

**A Traveler's
Guide**

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Chapter 01

INTRODUCTION

1.2 Statistics, Geography, and Population

Because Bahá'í is a relatively young faith compared to the other major religions of the world, it is small in population. However, it is rapidly growing, particularly in the West. Bahá'í has approximately five million followers, making up less than 1% of the world's population. Most of these followers live in three areas of the world: the United States, Iran, and India.²

Quick Facts

- Religion:** Bahá'í
- Adherents:** Bahá'ís
- Population:** 5 million
- Founder:** Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)
- Began:** circa 1863
- Type:** Pluralistic
- God:** The Unknowable Essence
- Texts:** The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book)
- Primary Sects:** NA



Chapter 02

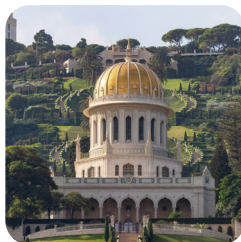
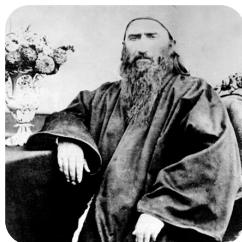
THE HISTORY OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Bahá'í is one of the world's fastest-growing religions, originating in 19th-century Iran and initially associated with Shia Islam. In 1844, a young Persian man named Ali Muhammad proclaimed himself the “Bab,” which means “Gate,” symbolizing a gateway to the truth of a new religion. As his following grew rapidly, many converts believed he was not only the Bab but also a prophet sent by God. However, his claims drew strong opposition from Islamic leaders and the government, ultimately leading to his execution in 1850 at the age of 30.

Before his death, the Bab appointed Mirza Yahya as his successor and predicted the arrival of a “Manifestation of God” in the future. In 1863, Yahya's half-brother, Hussein Ali, proclaimed himself to be the prophesied Manifestation and took the name Bahá'u'lláh, which means “Glory of God.” This announcement caused the followers of the Bab to split into two groups: those who followed Bahá'u'lláh and became Bahá'ís, and those who continued to follow Yahya, known as the Azarites.

Bahá'u'lláh spent much of his life in captivity or exile but spread his faith through his writings, the most important of which was The Most Holy Book, which became the central text of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892 and was honored by his followers as the “Greatest of all Manifestations.” Before his death, he appointed his eldest son, Abbas Effendi (also known as Abdu'l-Baha), as his successor and established the Bahá'í leadership system.

Under Abdu'l-Baha's leadership, the Bahá'í Faith began to spread around the world. Before he died in 1921, Abdu'l-Bahá appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as his successor. Shoghi became known as the “Holy Protector” and led the Bahá'í Faith until 1957. Today, although Bahá'ís represent less than 1% of the world's population, their faith is so widespread that it is the second most geographically diverse religion in the world, after Christianity. It has houses of worship in every continent, and its institutions actively promote the Faith throughout the world.³



Chapter 03

MAJOR BRANCHES OF BAHÁ'Í

There are no major divisions within the Bahá'í Faith. Due to its strict line of succession, which is part of a divine covenant, the Bahá'í leadership has avoided major schisms so far. There have been attempts to form new groups or alternate lines of succession, but these groups have either failed or gone extinct.⁴ The few splits within Bahá'í over the succession of leaders have challenged the Bahá'í Faith's call for global unity and religious tolerance. While this philosophy appears full of love and goodness, break-off groups from Bahá'í have been harshly rejected by the mainstream and even labeled as "enemies of the faith." In 1955, for example, the Bahá'í leader Shoghi Effendi publicly celebrated the death of a "covenant breaker" in a callous tone, calling him "Satan incarnate," in stark contradiction to the Faith's message of tolerance and love. Moreover, while the Bahá'í Faith's concept of "inclusiveness" advocates for the unity of all religions, its teachings imply that force may be used, if necessary, to achieve such unity. This view clashes with its preaching of peace and love and not only undermines inclusiveness but also gives rise to unease about Bahá'í's approach to achieving global unity.



Chapter 04

MAJOR BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS

I 4.1 Oneness of Humankind

The idea of the oneness of humankind is not only a philosophical or moral concept but also a practical guide. The Bahá'í Faith believes that human diversity (e.g., cultures, races, languages, etc.) should be cherished and not cause division. To realize the oneness of humankind, the Bahá'í Faith promotes global collaboration, eliminating discrimination, and creating social structures based on justice and solidarity.⁵

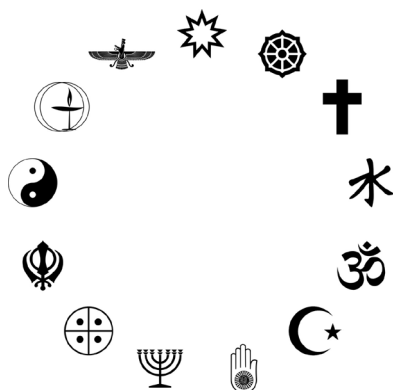


I 4.2 Independent Investigation of Truth

The principle of independent search for truth encourages everyone to discover and understand truth through his or her own efforts rather than relying on tradition, authority, or the views of others. The Bahá'í Faith believes that truth exists objectively but needs to be recognized through a combination of reason and spirituality. This process involves study, reflection, practice, and communication with others.

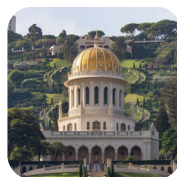
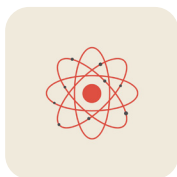
I 4.3 Common Foundation of all Religions

The Bahá'í Faith believes that all religions originate from the same divine source and have simply been conveyed to humankind through different prophets or “manifestors” at different times in history (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh, etc.). Bahá'í maintains that the core teachings of these religions are consistent and include the concepts of love, justice, compassion, and service. The Bahá'í Faith emphasizes that religions are dynamic in nature: as human society progresses, their teachings are renewed and refined through new manifestations.



■ 4.4 Essential Harmony of Science and Religion

The Bahá'í Faith considers science and religion complementary paths to truth. Science reveals the laws of the material world through observation and experimentation, while religion reveals moral and spiritual truths through revelation and spiritual teaching. The two complement each other and are indispensable. For example, science can provide the technical means to solve material problems, while religion can provide ethical guidance for the application of science and ensure that scientific and technological developments serve the well-being of humankind. The Bahá'í Faith also emphasizes that religion should not be confused with superstition but should be based on reason and facts.



■ 4.5 Elimination of all Prejudice

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes prejudice as one of the major obstacles to human unity. Prejudice – whether racial, gender, religious, class, or cultural – leads to division and injustice. The elimination of prejudice needs to be approached at both the individual and societal levels. At the individual level, prejudice must be overcome through education and self-reflection; at the societal level, equality and justice must be guaranteed through laws and institutions.



■ 4.6 Universal Compulsory Education

Bahá'u'lláh taught that ignorance is one of the greatest barriers to achieving a unified and peaceful world. Thus, education is a fundamental right of every human being and the key to achieving social progress. Education includes not only the transmission of knowledge but also moral and spiritual development.

■ 4.7 Spiritual Solution to Economic Problems

The Bahá'í Faith believes that economic issues are not only a matter of material distribution but also of morality and spirituality. The gap between rich and poor is rooted in greed, selfishness, and unjust social structures. These problems can be alleviated by raising humanity's spiritual consciousness. The Bahá'í Faith promotes an economic model based on justice and cooperation, emphasizing the rational distribution of wealth and care for the disadvantaged.

■ 4.8 Universal Peace Upheld by a World Government

The Bahá'í Faith believes that competition and conflict among nations are major impediments to world peace. To achieve universal peace, there is a need for a one-world government that would harmonize relations among nations and solve global problems (e.g., wars, poverty, environmental crises, etc.). This world government should be based on the principles of justice, cooperation, and collec-

tive security, ensuring that the interests of all nations are balanced. The Bahá'í Faith also emphasizes that universal peace is not only a political goal but also an expression of the spiritual and moral progress of humanity.⁶



4.9 Deity

The Bahá'í Faith believes that God is supreme, all-knowing, all-powerful, and full of love and wisdom. Although different religions call Him by different names, humans essentially worship the same God. Due to the finite nature of human beings, humans cannot fully understand the nature of God. Therefore, God sends different Manifestations (Messengers) to reveal His will to humans at different times and places (e.g., The Buddha, Jesus, etc.).



4.10 Messenger

In the Bahá'í Faith, God communicates revelation to mankind through messengers. These messengers are not only manifestations of God but also have a divine essence. Historical messengers include Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Krishna, Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and lastly, Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of Bahá'í. These messengers came at the time God deemed most appropriate to guide mankind in its spiritual growth and to advance civilization.

4.11 Afterlife

The Bahá'í Faith does not clearly describe the exact shape of the afterlife. However, Bahá'ís firmly believe in the eternal existence of the soul. Bahá'í teachings hold that a person's moral behavior and spiritual growth while on earth affect the state of the soul in the eternal world. When a person leaves this world, the soul returns to an eternal home and continues its spiritual process.⁷

Chapter 05

COMMON PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS

I 5.1 Worship Through Work

Bahá'í teaches that everyone should strive to perform honest work to benefit society and serve humanity. Work carried out in this spirit is considered a form of worship equivalent to prayer.⁸

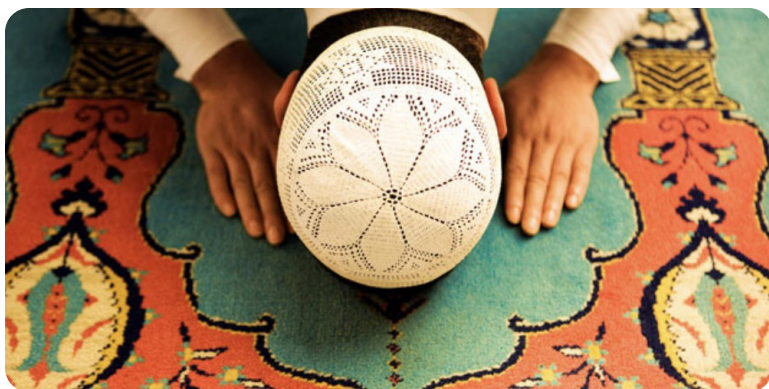
I 5.2 Devotional Prayer

The Bahá'í Faith views prayer as a natural impulse and encourages believers to pray regularly. The purpose of prayer is to enhance devotion or seek assistance from God. In addition to praying in their own words, believers may use prayers written by spiritual leaders such as the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh.

I 5.3 Obligatory Prayer

From the age of 15, every Bahá'í is required to perform one of three daily prayers while facing the Qiblih, the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Before prayer, a ritual cleansing of the hands and face is required. The prayers include movements such as standing, kneeling, and bowing. The three daily prayers are:

1. Short Prayer (a few sentences)
2. Medium Prayer (four paragraphs)
3. Long Prayer (over 1,500 words)⁹



■ 5.4 Meditation

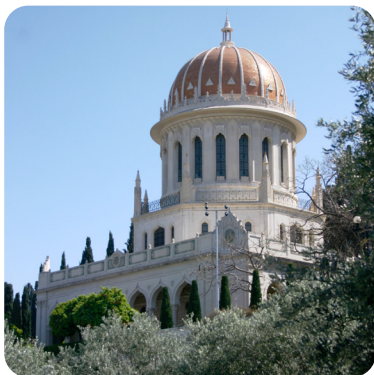
Bahá'u'lláh emphasized the inclusion of meditation in devotional life because it fosters human progress. Focused reflection on sacred verses of the Faith is particularly encouraged.

■ 5.5 Fasting

Similar to the Islamic practice of Ramadan, the Bahá'í Faith designates March 2-20 as the time of fasting. During this period, believers abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset to practice self-discipline and awaken spiritual awareness.

■ 5.6 Pilgrimage

During Bahá'u'lláh's exile, believers made pilgrimages to visit him in Akka (present-day Acre, Israel). Today, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Acre and the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel, are major pilgrimage sites. In the past, the House of the Báb in Shiraz, Iran, and Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad, Iraq, were also considered pilgrimage sites but are now inaccessible to most Bahá'ís.



■ 5.7 Marriage Rituals

While marriage is not obligatory, the Bahá'í Faith encourages it for the spiritual and emotional benefits it provides couples. Bahá'í wedding ceremonies often incorporate cultural elements and prayers or writings by Bahá'u'lláh. The bride and groom are required to recite the vow: "We will all, verily, abide by the will of God."

This vow is all that is required of a Baha'i marriage. Since the Baha'i have no official clergy, there is no need for anyone to preside over the marriage ceremony. In fact, no ceremony or service is even required outside of this simple vow.



Chapter 06

THE INFLUENCE OF BAHÁ'Í ON INDIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Religious beliefs inevitably interact deeply with local cultures as they spread across the world. This interaction manifests in various ways, including the localization of religious rituals, forms of worship, doctrinal understandings, and ethical practices. Therefore, beyond understanding the basic doctrines and history of the religion, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of different regional cultural characteristics to effectively engage adherents of Bahá'í in a cross-cultural environment. This cultural understanding and adaptation are key to successful cross-cultural relationship building and Christian evangelism among Bahá'í followers.

6.1 India

With approximately 2 million Bahá'í followers, India has the largest population of Bahá'ís in the world. The Bahá'í Faith originated in 1844 and took root in India within a few short years. The Faith was introduced to India by Jamal Effendi, a devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í sees Krishna, an important Hindu deity, as one of the Manifestors of God. This syncretism has led to the rapid spread of Bahá'í in India. In addition, the equality and fraternity advocated by Bahá'í teachings appeal to groups at the bottom of the social ladder in India's caste system.



In contemporary India, Bahá'í is more than just another religion; it has had a profound impact on social development. Inspired by Bahá'í teachings, India established many schools and educational institutions dedicated to promoting moral education, literacy, vocational training, women's empowerment, and environmental stewardship. The Bahá'í Faith attracted many members of India's lower castes and marginalized groups with its unique emphasis on human solidarity. In the

1960s and 1970s, Bahá'í teachings were localized and adapted to the core concepts of Hinduism, making them more relevant to the lives and cultures of rural populations and further promoting the spread and acceptance of the Faith in India.¹⁰ Although the number of Bahá'í followers pales in comparison to the Hindu population in India, the social reforms encouraged by the Bahá'í Faith contributed to the official end of the caste system in 2006.



6.2 The Middle East

The Bahá'í Faith originated in 19th-century Iran, and although it recognizes Islam's prophet, Muhammad, as a Manifestation, the teachings of Bahá'í differ significantly from mainstream Islam. As a result, it has faced severe restrictions and repression in most Islamic countries. In Iran, in particular, Bahá'ís suffer systematic persecution. The Iranian government does not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as a legitimate religion, and adherents are denied all basic rights, including access to education, employment opportunities, and property rights. All public religious activities have been banned, and many Bahá'ís have even been arbitrarily arrested and detained based on their faith. This harsh environment has forced many believers to make difficult choices between adhering to their faith and securing their basic right to live. Many have been forced to hide their faith or even go into exile to seek safety.¹¹

6.3 Western Europe and the United States

Due to its pluralistic approach to religious truth and its emphasis on the primacy of science and reason for discovering truth, the Bahá'í Faith has attracted many followers in the U.S. and Europe. The United States is home to the second largest concentration of Bahá'ís in the world, second only to India. It first made inroads into the U.S. through African American spiritualists in the early 20th century who found Bahá'í teachings particularly relevant for addressing issues of discrimination, inequality, and injustice. From there, Bahai spread to all demographics. Because Bahá'í holds that all religions essentially point to the same divine source and that authentic spirituality may be found in all religions, it has garnered widespread popularity among celebrities, pop culture figures, secularists, and the new age movement.¹²



Chapter 07

BARRIERS TO THE GOSPEL

I 7.1 Different view on Christ

The Bahá'í Faith denies the divinity of Jesus, His virgin birth, resurrection, and other such claims. In the Bahá'í perspective, all religious figures – such as Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and others – are regarded as “Manifestations of God” or “Divine Messengers.” They believe that the authority of these messengers follows a chronological order, with the most recent manifestation holding the highest authority. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the latest manifestation who not only acknowledges and respects the previous messengers but also extends their teachings to the age of globalization, advocating for the unity of humanity and the elimination of divisions.



Christians believe Jesus Christ to be fully God and fully human, born of the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, crucified, and resurrected. He is the only way of salvation and will return one day to judge the world (John 3:16; Heb. 1:1-2, John 1:1-14, 5:17-18, 8:56-59, 10:30-33, 14:6; Col. 1:15-20, 2:9).¹³

I 7.2 Different Views of the Bible and Truth

Christians regard the Bible as the divinely inspired word of God and the ultimate guide to truth. A Christian's entire life – encompassing their worldview, values, and behavior – is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Bible. While Bahá'ís acknowledge the significance of the Bible, they consider it outdated, believing its core truths have been updated and expanded through later figures such as Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís hold that the Bahá'í Scriptures represent the most recent divine revelation, superseding those that came before.

Essentially, Bahai is pluralistic. It teaches that truth is unitary, meaning that all religions of the world point to the same core truths about the physical and spiritual world. It also teaches that it is wrong to criticize others' beliefs. However, this unitary conception of truth and the call for tolerance is self-contradictory. Many of the core doctrines of the world religions are incompatible with one another, and Bahá'ís must ignore these differences in order to substantiate its pluralistic conception of the world. By ignoring these differences and reducing other religions down to their core truths, Bahá'í actually elevates itself above every other religion, which seems to contradict the essence of pluralism.¹⁴



■ 7.3 The Betterment of Humanity

Both Bahá'í and Christianity emphasize doing good and addressing social needs, such as selflessness, loving others, and being the light and salt of the world. Bahá'í places greater focus on the unity of humanity and the vision of globalization, emphasizing the use of reason and practical action to promote social progress and fulfill responsibilities toward all humankind. This driving force leans toward advancing humanity's collective well-being, transcending the individual relationship with God.¹⁵

Christians can agree with Bahá'ís on the virtue of working toward a better world and establishing systems of justice and equality for all people. Such efforts are consistent with treating all people as image bearers of God (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 9:6) but are also compatible with God's love for human beings (John 3:16). Nevertheless, Christianity maintains that the true solution to war, division, and social evils is not a one-world government, but the gospel of Jesus Christ that transforms the lives and hearts of people and nations (Isa. 2:4; Matt. 5:9, 38-48, 6:33, 26:52; Rom. 12:18-19, 13:1-7, 14:19; Heb. 12:14; Jas. 4:1-2). Christianity's core driving force is God's love, grace, and salvation, which inspire believers to act with goodness from the depths of their hearts as a response to God's grace.¹⁶

Chapter 08

BRIDGES TO THE GOSPEL

I 8.1 The Desire for Equality and Inclusion

The Bahá'í Faith is a very young religion, and unlike members of other major religions, most of its adherents are not bound by traditional religious rules and rituals. Instead, they actively engage in many socially beneficial endeavors. Racial unity, global wealth inequality, and educational issues are all areas where Bahá'í followers are passionate about contributing and serving. Nevertheless, from a Christian perspective, while God desires people to be the light and salt of the world, the driving force behind all these good works must come entirely from God, as humans alone cannot restore this sin-broken world to its original state (Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 2:11-15).¹⁷



I 8.2 Seeking the True Source of Salvation

Bahá'í followers are known for their persistent pursuit of world betterment and firm commitment to justice. Their efforts to advance human civilization are truly admirable. However, the Gospel points us to a deeper truth: while good works are praiseworthy, the world's fundamental problem lies in the broken relationship between humanity and the Creator. This relationship can only be restored through Jesus Christ's redemptive grace.

Christ's redemption not only rebuilds one's relationship with God but also fundamentally heals the wounds in human nature. When we recognize our limitations and are willing to let go of our reliance on personal efforts to achieve perfection, turning instead to trust in Christ's grace, we can find true spiritual freedom. This renewal from within not only gives individuals eternal significance but also enables us to serve the world with purer love, bearing genuine good fruit (Rom. 4:23-25; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; 1 Pet. 3:18).¹⁸

Appendix

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I Books and Articles

1. “Bahá’í Faith in India.” The Bahá’í Faith: The Official Website of the Indian Bahá’í Community. Accessed: February 21, 2025. <https://www.bahai.in/bahai-faith-in-india/>.
2. “Bahá’í Faith.” NAMB Apologetics. Accessed: February 21, 2025. <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/baha-a-faith/>.
3. “The Situation of the Bahá’ís in Iran.” Bahá’í International Community. Accessed: February 21, 2025. <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-bahais-iran>.
4. Boyett, Jason. *Twelve Major World Religions: The Beliefs, Rituals, Traditions of Humanity’s Most Influential Faiths*. Naperville, IL: Callisto Publishing, 2016.
5. Corduan, Winfried. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012.
6. Muck, Terry C., Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott, eds. *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
7. Studebaker, John A. David Cashin, and Chris Gnanakan. *The Quest of World Religions: An Introduction and Anthology*. San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2022.

I References

- ¹ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 168-170.
- ² Jason Boyett, *Twelve Major World Religions: The Beliefs, Rituals, Traditions of Humanity's Most Influential Faiths* (Naperville, IL: Calisto Publishing, 2016), 220.
- ³ Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 168-170.
- ⁴ Boyett, *Major World Religion*, 230.
- ⁵ For an overview of the major teachings of Bahá'í, see Christopher Buck, "Bahá'í: History, Beliefs, and Practices," in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, eds. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 114-124.
- ⁶ Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 172-173.
- ⁷ Boyett, *Major World Religion*, 222-224.
- ⁸ For a summary of Bahá'í customs, see Boyett, *Major World Religion*, 226-233.
- ⁹ Boyett, *Major World Religion*, 222-227.
- ¹⁰ "Bahá'í Faith in India." The Bahá'í Faith: The Official Website of the Indian Bahá'í Community, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.bahai.in/bahai-faith-in-india/>.
- ¹¹ "The Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran," Bahá'í International Community, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-bahais-ira>.
- ¹² "Evolution of the U.S. Community: The Growth of the Bahá'í Faith in America," Bahá'í in the United States, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.bahai.us/beliefs/origins/evolution/>.
- ¹³ "Bahá'í Faith," NAMB Apologetics, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/baha-a-faith/>.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ergun Canner, "Bahá'í," in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, eds. Ergun Canner and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 92-93.
- ¹⁶ "Bahá'í Faith," NAMB Apologetics, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/baha-a-faith/>.
- ¹⁷ Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 354; See also, "Bahá'í Faith," NAMB Apologetics, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/baha-a-faith/>.
- ¹⁸ Canner, "Bahá'í," 92-93; See also, "Bahá'í Faith," NAMB Apologetics, accessed February 21, 2025, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/baha-a-faith/>.

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