

Some Answered Questions, The Rebukes Addressed by God to the Prophets

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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The Rebukes Addressed by God to the Prophets

Question: Certain words of rebuke have been addressed to the Prophets of God in the Sacred Scriptures. To whom are they addressed and to whom do they ultimately refer?

Answer: Every divine utterance that takes the form of a rebuke, though it be outwardly addressed to the Prophets of God, is in reality directed to Their followers. The wisdom of this is naught but unalloyed mercy, that the people might not be dismayed, disheartened, or burdened by such reproaches and rebukes. These words are therefore outwardly addressed to the Prophets, but, even so, they are inwardly intended for the followers and not for the Messenger.

Moreover, the mighty and sovereign monarch of a land represents all who inhabit that land; that is, whatsoever he may utter is the word of all, and whatsoever covenant he may conclude is the covenant of all, for the will and purpose of all his subjects is subsumed in his own. Likewise, every Prophet is the representative of the entire body of His followers. Therefore, the covenant that God makes with Him and the words that He addresses to Him apply to all His people.

Now, the divine reproach and rebuke tends to burden and afflict the hearts of the people, and the consummate wisdom of God demands, therefore, such a form of address. For example, it appears from the Torah itself that the Israelites rebelled against Moses, saying: "We cannot fight the Amalekites, for they are mighty, fierce, and courageous." God then spoke with rebuke to Moses and Aaron, although Moses was in complete obedience and not in rebellion.[123] Surely such a glorious Being, Who is the channel of God's grace and the champion of His law, must be obedient to the divine command.

These holy Souls are like the leaves of a tree which are stirred into motion by the breeze and not of Their own accord, for They are attracted by the breaths of the love of God and have forsaken Their own will. Their word is the word of God; Their commandment is the commandment of God; Their prohibition is the prohibition of God. They are even as this glass globe whose light comes from the flame of the lamp. Although the light appears to emanate from the glass, in reality it proceeds from the flame. Similarly, the movement and repose of the Prophets of God, Who are His Manifestations, proceed from revelation and not from mere human whim. Were it not so, how could the Prophet act as a faithful representative and chosen envoy of God? How



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could He promulgate God's commandments and prohibitions? All the shortcomings ascribed to the Manifestations of God in the Sacred Scriptures must therefore be understood in this light.

Praise be to God that you have come here and met the servants of God! Have you inhaled from them aught save the fragrance of the good-pleasure of the Lord? Indeed, no! You have seen with your own eyes how they strive night and day to no other end but to exalt the Word of God, to foster the education of the souls, to rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind, to ensure spiritual progress, to promote universal peace, to show forth kindness and goodwill to all peoples and nations, to sacrifice themselves for the common good, to forsake their own material advantage, and to promote the virtues of the world of humanity.

Let us return to our subject. In the Torah it is said in Isaiah 48:12: "Hearken unto Me, O Jacob and Israel, My called; I am He; I am the first, I also am the last." It is evident that the intended meaning is not Jacob who was called Israel, but the Israelites. Also in Isaiah 43:1 it is said: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine."



Furthermore, in Numbers 20:23–4 it is said: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah"; and in 20:13: "This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them."

Observe that it was the people of Israel who had rebelled, but the reproach was outwardly addressed to Aaron and Moses, as it is said in Deuteronomy 3:26: "But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter."

Now, this reproach and rebuke was in reality addressed to the children of Israel, who, on account of their rebellion against the commandments of God, were made to dwell for a long period in the barren desert beyond the Jordan, until the time of Joshua. This reproach and rebuke appeared to be addressed to Moses and Aaron, but in reality it was directed to the people of Israel.

Similarly, in the Qur'án it is said to Muḥammad: "We have granted thee a manifest victory, that God may forgive thee thy past and future sins." [124] Now, these words, though apparently addressed to Muḥammad, were in reality meant for all His people; and this proceeds from the consummate wisdom of God, as we said previously, so that hearts might not be troubled, perplexed, or dismayed.

How often have the Prophets of God and His universal Manifestations confessed in Their prayers to Their sins and shortcomings! This is only to instruct other souls, to inspire and encourage them to be humble and submissive before God, and to acknowledge their own sins and shortcomings. For these holy Souls are sanctified above every sin and freed from every fault. For example, it is said in the Gospel that a man came to Christ and called Him "Good Master". Christ answered, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." [125] Now, this did not mean—God forbid!—that Christ was a sinner, but rather His intention was to teach



humility, lowliness, meekness, and modesty to the man He was addressing. These blessed Souls are light, and light cannot be united with darkness. They are life everlasting, and life cannot be gathered in with death. They are guidance, and guidance cannot be brought together with waywardness. They are the very essence of obedience, and obedience cannot join hands with rebellion.

In brief, our meaning is that the rebukes recorded in the Sacred Scriptures, though outwardly addressed to the Prophets—the Manifestations of God—are in reality intended for the people. Were you to peruse the Bible, this matter would become clear and evident.