

Talk at Home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Parsons

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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1700 Eighteenth Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

Notes by Joseph H. Hannen

The address delivered last evening in the Jewish synagogue evidently disturbed some of the people, including the revered rabbi who called upon me this afternoon. Together we went over the ground again, which I shall now review for your benefit.

It was not possible to make the subject completely plain to the rabbi last night, as he was very much pressed for time, but today the opportunity was sufficient for a reconsideration of the statements in detail. I wish you to understand them thoroughly and memorize them in order that you may discourse with the Jews and thus, perchance, become instrumental in leading them aright.

The quintessence of our subject was this: What is the mission of the Prophet, and what is the object of a divine law? In answer we stated: There is no doubt that the purpose of a divine law is the education of the human race, the training of humanity. All mankind may be considered as pupils or children who are in need of a divine Educator, a real Teacher. The essential requirement and qualification of Prophethood is the training and guidance of the people. Therefore, we shall first consider the efficacy of the teachings of those who have been followed and accepted as the Prophets of God. The question that must be answered is: Have They taught mankind? Have They proved Themselves efficient Educators?



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AUDIO

Among Them was Moses. We find that He appeared as the leader of the children of Israel during a period of their captivity. They were in a state of extreme humiliation, ignorance and heedlessness, living in a very lowly manner in Egypt under conditions of life worse than death. Imagine an ignorant people, downtrodden and oppressed, thoughtless, negligent and mentally darkened, held in subjection as slaves. Moses was appointed for their deliverance and training. He guided them, led them out of bondage into the Holy Land, uplifted them from ignorance and despair, trained them so that they rose from a condition of lowliness and subjection into one of honor and importance, and enabled them to reach a high degree of perfection. They became proficient in sciences and arts, attained a lofty plane of civilization, honorable and esteemed among nations, whereas formerly they had been lowly and despised. They were ignorant; they became intelligent, finally reaching that period of supremacy and power witnessed in the Solomonic[pg 412] sovereignty. Their name became widespread throughout the world, and they were esteemed for distinct virtues. Even the philosophers of Greece went to Palestine to drink from the fountains of their wisdom and sit at the feet of their sages. All these facts prove that Moses was a Prophet and a Teacher.

As to Christ: He was a single, unique and lowly individual Who appeared at a time when the Israelitish nation had fallen from the heights of its glory to the lowest condition of bondage and contempt, subject to the tyranny of the Roman Empire, living under a yoke of humiliation, ignorant and negligent of God. The historical records of the Holy Books confirm these statements. Christ — this single and unique Personage — appeared amongst these despised and degraded people, reflecting a divine power and the potency of the Holy Spirit. He unified the various peoples and nations of the world, brought them together in fellowship and agreement and gathered them beneath the overshadowing protection of one Word. His prestige and mention were not confined to the children of Israel alone, who were at that time a limited race and people, but His spiritual power had also permeated and united great influential nations who had been warlike and hostile, such as the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Chaldeans, Syrians and Assyrians. He dispelled their hostility, healed their hatred, made them a united people, and by His Word created the utmost love amongst them so that they advanced immeasurably in the degrees of education and human perfection, thereby attaining a never-ending glory.

The Jews had become dispersed and widely scattered. This single and unique Personage overcame all the then known world, founding an everlasting sovereignty, a mighty nation indeed. Such a result proved Him to be a great man, the first Educator of His time, the first Teacher of His period. What proofs could be greater than these? What would be more convincing than this evidence that a single individual resuscitated so many nations and peoples, unified so many tribes and sects, removed so much warfare and hatred? Undoubtedly, such accomplishment could be wrought

only through the power of God and not by mere human effort, which is altogether incapable of producing these mighty results.

When Christ appeared, the Jews pronounced Him an enemy of Moses. Pharisaical rabbis of that age declared Him to be the destroyer of the Mosaic law and the institutes of the Torah. They proclaimed that He would bring great misfortune to the people of Israel, considering Him the violator of the holy Sabbath and destroyer of the Temple of Solomon. Therefore, they turned away [pg 413] from Him. Let us investigate this and discover whether such accusations were true or false. We will find that in reality Christ caused the name and prestige of Moses to become widespread. Through His efforts and teaching the Book of Moses, the Bible, became known everywhere. In fifteen hundred years there had been but one translation of the Old Testament, the Torah, which translation was made from Hebrew into Greek. But through the instrumentality of Christ's message and teachings it was translated into six hundred tongues and spread to every part of the world. All the kings and prophets of Israel were unable to promulgate the teachings of Judaism and the name of Moses beyond the borders of Palestine, whereas through Christ Judaism became an established religion in Asia, Africa, Europe and the world generally. Through the message of Christ, Moses was everywhere proclaimed a Prophet of God and His Book the Book of God. Shall we consider this Personage an enemy or a friend of Moses?

Justice is needed; we must render fair judgment upon this question. Had He been an enemy, He would not have allowed the name and teachings of Moses to become widespread in the world. He would not have promulgated the law and principles of the Torah. Would there have been any mention of Moses in America? Could even the name of Judaism have reached this part of the world through any other instrumentality? Undoubtedly, it was owing to the blessed agency and influence of Christianity that Judaism became established in this western world. Moses had no better friend and sympathizer than Christ. Consider how the illiterate among the Israelites conceal the reality of these facts and continue the delusion that Christ was an enemy of Moses. All Christians believe in Moses. They declare that He was a Man of God, the Interlocutor and Prophet of God, that His Book was the Book of God, that the people of Israel were the people of God and that all the prophets of Israel were valid and true. They offer unlimited praise, sincere eulogy, and manifest unlimited love for the religion of Moses. What harm comes from this? And if the Jews should say that Christ was also the Word of God, the Spirit of God, what harm could follow this statement? Just these few words would be the cause of reconciling the Christians and Jews. The Christians accept Moses and His Book. What harm have they suffered on account of this belief? Have they lost anything because of it?

In answer to all these questions the rabbi answered, "No."

We continued: What harm could result if the Jews were in a similar attitude toward Christianity, declaring that Christ was the [pg 414] Word of God, that the Gospel is the Book of God? Such an attitude as this would cause the enmity of many centuries to pass away. If we declare that Moses was the Prophet of God and that His Book was the law of God, does it harm our religious standpoint? Not at all. Furthermore, every nation is proud of its great men and heroes even though those great ones may have been atheists or agnostics. Today France glorifies Napoleon Bonaparte, saying, "He was a French military genius," whereas, in reality, he was a tyrant. They say, "Voltaire was ours," although Voltaire was an atheist. "Rousseau was a great man of this nation," and yet Rousseau was irreligious. France is proud of these great men. Feasts are held commemorating them, their names are perpetuated in special days, their memories treasured in prominent places, and there is music and celebration in their honor. The nation is proud of them. And now, do you consider these great men of France greater than Jesus of Nazareth? It is evident that in comparison with Jesus Christ they are as nothing. Consider the grandeur and majesty of Jesus in contrast with such men as we have mentioned. Consider Him from the standpoint of fame and renown. Where is the station of Christ, and where is their station? What comparison is there? In reality, Christ is incomparable. What harm, then, could come from your declaration that Jesus of Nazareth was a great man of Israelitish birth and, therefore, we love Him? That we have given to the world a great man indeed? That this mighty Personage, Whose Word has spread throughout the world, Who has conquered the East and the West, was an Israelite? Should you not be proud of Him? When you glorify and honor the memory of Christ, rest assured that the Christians will take your hands in real fellowship. All difficulty, hesitancy and restraint will vanish. Consider the troubles and persecutions heaped upon you in Russia for your fanaticism of unbelief. And you must not think that this is ended.

This humiliation will continue forever. The time may come when in Europe itself they will arise against the Jews. But your declaration that Christ was the Word of God will end all such trouble. My advice is that in order to become honorable, protected and secure among the nations of the world, in order that the Christians may love and safeguard the Israelitish people, you should be willing to announce your belief in Christ, the Word of God. This is a complete statement; there is nothing more. Is it not thoughtless, ignorant prejudice which restrains you from doing so? Declare that, verily, the Word of God was realized in Him, and all will be right. [pg 415]

The rabbi thoughtfully said, "I believe that what you have said is perfectly true, but I must ask one thing of you. Will you not tell the Christians to love us a little more?"

We replied, "We have advised them and will continue to do so."

