

The comprehensiveness of these exegeses naturally invite the question of whether 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself was foretold in the Bible; indeed, the omission of such might be considered peculiar in light of his station as the 'Center of the Covenant', 'Interpreter of the Word of God', and 'Perfect Exemplar' of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.[5] In this paper, it is suggested that `Abdu'l-Bahá was indeed prophesied in the Bible, and that through indirect references in his own exegeses, there emerges indications that `Abdu'l-Bahá was the 'seventh angel' described in the canonical Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation. This view is here suggested based on four main criteria: firstly, chronology, secondly, association with the Book of the Covenant, thirdly, spiritual qualifications, and fourthly, proclamation and diffusion of the Faith. These are each considered in turn below, following an initial introduction to the 'seventh angel'.

Identity of the 'seventh angel'

The Book of Revelation, which is the final book of the New Testament, introduces in its eighth chapter a series of seven angels: 'And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.' (Rev 8:2). The final, or 'seventh angel', is described in the tenth, eleventh, and sixteenth chapters, and is of particular interest to Bahá'is inasmuch as `Abdu'l-Bahá has associated the 'seventh angel' with the proclamation and diffusion of the Bahá'í Faith.[6] The first description of this 'seventh angel' is provided in the tenth chapter: 'And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.' (Rev 10:1) The interpretation of the symbolism in this and related verses can be procured through the application of Iqanic principles; [7] the focus of the present paper, however, is the interrelation of existing exegeses pertaining to the 'seventh angel'. `Abdu'l-Bahá, in his commentary on the eleventh chapter, provides the following explanation:

The seventh angel is a man qualified with heavenly attributes, who will arise with heavenly qualities and character. Voices will be raised, so that the appearance of the Divine Manifestation will be proclaimed and dif-fused. In the day of

the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts, and at the epoch of the divine cycle of the Omnipotent which is promised and mentioned in all the books and writings of the Prophets—in that day of God, the Spiritual and Divine Kingdom will be established, and the world will be renewed;[8]

In the following sections, the view that `Abdu'l-Bahá was alluding to himself is suggested based on his unique fulfillment of four criteria derived from this and other Biblical exegeses.

Chronology

The appearance of each of the seven angels proceeds sequentially inter-spersed with three woes (Rev 8-16); these three woes, `Abdu'l-Bahá explains, relate to the appearance of specific Manifestations of God: 'The first woe is the appearance of the Prophet, Muhammad, the son of `Abdull'áh peace be upon Him! The second woe is that of the Báb to Him be glory and praise! The third woe is the great day of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts and the radiance of the Beauty of the Promised One.'[9]

As the 'sixth angel' is described as appearing after the first woe (Rev 9:12--13), and the 'seventh angel' is described as appearing after the third woe (Rev 11:14-15), a basic chronology can be proposed: (i) first to fifth angels (ii) appearance of Prophet Muhammed, (iii) sixth angel, (iv) appearance of the Báb, (v) appearance of Bahá'u'lláh, (vi) seventh angel. The appearance of the 'seventh angel' after the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh is also consistent with the exegesis given by `Abdu'l-Bahá above. It is suggested that a more accurate time-frame for the appearance of the 'seventh angel' can be resolved by reference to the sixteenth chapter of the book of revelation:

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell:

and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great. (Rev 16:17-21)

Speaking at Stanford University in October 1912, `Abdu'l-Bahá related these events to the approach of World War I: [10]

We are on the eve of the Battle of Armageddon referred to in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation. The time is two years hence, when only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe. The social unrest in all countries, the growing religious scepticism antecedent to the millennium, and already here, will set aflame the whole of Europe as is prophesied in the Book of Daniel and in the Book (Revelation) of John. By 1917 kingdoms will fall and cataclysms will rock the earth. [11]

As the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation depicts these events as occurring after the 'seventh angel poured out his vial into the air' (Rev 16:17), it can be concluded that the 'seventh angel' would 'pour out his vial' before World War I. Taken together with the aforementioned appearance of the 'seventh angel' after the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, this would suggest a very narrow window of 22 years, between 1892 and 1914, for this prophecy relating to the 'seventh angel' to be fulfilled; thus chronologically, the seventh angel was active during the Third Epoch of the Heroic Age (1892-1921), therefore implicating the Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

This view is also consistent with the indication that the 'seventh angel' would appear before 'that day of God, [when] the Spiritual and Divine Kingdom will be established, and the world will be renewed'. [12] These words closely match `Abdu'l-Bahá's exegesis of Daniel 12:12, where the year 1963 is foretold as the time when 'the teachings of God be firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from the East even unto the West'; [13] the Guardian emphasized that these were references to occurrences 'within the Faith, not occurrences outside the Faith', and were fulfilled with the Ten-Year Crusade (1953-1963). [14] In summary, three main chronological indications are associated with the 'seventh angel': (i) appearance after the Ministry of

Bahá'u'lláh

in 1892, (ii) active before World War I in 1914, and (iii) active before the Ten-Year Crusade from 1953-1963. These considerations are suggestive of `Abdu'l-Bahá as the 'seventh angel'. This interpretation finds further support in three additional criteria described below.

Association

with the Book of the Testament

Describing the 'seventh angel', the tenth

chapter of the Book of Revelation prophesies: 'And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,' (Rev 10:2). Although an exegesis

of the tenth chapter of the Book of Revelation is not present in any available Bahá'í

Writings, there is some overlap between this chapter and the eleventh chapter, for which an

exegesis by `Abdu'l-Bahá is extant. This enables the identity of the 'little book' to be suggested by reference to Revelation 11:19: -'And the temple of God

was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.' (Rev 11:19) This verse also overlaps with Revelation 16:18 above, and in both cases is

associated intimately with the 'seventh angel'. `Abdu'l-Bahá provides the following explanation of this verse:

And there was

seen in His temple the ark of His Testament that is to say, the Book of His Testament will appear in His Jerusalem, the Epistle of the Covenant will be established, and the meaning of the Testament and of the Covenant will become evident. The renown of God will overspread the East and West, and the proclamation of the Cause of God will fill the world. The violators of the Covenant will be degraded and dispersed, and the faithful cherished and glorified, for they cling to the Book of the Testament and are firm and steadfast in the Covenant. And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail, meaning that after the appearance of the Book of the Testament there will be a great storm, and the lightnings of the anger and the wrath of God will flash, the noise of the thunder of the violation of the Covenant will resound, the earthquake of doubts will take place, the hail of torments will beat upon the violators of the Covenant, and even those who profess belief will fall into trials and temptations.[15]

The Book of the Testament (also known as the

Book of the Covenant, or the Kitab--i-'Ahd), was the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh,

wherein `Abdu'l-Bahá was appointed as his successor.[16]

The 'violation of the Covenant' in relation to this book pertains primarily to the half brother of `Abdu'l-Bahá, Muhammed Ali, who disputed the leadership of `Abdu'l-Bahá

shortly after Bahá'u'llah's ascension in 1892, and who died in 1937 with his claims dismissed by the vast majority

of the Bahá'í community; indeed, his support had 'faded into insignificance' by

the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá's journeys to the West in 1910.[17] Therefore, disputes over the Kitab-i-`Ahd described in this exegesis were confined almost entirely to the Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá, which supports the chronology outlined

in the first criterion. The relation of these events to the 'seventh angel' inferred from the above exegesis suggests that the identity of the 'little book' was the Kitab-i-`Ahd, through which `Abdu'l-Bahá was invested with his authority, and that the 'seventh angel' was `Abdu'l-Bahá himself.

Heavenly attributes, qualities, and character

`Abdu'l-Bahá described

the 'seventh angel' as a 'man qualified with heavenly attributes, who will arise with heavenly qualities and character'.[18] Although the Bahá'í writings emphasize the development of heavenly attributes, qualities, and character in the life of every individual, it would be erroneous to draw any comparison between the heavenly qualifications of the individual believer and those of `Abdu'l-Bahá, to whom this description most aptly applies. The distinction is so vast, that in relation to Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, the

Guardian declared himself 'infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature'.[19] Speaking on the unique distinctions of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian wrote:

He alone had been accorded the privilege of being called 'the Master,' an honor from which His Father had strictly excluded all His other sons. Upon Him that loving and unerring Father had chosen to confer the unique title of 'Sirru'lláh' (the Mystery of God), a designation so appropriate to One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His Fore-runner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with super-human knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light. To Him, whilst in Adrianople, that same Father had, in the Suriy-i-Ghusn (Tablet of the Branch), referred as 'this sacred and glorious

Being, this Branch of Holiness,' as 'the Limb of the Law of God,' as His 'most great favor' unto men, as His 'most perfect bounty' conferred upon them, as One through Whom 'every mouldering bone is quickened,' declaring that 'whoso turneth towards Him hath turned to-wards God,' and that 'they who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch are lost in the wilderness of error.
[20]

The belief that `Abdu'l-Bahá would remain entirely unparalleled as the perfect exemplar of His Father's teachings, and that there could be none so qualified as `Abdu'l-Bahá in 'heavenly attributes' and 'heavenly qualities and character', was further emphasized by the Guardian:

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light ... [the Guardian] remains essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son.[21]

Voices will be raised

An additional description of the 'seventh angel' provided by `Abdu'l-Bahá refers to his activities: 'Voices will be raised, so that the appearance of the Divine Manifestation will be proclaimed and diffused.'[22] As with other quotes from the Some Answered Questions compilation, these words were recorded in interviews with `Abdu'l-Bahá during the years 1904-1906, when he remained confined to Akka as a prisoner.[23]

This description can therefore be interpreted as prophetic of his own approaching liberty and subsequent three-year world-wide teaching campaign beginning in 1910.

In Egypt, Europe, and North America, `Abdu'l-Bahá 'proclaimed and diffused' His Father's teachings and the Bahá'í Faith was promulgated in the West at diverse gatherings, including churches, universities, and homes, and was widely reported in hundreds of newspapers.[24]

Writing on the achievements of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian wrote:

Through His

unremitting labors, as reflected in the treatises He composed, the thousands of Tablets He revealed, the discourses He delivered, the prayers, poems and commentaries He left to posterity, mostly in Persian, some in Arabic and a few in Turkish, the laws and principles, constituting the warp and woof of His Father's Revelation, had been elucidated, its fundamentals restated and interpreted, its tenets given detailed application and the validity and indispensability of its verities fully and publicly demonstrated. [25]

This

criterion of 'proclamation and diffusion of the Faith' might be said to apply to

any teacher of the Bahá'í Faith; for example, writing in 1954, the Guardian made specific mention of a range of outstanding Bahá'í teachers: Marion Jack, Martha

Root, Lua Getsinger, May Maxwell, Hyde Dunn, Susan Moody, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Ella Bailey and Dorothy Baker; [26]

however, these individuals were often contemporaneous with `Abdu'l-Bahá, and even directly inspired by him after attending his various talks – as was the case with Martha Root, whom the Guardian acclaimed as the 'archetype of Bahá'í teachers'. [27]

Therefore, it can be suggested that this

criterion, though applicable to Bahá'í teachers in general, applies more fully to `Abdu'l-Bahá, whose example inspired the methods and activities of all Bahá'í teachers.

Discussion

In the present paper, it is suggested that the

'seventh angel' foretold in the Bible was fulfilled in `Abdu'l-Bahá. This conclusion

arises from four main interpretations: (i) Biblical chronology, supported with

the exegeses of `Abdu'l-Bahá, indicating that the time-frame for the appearance

of the 'seventh angel' would be after the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, before World

War I, and before the Ten-Year Crusade, (ii) association between the 'seventh angel' and contention relating to the Kitab-i-`Ahd, which was largely confined to the Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (iii) congruence between `Abdu'l-Bahá and the

description that the 'seventh angel' is 'qualified with heavenly

attributes' and 'heavenly qualities and character', and (iv) alignment between

`Abdu'l-Bahá's world-teaching campaign and the description that 'Voices will be raised, so that the appearance of the Divine Manifestation will be proclaimed and diffused.'

One question which arises naturally from this

interpretation is why `Abdu'l-Bahá would make only allusion to His fulfillment

of these prophecies, rather than declaring it overtly? On this question we can but speculate. One clue can be found in the preface to *Some Answered Questions*, where Laura Clifford Barney writes 'In these lessons, He is the teacher adapting Himself to His pupil', and in a similar strain, 'the teachings were made simple, to correspond to my rudimentary knowledge, and are therefore in no way complete and exhaustive'.[28]

The possibility that his exegeses were tailored to the needs and capacity of his 'pupils' are suggested in other sources too; for example, Madame Bernard remarked 'The greatest proof of the Master's station is his intimate perception of the need and capacity of each one who comes to him.'[29]

Other considerations may also apply. Perhaps this was an expression of his great humility, and/or he considered it a potential distraction from his Father's teachings; indeed, one can easily imagine what reaction and distraction might have been provoked during his teaching campaigns to the West had the matter been widely reported.

The topic of the 'seventh angel' is also pertinent to the Covenant, inasmuch as a section of Covenant breakers have found scope within `Abdu'l-Bahá's exegesis to declare the door wide open to claiming 'seventh angelhood', thus leveraging their misplaced claims for leadership. The belief that no less than three chapters of a Book in the New Testament refers to themselves has already proven an insatiable prospect for victims of egotism and vainglory. Recent examples of individuals claiming the designation 'seventh angel' include Lelend Jensen from the covenant-breaking group 'Bahá'ís under the provision of the covenant',[30] and the self-titled 'Maitreya' from the 'Mission of Maitreya' who has not only found scope within the exegesis of `Abdu'l-Bahá to claim 'seventh angelhood', but also to claim authorship of Divine Revelation, in clear violation of the thousand-year injunction of Bahá'u'lláh [31],[32]; it seems reasonable to predict that further examples will emerge in the future.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, `Abdu'l-Bahá, who – it has been herein suggested – was the only realistic candidate for the 'seventh angel', was seemingly disinclined from even making mention of it. This, it would appear, is another demonstration of the Bahá'í ideal of self-effacement in action; as `Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed in reference to the Tablet of the Branch, [33] 'the true meaning, the real significance, the innermost secret of these verses, of these very words, is my own servitude to the sacred Threshold of the Abha Beauty, my complete self-effacement, my utter nothingness before Him. This is my resplendent crown, my most precious adorning. On this I pride myself in the

kingdom of earth and heaven. Therein I glory among the company of the well-favored!"[34]

Notes

[1] `Abdul-Bahá, and Barney, Laura Clifford. Some answered questions / collected and tr. from the Persian of `Abdu'l-Bahá by Laura Clifford Barney (Baháí Pub. Committee, Wilmette, Ill. : 1947; hereinafter SAQ) 47-52 – (SAQ 47-52)

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[18]
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[19]
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[21]
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[22]
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[24]
Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh* 59-60

[25]
Effendi, *God Passes By* 314

[26]

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[31] 'Maitreya', Holiest of the Holies (Thoth) – the Last Testament (7th edition, Eternal Divine Path, The Mission of Maitreya, 1982), 563 – (Maitreya, Thoth 563)

[32] Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book (trans.

Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 1992), 32 – (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas 32)

[33]

The Tablet of the Branch, or the Súrih-i-Ghusn, was a tablet by Bahá'u'lláh which confirmed the very high station of Abdu'l-Bahá ('the Branch of Holiness')

[34]

WOB 138

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