

Why Have People Always Denied God's Messengers?

You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.

Acts 7:51-52

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures. Behold how, notwithstanding such an announcement, mankind hath strayed from its path and shut out itself from its glory.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

Knowing the answer to this question—Why do people always deny their Messengers?—is absolutely essential for every seeker of truth. It helps us understand human nature. It reveals how people like us have behaved in similar circumstances in the past. It helps us to draw from the collective experience and wisdom of many generations.

Thinking about this question makes us humble. It helps us descend from the inflated and floating clouds of our dreams, illusions, assumptions, and fantasies to the cold facts of reality. Studying this question is like doing research to learn the secrets of success and failure. It is like finding out why millions died in an earthquake, while other millions managed to survive. It is like discovering why millions succeed at school, while other millions fail; why some companies prosper, while others go bankrupt; why some individuals live healthy and long lives, while others die early; why some parents raise well-adjusted and spiritual children, and why others fail. In all these cases we would be eager to know the reasons behind people's success and failure. Should we make an exception about religion? No, we should be even more eager, more concerned, because the consequences of our choices are everlasting. Bahá'u'lláh invites us repeatedly to avoid fantasy thinking and to engage in factual thinking:

Consider the past. How many, both high and low, have, at all times, yearningly awaited the advent of the Manifestations of God...How often have they expected His coming, how frequently have they prayed that...the promised Beauty...be made manifest to all the world. And whensoever...the light of the Unseen did shine above the horizon of the celestial might, they all denied Him,

and turned away from His face—the face of God Himself. Refer ye, to verify this truth, to that which hath been recorded in every sacred Book.

Ponder for a moment, and reflect upon that which hath been the cause of such denial on the part of those who have searched with such earnestness and longing. Their attack hath been more fierce than tongue or pen can describe.²

Now take a few minutes to respond to the second most vital question every truth seeker must ask. List here the reasons you believe God's great Messengers and Redeemers have always been rejected:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now compare your list with this list:

- Being apathetic, having no interest in religion.
- Following the majority, assuming they are the best judges.

- Depending on religious leaders who regard tradition as equivalent to spiritual truth.
- Feeling satisfied and complacent in one's comfort zone.
- Fearing the loss of one's beliefs.
- Failing to understand the symbolism behind prophecies.
- Expecting earth-shaking or miraculous events. (Christ was expected to be a powerful king.)
- Being too busy; not finding time to devote to spiritual matters.
- Being worldly and selfish; not looking beyond self-interest.
- Not wanting to alienate friends or family members.
- Fearing a loss of status.
- Being emotionally attached to one's beliefs or traditions.
- Lacking knowledge; not hearing the new message.

Most, perhaps all, of these reasons can be summarized in these words: *unawareness* and *closed-mindedness*. Those to whom God's Messengers were sent either did not look or, if they *did* look, saw *only* what they *wanted* to see. The next story shows the power of feelings in human judgment.

"A little girl had misbehaved and her mother told her to go to the corner, and said very harshly, 'You will sit there until your father gets home.' The

little girl stuck out her lip and said, 'I'll stand in the corner, but I won't sit in the corner.' Her mother took her shoulders and forcibly sat her down. When the father came home, he asked the little girl what she was doing sitting in the corner. She said defiantly, 'My head tells me I'm sitting in the corner, but my heart tells me I'm still standing.'" This is how most people relate to religion. Their hearts rule their heads.

The way God's Messengers have been treated is the best evidence of the power of feelings in human life. Suppose you expect your greatest and most honored guest. You are so proud of receiving him, you decorate your house with the most beautiful flowers, buy expensive furniture, and prepare the most delicious foods. But when your honored guest arrives, you curse him, kick him, and kill him! How strange! How bewildering! How incredible! This is how Jesus and all the other great Messengers were treated. People did to them what they would do to their worst enemies. This is not something that happened only in ancient times, centuries ago. It also happened in the 19th Century.

If people have always rejected their Messengers, what makes us believe that this time it will be any different? Have the people of our time suddenly turned into saints and angels? "The way of the world is to praise dead saints and persecute living ones."

"History teaches us that man learns nothing from history."

1. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5.
2. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 4-5.



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