prophets were written down some time later, we cannot categorically state, as we do in the case of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, that the words and phrases attributed to Them are Their exact words.

(9 August 1984 to an individual believer)