

Interpreting the Bible

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Most of us grew up hearing ministers explain the Bible, but a fresh study of scripture shows many explanations are wide of the mark! I invite you to study the topics below to learn and decide for yourself what Christ meant.

Introduction	Return and Resurrection of the Dead p.8
Literal and Spiritual Interpretation p.2	The Resurrection of Christ p.11
Principles of Bible Interpretation p.2	Christ's Ascension to Heaven p.13
The Great Test p.4	Was Jesus Christ God? p.13
The Seven Days of Creation p.5	What is Satan? p.15
Baptism p.6	Conclusion & References p. 17
Original Sin p.7	

Introduction:

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9:39)¹ (see also Isa 29:18)

What did Christ mean: "...that they which see might be made blind.", and what does that have to do with "judgment"? Maybe, just maybe, He wanted those of us who know and trust only the physical world or the outward forms of religion to be blinded to them by a new inner vision (insight) of the bright 'sun' of His spiritual reality, and thus transform our spiritual judgment.

No one but Christ knows the true meaning or meanings of His words, but it is evident that we cannot just interpret His words literally. By considering all uses of a word or phrase, we can gain a better understanding of God's guidance for us in Scripture. By reading the other 75+ uses of the word 'blind' in the Bible we find several that must be interpreted figuratively. For example Moses instructed: "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous." (Deu 16:19) (also 1Sa 12:3)

The following Bible passages and comments are offered to you

with the purpose of promoting unity among all people, that differences in interpreting scripture that divide us may be resolved so that we love one another and appreciate each other's views, even though they may differ from our own. This unity will attract unbelievers into faith in God.

Both Bahá'ís and Christians are students of the Bible. Both accept the Bible as true. Both accept the Divinity of Christ. In the words of a respected Baha'i leader: "Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found."²

*Portions of this document, scattered throughout, come from the booklet: "The Resurrection of All Mankind" by Dr. David Young.*³

The opinions expressed in these web pages constitute personal understanding and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Baha'i Faith or its teachings. For every quote on these pages I have studied the entire passage and often studied the key Hebrew or Greek words in it before offering my comments.

-Richard DeLoughery

Literal and Spiritual Interpretation:

There are two types of interpretations of Scripture: literal and spiritual. A 'literal' interpretation is the "explicit or primary meaning of a word or words."⁴ There are many Bible statements that must be interpreted literally, such as **"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:"** (Mark 12:29), or when Christ said **"Sell that ye have, and give alms,"** (Luke 12:33). As you can understand, even scriptural sentences interpreted literally, or at 'face value', usually give spiritual messages.

In addition, most of Christ's teachings and much of the Old Testament must be interpreted spiritually, figuratively. A few examples include:

- A. **"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** (John 3:3),
- B. **"Let the dead bury their dead..."** (Luke 9:60),
- C. **"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart..."** (Deut 10:16), and
- D. **"Then said Jesus...I am the door of the sheep."** (John 10:7)

Several passages from the Bible explain this:

- E. **"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a**

proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings*." (Proverbs 1:5-6) "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:...But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God...Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor 2:7,10,13,14) (also: II Cor 3:13-16)

* the word translated as 'dark sayings' is also translated as 'hard question, proverb, or riddle'. See Strong (5).

- F. "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter;" (Rom 2:29)
"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit..." (Phil 3:3)

Interpreting a passage literally should not exclude a spiritual interpretation of that passage, and vice versa. Usually both interpretations are necessary. Two examples:

- G. The Ten Commandments: (Exo 20:3-17; Deu 5:7-21) We must follow them to the letter and by the spirit or intent of each, considering the various meanings of each one.
- H. "After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias;... But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." (John 21:1-4) The disciples, including Peter and Thomas, knew it was Jesus, but not by his looks. He did appear to them, but not in a recognizable physical body.

Principles of Bible Interpretation:

1. The Bible is about God and spiritual truth. Every passage should be considered as presenting one or more spiritual truths unless it is obviously literal. Christ said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63)

2. We must have a pure heart, free of ego, past learning, suspicion, assumptions, and limitations. "And [Jesus] said... Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Mat 18:3, also 19:14 and Luke 18:16-17) The Greek word translated as "converted" means: "to

twist, i.e. turn quite around or reverse (literally or figuratively)".⁵ To understand scripture we must leave behind everything we think we know, and reverse our thinking and beliefs. Children are 'sponges' of knowledge, free of prejudice and self-righteousness, following their inspiration, without fear of what others might say, non-judgmental, and accepting of truth from where ever it comes without fear of hell or of following a false prophet, **until they are taught otherwise**. We must be like little children, but with an inner strength, and at times in the face of criticism and popular opinion, to truly learn and understand Biblical meanings.

“But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil [veil] is upon their [Jews] heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (II Cor 3:15-17)

3. Each person must seek the truth for him- or herself with reason and wisdom: “But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” (Deu 4:29), “Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord,...” (I Sam 12:7), "I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things,..." (Ecc 7:25), "Who is as the wise man? And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine..." (Ecc 8:1), “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” (Isa 1:18) “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Mat 7:7-8), “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.” (Acts 17:2) "These were more noble...in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11), "Prove all things: hold fast to that which is good." (I Thes 5:21). “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (II Tim.1:7) “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

Our intellect is a gift from God. To have wisdom and good judgment is to make decisions based on our own determination of the facts, and to accept another's interpretation only after investigation and contemplation. Spiritual truths, and the search for

them, can follow logical paths. As logical deductions and critical thinking have unraveled the mysteries of the physical creation to modern scientists, so can critical thinking draw out and reveal truths hidden in Scripture to the true seeker. Our intellect must be used to the fullest, or it is like burying the talents we were given (Mat 25:24-29).

"I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use."

--Galileo Galilei

4. Scripture has no contradictions. "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever." (Psalm 119:160) Based on this, we must accept the entire Bible as the Word of God. We must also conclude that Christ and the other authors of the Bible did not contradict each other or themselves regarding spiritual truths. Therefore, an important basis for interpreting a word or phrase in one passage of Scripture is how this word or phrase must be interpreted in other passages. For example, 'dead' is used many times in the Bible to refer to the physically dead (e.g. II Sam 18:20). But in several places, for example, "Let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9:60; also Prov 2:16-19, 21:16, Eph 2:5) it clearly refers to a spiritual condition such as, "Let the [spiritually] dead bury their [physically] dead." Thus, for each use of the word 'dead', or any other word in Scripture, we need to carefully consider its literal, physical interpretation, and several figurative, spiritual interpretations.

5. Consistency. When one phrase in a sentence must be interpreted spiritually, then other phrases in that sentence or passage must also be interpreted spiritually. For example: "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9:39) Since Christ did not come to make people physically blind, then this phrase and all phrases in this statement must be interpreted spiritually.

6. No one word or phrase can adequately represent any spiritual truth. Words can describe physical and emotional conditions. Spiritual truths are taught using parables, analogies, allegories, similes and symbols. Therefore, the spiritual meanings and lessons contained in any word, phrase, or story of scripture is limited by language itself.

7. No mere human knows all the interpretations. God, the Source of all Truth, is infinite. As part of God's creation, our minds are finite. Our minds are further limited by the lessons that have been impressed into them by parents and religious teachers that we assume are correct, but may, in fact, not be. Our obligation to God is to spend our life testing and expanding our understanding of Scriptures. Only the Manifestations of God (for example Moses and Christ) know the meanings of Their Words. We are but students, and we are fallible. We must be humble about our own understanding of the meanings of Scripture, and not impress them on others.

8. Obedience. "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them." (Deu 4:29-31) "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23, also John 14:21, 15:10) If we love God and His Messengers we must obey and live His teachings. To do this we must study and strive to understand the meanings of His words "...with all thy heart and with all thy soul." If we do this, God will guide us to the wisdom of His words.

The Great Test

Accepting God's Messengers, and how we interpret their words (Scripture) is God's test of our obedience to Him (Ex 16:4), our judgment (John 9:39), our purity of heart (Mat 5:8), our detachment from the world (Luke 18:18-30), and the assumptions that we think are fact (see 'E' and '2' above).

- A. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor 2:14)
- B. "...our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (II Cor 3:5-6)
- C. "As also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Pet 3:16, see

also Heb 4:12)

This test is directly related to the test God gave to the Jews by sending Christ to them in a way in which they did not expect. Most Jews rejected Christ because they accepted their rabbi's simple, literal interpretation of the Torah's (Old Testament) prophecies about Him, whereas Christ fulfilled many or most of them spiritually. They also did not expect Him to abrogate any of Moses' laws, or to speak using parables and spiritual symbolism. They also missed Daniel's prophecy of what year to expect Him (Dan 9:24-27; Eze 4:6)

History repeats itself all the time because we do not learn from history. It would be vain for Christians, or for people of any religion, to think that they would not make the same mistake about Christ's return as the Jews made at His first coming.

Biblical topics that must be interpreted spiritually:

The following are topics that have been interpreted literally by many well-meaning Christians, though spiritual interpretations are also essential for a complete understanding.

The Seven Days of Creation

Whether to interpret the seven days of creation, as described in Genesis (1:1-2:3), as a literal event or figurative / spiritual lesson has greatly divided Christian communities. It has also separated many scientists from Christianity because evolution clearly took place, and many believe it did so without a Creator. Thus evolution is rejected and denounced by many Christians, especially those who favor a literal interpretation of Genesis.

In fact both can be true. Bahá'ís believe that God created the universe with life and endowed it with the power to change physical forms over time. He also gave Mankind a soul and mind, which distinguishes Man from animals.

- A. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light...and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Gen 1:3-5) “And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night:...And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.” (Gen 1:16, 19) We all know that the spinning of the earth near the sun is the cause of our days and nights, yet the sun was supposedly not created until the fourth “day” of creation. Thus a literal interpretation is

impossible.

- B. “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,...” (Gen 2:4). Here the word “day” is singular, referring to all seven “days” of creation as one period of time. The same Hebrew word is used in this verse as is used throughout the first chapter. “Generations” is defined in “Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible”⁵ as “(plural only) descent, i.e. family; (figuratively) history.”

There is clear scientific evidence of evolution: populations of bacteria that were once susceptible to antibiotics are now resistant to the lower concentrations of antibiotic due to unhindered reproduction by a few survivors that could tolerate the initial dose of antibiotic, passing this trait of resistance on to all their offspring.

Baptism:

To baptize means to dip, cleanse or purify. Many Christians have been taught to believe that we are not 'saved' unless we are baptized in a ritual with water, yet John the Baptist said,

- A. "I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I cometh,...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Mat 3:11) No baptism is currently being done by holding a flame under a new believer or baby. Water and fire then must both refer to a spiritual cleansing, and/or a regeneration of our spirit of faith.
- B. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized is saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16) Jesus said that the penalty of damnation is for not believing in Him after hearing His teachings, not for failure to be baptized, nor for not hearing His teachings.
- C. “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much:...And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven....And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” (Luke 7:47-50)
- D. “And he [thief on the cross] said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43) Jesus’ statements in C and D clarify that baptism is not a requirement of salvation.
- E. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Mat 7:21) Christ clarifies that faith AND

obedience to God's will are required for salvation. He again does not mention baptism.

- F. "...they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)" (Acts 8:14-16)
This says that baptism itself does not bestow the gift of faith or salvation.
- G. "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:46-47) This clarifies that baptism by water was done after someone received the spirit of faith. (also Acts 2:41, 8:12, 8:13, 8:36-38, 18:8)
- H. "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." (Acts 11:15-16; see also I Cor 12:13) Being filled with the Holy Spirit (faith in God) is in itself baptism.
- I. "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (I Cor 15:29) The practice of being baptized for a dead person supports the symbolic nature of the ritual.
- J. "And he [John the Baptist] came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;" (Luke 3:3) Luke says baptism is repentance, not the pouring on or submersion in water. Peter is quoted saying about the same thing in Acts 2:38.
- K. "For Christ sent me [Paul] not to baptize, but to preach the gospel:" (I Cor 1:17) Understanding, believing, and obeying the message of Jesus Christ must be more important than being baptized.

Original Sin:

There is no passage in the in the Old or New Testaments that directly supports original sin. Christians who believe in original sin reference these statements by Paul:

- A. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor 15:22), (this is part of a discussion about spiritual resurrection, which is discussed in the next section.)
- B. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" (Rom 5:12)(also Rom 5:18).

But then consider the following:

- C. "Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which

he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like,... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live." (Ezek 18:14-17) Thus if we are not guilty for the sins of our parents, and Adam is the father of all mankind, no one has ever been guilty of his 'original' sin.

- D. "Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (Ezek 18:19-20) Ezekiel clearly states that God judges each person by their own acts, not by their parent's or their children's acts, whether good or bad.
- E. "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Mat 19:14) If they had original sin He could not have said this for they would not have been pure enough to be representative of the kingdom of heaven. Also, there is no reference in the Bible that the Jews, or Jesus and His followers, were performing infant baptism.
- F. "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law." (Rom 5:13) Until the law was brought to us (e.g. by Adam and Moses) breaking God's laws was not held against us. Similarly, little children are not held accountable for hitting or taking something, until they know and understand the rules.
- G. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rom 5:19) The phrases "many be dead" and "many were made sinners" appear to contradict the use of the word "all" in 'A' and 'B'. Since there can be no contradictions in the Bible, the phrase "For in Adam all die" must refer to our physical death, and "death passed upon all men" must refer to our potential for spiritual death. This is supported by the very next passage, H, below.
- H. "... For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." (Rom 5:15), and
- I. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Mat 16:27) "...the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds:" (Rom 2:5-6) and "...and they were judged every man according to their works." (Rev 20:13, also

II Cor 5:10)

In none of these passages is baptism or original sin mentioned.

Therefore, God will judge each person according to their acts, not according to whether they had been baptized to absolve them of an 'original' sin.

The Return or Resurrection of the Dead:

At the time of Christ, resurrection was a common belief attributed to many gods in the Mediterranean region, with some dating back to 3000 BC. Some gods also miraculously raised others from the dead. Many people did not believe that life continued in spirit after the death of their body.

Some Jewish people at that time believed that the dead would come back to life at the coming of the Messiah in the 'Last Day' **“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,”** (Dan 12:2, John 11:24) Others did not believe this: **“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.”** (Acts 23:8).

Some Christians today have the same expectation at Christ's return, yet Christ and Herod both clearly state that this would not be a physical resurrection. Upon study we can understand that 'resurrection', 'return', and 'rebirth' are all referring to the same thing: the spiritually dead coming back to spiritual life.

- A. **“But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?...So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”** (Job 14:10,12) This chapter is about the limited days we live on earth and that we do not come back to life like the sprouts from the root of a dead tree.
- B. In a vision while he was “in the spirit” Ezekiel brought dry bones back to life (37:1-10). **“Then he [God] said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live,...”** (Ezek 37:11-14) Since God said the bones “are the whole house of Israel...Therefore prophesy and say unto them...” it is apparent Ezekiel was not to speak

to bones, but to the people physically alive at that time. The bones without “breath” represent spiritually dead people. Their ‘graves’ must represent spiritual death, and coming “up out of your graves” means the spiritually dead will come back to spiritual life. Note that God called Ezekiel the “Son of man”. Christ called Himself the ‘Son of man’ numerous times, indicating He was performing the same role that God asked of Ezekiel 600 years earlier.

- C. **"Behold, I will send you Elijah [Elias] the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:"** (Mal 4:5) Jewish priests asked John the Baptist if he was Elias, but he denied that he was (John 1:21). Later, Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elias (Mat 11:13-14; also Luke 1:13-17). Since the Bible is true, and both John and Jesus spoke the truth, one explanation is that John the Baptist was the return of the station of Elias, a spiritual condition. Some of the Jews may have expected a physical return of Elias, and John knew he was not that. Also, John may not have known that he was the return of the station of Elias.
- D. **"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him."** (Mat 14:1-2) Herod Antipas was Jewish. This is a Biblical explanation of 'return' and 'resurrection'. This explains why the Jewish priests and Levites asked John the Baptist if he was Elias. They were expecting Elias to return in another person, not Elias' body that Elisha reported ascended into heaven (2 Ki 2:11). This meaning of 'return' should cause us to suspect that Jesus also may not return in ways that many Christians are expecting Him to (for example: on a cloud in the sky)!
- E. **"For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.... Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live... Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."** (John 5:21,24-25, 28-29) Based on Christ's words in the third and fourth lines above, this long passage could not possibly be referring to physically dead people coming back to physical life.

- F. “Jesus saith unto her [Martha], Thy brother [Lazarus] shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” (John 11: 23-26) Christ clearly says resurrection is a spiritual and eternal ‘coming back to life’ as a result of belief in Him. He did not say it is a physical event.
- G. Jesus was asked about a woman who had married seven brothers in turn: “Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham,... For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.” (Luke 20:33-38) (also Mark 12:23,25) Christ’s statement “Now that the dead are raised” indicates a spiritual resurrection had already occurred. Christ even used Moses as an example of someone who had been ‘dead’ and was resurrected when He spoke to God at the burning bush (Ex 3:2; Moses had previously murdered a man in His anger).

“I will raise him up at the last day.”

- H. “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:39-40) Believing in Christ, and “everlasting life” are spiritual conditions, so the other phrases must be spiritual conditions including being “raised up” in the “last day.”
- I. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44)
- J. “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:54) Since “eternal life” is a spiritual condition, then the other words and phrases must be spiritual conditions. As you can see, Christ used this phrase three times during His discourse on being the

“bread of life”. His words, the Word of God, are our bread, the food of our souls (see also Deu 8:3, Mat 4:4). Eating of His bread raises us up, resurrects us, to spiritual, everlasting life in the “last day” or the ‘age’ of His appearance. Therefore, if Christians believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead when Christ returns, then it must be a spiritual resurrection, the spiritually dead coming back to spiritual life based on a new message (bread).

- K. “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)
- L. “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his [Christ’s] resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” (Mat 27:52-3) Based on Christ’s explanation in ‘E’, this could not have been a physical resurrection. This also shows that being a believer in Christ during their life on earth was not a requirement for resurrection. In addition, Christ’s greatness cannot be based on His resurrection and showing Himself to the disciples, because these saints also rose from the dead and showed themselves to others, and they had been dead a long time!

In the following passages (M – Q) Paul explains that the resurrection is ‘raising up’ of our “spiritual body”, our soul, not a reanimation of our physical body.

- M. “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” (I Cor 15:31, 35-38) In a long passage (15:3-55) Paul explains that when we ‘die’ to the world (become detached from it) we are reborn as a spiritual person. He gives us a simple analogy showing that the seed that is sown in the soil is not simply made larger, but it has to ‘die’ to be transformed into a plant, a different ‘body’, that grows (raises) up out of the soil.
- N. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body...” (I Cor 15:42-4) Paul also is referring to when our physical body dies, our soul rises up.
- O. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the

kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” (I Cor 15:50) All of I Cor 15 is about the resurrection of our spirit of faith.

- P. “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:” “But God,... Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:” (Eph 2:1,4-6) Here Paul indicates that he and other believers in Christ had already been resurrected, or transformed from spiritually ‘dead’ people to spiritual life before they died physically.
- Q. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:26) Lest we forget.

The resurrection of Christ:

Many Christians believe that Christ physically arose from the dead, appeared to many of His followers, and will return either with the same physical body or in a ‘glorified’ body. Although there are a number of Bible quotes that indicate this is true (Mat 28:9, Luke 24:36-45), Christ was not recognized physically in about half of all His appearances after His crucifixion. Christ’s own words about resurrection quoted in the section above contradict this belief in a physical resurrection. His words below do also. We need to strive for one unified understanding of this.

- A. “Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain,...” (Hosea 6:1-3) Here Hosea is prophesizing Christ’s follower’s resurrection in three days, NOT Christ’s resurrection. [Note: since “revive”, “raise up”, and “live” are spiritual conditions, then “day” is also a spiritual time, not necessarily one physical day.]
- B. In Christ’s parable of the rich man and the beggar:
“...Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. (Luke 16:29-31) Since Christ taught that resurrection of the dead will not convince people to live the spiritual life taught by God’s Messengers, why would Christ physically come back from the dead? And why would Christians place

emphasis on believing in Christ's physical resurrection as key to salvation? Physical resurrection is also one of those "great signs and wonders" (Mat 24:24) that Christ Himself warned his followers to beware of.

- C. "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Mat 12:39-40)(Jon 1:17), "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." (Luke 11:30) Many Christians refer to this as Christ foretelling his resurrection. Yet the days don't add up. Christ died on a Friday afternoon, and resurrected sometime before Sunday morning, two nights and one day later.

Alternatively, if we consider the three days as three years in prophecy* then Christ's 'three days and three nights' were His three years of ministry in which He called people to turn once again to God to avoid destruction (40 years later in the first Jewish-Roman war, Luke 19:43-44), as did Jonas to the Ninevites (40 days later, Jon 3:4). Certainly there are other valid meanings.

*["I have appointed thee each day for a year." (Eze 4:6);
"After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise." (Num 14:34), see also
Gen 29:27-28]

- D. "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: ... she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener,..." (John 20:11,14-15) Mary Magdalene had spent many hours with Jesus, yet just 72 hours after His crucifixion she did not recognize Him or His voice.
- E. "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village ... while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?: ...And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and

brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.” (Luke 24:13,15-18,30-31) To have a different appearance and voice, and to disappear, can only be understood as Christ appearing in the spirit to these two disciples.

- F. “Then saith he [Christ] to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:27-9) John does not say that Thomas actually placed a finger or hand in Christ’s wounds. Therefore this passage is not proof of Christ’s physical resurrection.
- G. “After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias;...Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus... Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.” (John 21:1-4,12-13) Since John, Peter, Thomas and others did not recognize Jesus at this appearance, then His appearance was of His Spirit, not His physical body.
- H. “After that he appeared in another form unto two of them...” (Mark 16:12) For Christ to change forms, his resurrection could not have been with His physical body.
- I. “And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;... And last of all he was seen of me also,..” (I Cor 15:5-8) Paul includes his own experience in meeting Christ after the crucifixion as one of the resurrection appearances, yet all that he saw was “a light from heaven” (Acts 9:3). Therefore Christ’s appearances were not necessarily physical.
- J. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (I Cor 12:27); “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church:” (Col 1:18) After the crucifixion Christ’s followers are now His ‘body’.

In summary, after Christ’s martyrdom His disciples were grief-stricken and despondent. After several days Christ’s appearances to the disciples and His consoling and encouraging words gave them new life (resurrection). Whereas they had felt as moths, they became eagles soaring in the atmosphere of His love and power, and ultimately conquered the ‘world’, and spread His teachings to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Christ's Ascension to Heaven

Most Christians accept that Christ's physical body or a 'glorified' body ascended to heaven 40 days after his resurrection... "he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:... And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:3,9)

- A. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (John 3:13) Christ says that He "came down from heaven", yet we all know he was born as a baby and grew to manhood. Therefore His was a spiritual descent. Based on this, the following quote cannot refer to His physical ascent, and physical descent, as a mature man when He returns: "two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said,...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)
- B. "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38)
- C. "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?" (John 6:42)
- D. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:62-63)
- E. "Who in the days of his flesh..." (Heb 5:7) Paul is referring to Christ's past "days of...flesh". Thus Christ could not be physically ascended into heaven.

Jesus Christ was born of a woman. He had a physical body. His reference of being "in heaven" while He spoke, and of coming "down from heaven" and ascending "up to heaven", are references to the Holy Spirit, ascending, descending and being 'in' Him. Therefore 'ascend' and 'descend' have spiritual, symbolic meanings. Christ emphasizes (in D) that it is His words that bring life to His believers, not His physical resurrection.

Was Jesus Christ God?

Most Christians believe that God became Jesus Christ, that Christ

is God. To support this they point to statements of Christ such as these:

- A. "Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." (John 8:19, 14:7)
- B. "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30)
- C. "And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me." (John 12:45,14:9)
- D. "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me:..." (John 14:11; see also 14:20)
- E. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God....And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1-2, 14; also Heb. 1:2)

Christ is not God:

Yet, time and again Jesus differentiated Himself from God (and the Father). Here are a few examples:

- F. "... the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:24)(also John 12:49-50, 14:10)
- G. "... I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I." (John 14:28)
- H. "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30)(also John 5:19, 14:31, 8:28-29)
- I. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18)
- J. "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." (Luke 23:46)
- K. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." (Mat 24:36) If Christ was God, He would know the date of His own return.
- L. "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." (Mark 6:46) Would Jesus have prayed to Himself?
- M. "...Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18)
- N. "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape." (John 5:37; see also: 1 Tim 6:15-16)
- O. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)
- P. "Jesus saith unto her... I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:17) Christ is to ascend to His God, therefore Christ cannot be God.

Q. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" (1 Tim 2:5); "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,..." (Heb 12:24) Here Paul refers to Christ as a man, and distinct from God. In seven places Paul refers to Christ as the "mediator" (go-between, intercessor), not as "God".

Impossible for God to become flesh:

There are also several clear Biblical statements that God could NOT become mortal flesh (incarnate):

- R. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Ki 8:27)
- S. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6), and "God is a Spirit:" (John 4:24)
- T. "...the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see..." (1 Tim 6:15-16)

A perfect Mirror:

There is an alternative interpretation that brings into harmony and unity all of the above statements. It is that Christ is a perfect Mirror of all of God's power, knowledge, justice, and love. These quotes by Paul support this:

- U. "...Christ, who is the image of God,..." (2 Cor 4:4)
- V. "...beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,..." (2 Cor 3:18)
- W. "...of his dear Son:...Who is the image of the invisible God..." (Col 1:13, 15)
- X. "God, who ... spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, ... Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,..." (Heb 1:1-3)

Conclusion of 'Was Jesus Christ God?'

In the 'Mirror' analogy God is like the sun, and the Holy Spirit like the rays of sunlight. When we look at the Mirror (Christ) we see the Sun (God) perfectly reflected in It. We should be able to accept Christ as having both a temporary human life, and a Divine Station that we cannot comprehend, at one with God from everlasting to everlasting, but not God, even though Christ may say "I and my Father are one."

Re-read the quotes from A to V above. What does your heart tell

you?

Western Christian's insistence that Christ is God is a major reason generations upon generations of Jewish believers and followers of other faiths have not accepted Christianity. It is also the main reason that Orthodox Christians split away from the Roman Christians. Believers in none of the other faiths in this world believe that their Divine Messenger was God. Western Christians must now accept that this is an unfounded, non-scriptural doctrine. The concept of the 'Trinity' (not mentioned in the Bible) is an explanation that fails to unify all of the quotes above if the incarnation of God is insisted upon.

Since all of creation is one existence, then there must be one Creator, by whichever name we call Him. If there is one Creator, then all the religions of the world are one in essence. All of his Messengers (Manifestations) come from the same Source, all teach about the same loving Unknowable Essence, and all teach the same spiritual truths.

What is Satan?

A1. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Mat 16:21-23) Here Christ identifies Peter as Satan when Peter expresses the natural, worldly concerns that people have for a loved one. Peter later denied being an apostle of Christ three times (Luke 22:54-60), the same Peter (Rock) upon whom Christ "will build my church" and to whom He gave "...the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." (Mat 16:18-19).

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word 'Satan' is translated seven times as 'adversary' or 'adversaries' and once as 'withstand', e.g. see Num 22:22 or 1 Ki 11:23. In the New Testament 'Satan' refers to 'false accuser' or 'devil'. 'Devil' in the New Testament refers to a supernatural spirit of bad nature.⁵

Since Christ would not have founded His church upon someone who is evil, 'Satan' must be a symbolic title for the spiritual condition of attachment to worldly concerns, selfish desires, and popular actions that oppose, or are adverse to, a Manifestation of

God, or spiritual reality and transformation. Much of Bahá'u'lláh's writings are similar to Christ's, calling us to the highest levels of detachment from the world, standards of behavior, and purity of heart.

Christ continued His remarks after calling Peter Satan:

- A2. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mat 16:24) Note that He said we must deny our 'self' (Satan) and offer our life up in the path of God as Christ did.
- A3. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Mat 16:25) We can 'save' our worldly life by following our selfish, satanic desires, or the 'safe', 'tried-and-true' religion all around us, but when we do, we lose our spiritual life. By giving our talents and time selflessly in the path of God, we become transformed into our true, loving, spiritual self.
- A4. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat 16:26) True poverty is to "gain the world" and lose our faith in God. We can't just buy salvation with worldly accomplishments, just saying we believe, or attendance at religious gatherings.
- A5. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Mat 16:27) When Christ returns we are judged according to whether our works are motivated by selfishness, or selflessness in the path of God.

In the above four sentences Christ explained what 'Satan' was: our Self.

- B. "Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve." (Luke 22:3; also John 6:70) Did the spirit or soul of Peter enter Judas, or is the word 'Satan' again used as a symbol of an adversary to God's will, of unbelief, fears, and attachment to the world?
- C. "Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." (Mat 15:17-20) Here Jesus explains that what defiles us spiritually comes out of our heart. That which is around us or enters us

does not defile us. Therefore Satan is not some evil spirit that enters us and defiles us, but is instead our selfish, worldly desires that spring from our heart. We also must not let the desires of selfish people influence our hearts. See also, the ten commandments (Ex. 20:17, Deu. 5:21)

- D. "These words spake Jesus,...Father...glorify thy Son,...As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal,..." (John 17:1-3) Since Christ did not have physical power over people, this must mean that our faith in Christ gives us the spiritual power over our worldly desires and fears, i.e. Satan.
- E. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.... the tempter came to him,...and setteth him [Christ] on a pinnacle of the temple,...and showeth him [Christ] all the kingdoms of the world,..." (Mat 4:1-10) Since it was not physically possible for Christ to sit on the pinnacle of the temple while being in the desert, nor see all the kingdoms of the world, then we must conclude that the tempter did not literally come to Him, but spiritually arose in His heart.
- F. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace..." (I Cor 14:33) "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good..." (Gen 1:31) Everything God created is good, therefore He did not create Satan. Instead Satan must represent our heedlessness, spiritual emptiness and darkness (death), and selfishness in our hearts.
- G. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,..." (I Cor 4:3-4) So Satan (the god of this world), our worldly desires, can blind our mind to spiritual truth, and even cause us to oppose it.

Conclusion:

Based on Christ's own words, a spiritual interpretation must be the basis of any study of the Bible. Therefore, a study of how Christ will return, and how we will know who to accept as His return must also be based on the spiritual meanings of the passages that speak about His return.

References:

- ¹ Quotes from the Bible used in these web pages are from the King James version.

- ² Abdu'l-Baha', Selected Writings of Abdu'l-Baha', p. 30.
- ³ The Resurrection of All Mankind: A Baha'i Exploration of Christian Topics, by David Young.
- ⁴ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1969.
- ⁵ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, James Strong, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.