

Bahá'ís

Origins

The Bahá'í faith developed from the beliefs of the Muslim Shias. The Shias believe that the authority of Muhammad was handed down to successive leaders, known as the Imams. The twelfth of these, Mahdi, is said to have gone into hiding in 873 and to be still alive. Since going into hiding, he has supposedly been communicating via intermediaries known as Báb (gates). The Bahá'ís do not regard themselves as a branch of Islam. In 1844 a young Iranian said that he was the next Báb and claimed that a prophet would soon reveal himself. He and his followers were persecuted. The Báb was killed in 1850.

In 1852 one of the persecuted followers, whilst in prison in Teheran, claimed that he was the prophet spoken of by the Báb, and called himself Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God). Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í religion. He was exiled on numerous occasions. In 1863 he arrived in Baghdad. Later he was sent to Constantinople and then to Adrianople. He finally came to Acre in Palestine as a prisoner in 1868. Whilst in Acre he wrote a key Bahá'í text known as the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. He died in Acre in 1892. After his death, successive leaders in the first half of the twentieth century spread the Bahá'í faith around the world. Bahá'ís regard Bahá'u'lláh as the latest in a line of divinely inspired prophets and messengers. Other prophets which they place in this line include Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and Krishna. They expect other messengers from God in the future.

Today

The faith currently has five million followers in over 200 countries. Since 1957, Bahá'ís have been led by the Universal House of Justice, based at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. The community is represented internationally by the Bahá'í International Community, whose areas include peace-building, human rights, education, health and sustainable development, and at the United Nations by the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office.

What the mainstream says

- Humanity is one single race.
- The day has come for the unification of humanity in one global society.
- God has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed and nation, and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilisation.
- All forms of prejudice should be abandoned.
- Women should be assured of full equality of opportunity with men.
- Religious truth is unified and relative.
- Extremes of poverty and wealth should be eliminated.
- Education should be universal.
- Each person should independently search for truth.
- True religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

(Source: <http://info.bahai.org>)

Suggested initial Scriptural approach

Paul's statement that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26) provides a perspective on humanity as a single race with which the Bahá'ís should have some sympathy. The unity of the Kingdom can then be explained, showing how it will begin on the day when Christ "will judge the world in righteousness" (v. 31), showing that the unity will be based on the "one faith" (Eph. 4:5) and the blood of Christ, "who hath made both one" (Eph. 2:14).