

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

The Bible and Wisdom

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In a previous lecture, [unknown reference] we discussed spiritual science in relation to religious records. Today we shall attempt to enter more deeply into the Bible, at least in a few instances. The Bible is after all a religious document that today is known to every educated person. From the spiritual scientific point of view, it will be easiest if, in our approach, we start with the New Testament. In the earlier lecture, we discussed how certain critical comments concerning the Bible are to be understood in the light of spiritual science, in particular those concerned with the actual writing of the four Gospels and Scriptures in the Old Testament. Today we shall look at more positive aspects and, while bearing in mind what was dealt with in the previous lecture, go straight to the subject from the spiritual scientific viewpoint.

You will be aware that someone who, out of a heartfelt need of his Christian faith, turns to the four Gospels known as the Gospel according to Matthew, to Mark, to Luke and to John, comes up against what appear to be insoluble contradictions. A modern person, however great his faith, can have no notion of how differently one approached the Bible in an earlier more religious age. Nor can a person have any idea of the significance attached to the word Bible or to the expression, the Word of God. We must realize that for centuries the faithful were in no doubt that the writers of the religious records were inspired. Consequently, every word in the Bible was regarded as holy, as from divine inspiration only truth could come. People saw the Bible as dealing with great world questions, and they fastened onto every word, for it was impossible for them to believe that fault could be found in what men of God had written under divine inspiration.

Modern human beings find it difficult to transport themselves into such a mood and attitude. They read the Gospel of Matthew and that of Luke and find two different genealogies of Jesus of Nazareth. Already in the third place, above the name of Joseph, they find in Matthew the name Solomon, in Luke the name Nathan; going further they find many more names that differ, and ask, How is it possible that a document, which for centuries has been considered a source of Truth, can contain such contradictions?

Here we see the seed of all the doubts aroused by disparities in the Gospels and consequently doubt that they were in fact inspired. By subjecting the Gospels to detailed scrutiny we believe to have discovered what can be accepted as more or less genuine. In regard to the fourth Gospel, the conclusion is drawn that as it is so different from the others it cannot be a historical record at all. It is understandable that the modern person becomes critical when faced with contradictions that are impossible to explain away by even the most open-minded individual.

However, we must ask ourselves how it came about that no one for centuries, for millennia, noticed these contradictions that are now criticized. It is difficult to believe that only very stupid people ever handled the Bible. Perhaps it could be argued that only very few people had access to the Bible; before the art of printing, the majority of the faithful did not. Consequently, they could not

pass judgment on something about which they were not informed by the leading few who did have access to the Bible. But are we really to believe that those few were all so stupid that they did not notice what is pointed out by today's critics?

Some historians maintain that only slowly, through the power of the church, did these documents come to be appreciated. Reverence for the Bible arose only gradually. It is said that the Bible cannot stand up to close historical investigation. Looking at events that took place in the early Christian centuries, the conclusion is drawn that the Ecumenical Council of Nicea [Council of Nicaea was called by Emperor Constantine. It formulated the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325.] decided which Gospels were true, and there it was ordained: "These are the true Holy Scriptures." Unprejudiced investigation does not bear this out. Looking back we come to personalities who lived in the early days of Christendom. From them we learn that, for example, in the year A.D. 160 a so-called harmonizing of the Gospels took place. This meant collating the Gospels and bringing them to present a uniform picture, a procedure that was later repeated. And indeed, careful examination of the Gospels as they were in the second century showed that already then they contained what we know as the New Testament. We find that the early Church Fathers in particular spoke with the deepest reverence about the Bible, which suggests that they certainly had the belief that the Bible had been inspired by a higher spiritual source. Already in Origen [Origen (c. 185–A.D. 254) was an early Christian Church Father and writer.] we encounter the same reverent approach to the biblical records as is later to be found in the faithful, whether of learned or of simple faith.

When these things are considered, all prejudice must be set aside. In the early centuries the attitude of learned people towards Christianity was by no means the same as that of modern people. Today one risks being accused of repudiating the true words of the Bible, of being an agnostic and unfit to call himself a Christian by people with orthodox viewpoints. These people should recognize that to interpret the Bible in ways that differ from their own is not the equivalent of doubting its truth. It was the Church Father Augustine [Augustine, Saint (354–430) a Christian theologian and writer. The most prominent of the Latin Fathers of the Church.] who said: "What is known today as Christian religion is ancient; in fact, what was the true primordial religion is today called Christianity."

These words are in great contrast to the usual experience of those who interpret the Bible in the light of spiritual science. The hostility, often coming from family and friends, is nothing short of tragic. Spiritual scientific explanations are harshly rejected as having nothing to do with the Bible. Such reactions are based on complete ignorance of the Bible itself. It is also pretentious, for it proclaims an understanding of the Bible that cannot be faulted. If only such people would recognize that their attitude to the spiritual scientific explanations is in effect like saying: "What I find in the Bible is the only truth."

Spiritual science, far from having a negative approach to the Bible, seeks to unravel its deep truths. The main concern is that these religious records should be properly understood. Those who simply find it more comfortable to remain within views to which they have become accustomed are not in a position to oppose spiritual science. Rejection of true explanations is often based on deep seated hostility, though sometimes it is simply too much effort to learn something new.

No Christian with any understanding of a certain passage from the Sermon on the Mount, often quoted by me, could maintain that attitude. The passage, when rightly translated reads: "Blessed are those who are beggars of the spirit, for within themselves they shall find the Kingdom of Heaven." No words could better or more beautifully express the inner feeling and disposition of the spiritual scientist than this passage from the Sermon on the Mount.

What do we mean by the inner disposition of the spiritual scientist? We mean an inner impulse to strive to develop the deepest kernel of our being, our spirituality. What builds our body comes from substances that surround us; likewise our inner being comes from the spirit that lives, and always did live all about us. Just as it is true that our body is, as it were, a drop from the sea of material reality, so is it true that our soul, our spirit, is a drop from the sea of the all-encompassing Universal Spirit. As the drop of water is of the same substance as the sea from which it is taken, so is that which lives in the deepest recess of the human soul godlike. Human beings are able to recognize God because God lives within them and human beings are themselves spiritual. Furthermore, if a person truly will, he can attain that spiritual world that is all about him. However, for that to come about something is needed — something which can be simply expressed by saying: Do not ever stand still. Human beings must *experience* progress, must be conscious of evolving, rather than merely having faith that it will happen. It means never to lose sight of the fact that not only have human beings developed to their present stage from inferior levels, but also that at every moment they can develop further.

In this instance we are not concerned with the fact that a person's external being has altered in the course of evolution, but rather with the fact that the human soul can climb upwards from stage to stage. In striving for perfection, a human being's soul is capable of improving from day to day. Today we may learn something new; we inwardly grasp something we did not know before; through our will we become capable of achieving something we could not manage before. If we remain at what we understand today, at what our will is capable of today, then we do not evolve. We must never lose sight of the fact that as well as the forces that are already developed within us, we possess others still slumbering. It is comparable to the seeds of new plants that slumber within the seed that has already become a plant. If we never forget that we possess such forces, our will grows stronger; it reaches higher stages of development and we become aware that our soul begins to evolve spiritual eyes and ears. We must not think of this as something trivial, but recognize that the development of the human soul and spirit is of universal significance.

When we see in the physical world, a relationship between animal forms and the noble human form, it does not justify the assumption that a person has developed from the animal, even if natural science has established that, as regards the physical structure, there is greater similarity between the lowest developed human being and the highest developed ape, than between the lowest and highest developed ape. This observation, however, led natural science to regard human beings as having descended from the ape. The famous natural scientist Thomas Henry Huxley [Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895). He supported Darwin's theory of evolution. He coined the word "agnostic." He also was a natural scientist.] spoke about it as a great heresy in 1859. This view influenced practically everything he wrote. However, those who recognize spiritual development say: Granted that man, in regard to his external bodily form, is closer to the highest evolved ape, than the latter to the lowest of its own species, it is equally true that a human being who has reached a certain stage in spiritual development is further from the lowest developed human being, than the latter from the highest evolved animal.

When evolution is followed through, the higher stages are seen to continue up into spiritual realms where what is described by spiritual science takes place, and which to spiritual sight is as much a reality as physical evolution is to physical sight. Spiritual knowledge has always existed. Natural science today only acknowledges an evolution that starts with the lowest animal form and continues up to that of man. Spiritual science is in full agreement with that evolution. It also acknowledges the enormous difference between the lowest form of life, barely visible even through the microscope, and the perfect structure of the human organism. A person's physical structure does indeed pass through innumerable evolutionary stages from the most imperfect to the most perfect.

However, the spiritual scientist sees the evolution of soul and spirit as just as real. The difference he sees is just as great between the highly advanced human being, the initiate, and the person who has barely begun to develop his slumbering forces. An initiate is someone who has attained spiritual faculties by developing to ever greater perfection forces that are inherent in every human soul. The difference between the lower stages of soul development and those attained by an initiate is actually greater than the difference between the lowest living structure and that of human beings. A person who knows that initiates exist also knows that the possibility to develop spiritually is a reality.

With this insight there dawns in the human soul a feeling, an attitude that says: I look up to a godlike ideal of man, the seed of which slumbers within me. I know that in the future it will become reality, though as yet it is only slightly indicated. I know also that I must exert all my powers to attain that ideal. With this insight into spiritual development man becomes a "beggar of the spirit"; he feels himself blessed. In the spiritual scientific sense the passage from the Sermon on the Mount is a truly wonderful saying: "Blessed are those who are beggars of the spirit, for within themselves they shall find the Kingdom of Heaven."

Those acquainted with old linguistic usage will not imagine that what is here meant by heaven is something existing in an unknown beyond. In those days heaven was understood to be wherever man is. Where we are is where heaven is, that is, the spiritual world. A blind person will see the world full of color when successfully operated upon; likewise a person whose spiritual eyes are opened sees around him a new world. What a person sees was actually always about him, but he sees it in a new way. He sees the way he must be able to see if he is to attain his higher humanity. He will know that heaven is not somewhere else, is not in another place or time. He recognizes the Truth when Christ says: "Heaven is in the midst of you."

Where we are is the Kingdom of Heaven; it penetrates everything physical. As ice swims in water out of which it has condensed, so does matter swim in a sea of spirit out of which it has condensed. Everything physical is condensed, transformed spirit.

In the animal kingdom we see the physically imperfect side by side with the physically more perfect; in the human kingdom we see all stages of spiritual development: One person has forged ahead, another remained at a lower stage. This indicates how in the spiritual scientific sense, human beings are connected with evolution. One person's interest lies in the realm of modern science, another's in the realm of human cultural development from the savage to the highly advanced individual who has attained insight into the spiritual world around him. The initiates always had insight into all the stages of human spiritual development. One spoke of the initiate as of someone who possessed greater knowledge than anyone else. Such initiates were mentioned in every epoch. Let us make it clear in what sense one spoke of those initiated into the spiritual world.

We have often discussed the fact that in ancient times people had clairvoyant consciousness. The term "clairvoyant" did not refer to clarity, but to the fact that it penetrated through the external to the soul. A residue of this dull, dim consciousness can be seen in today's consciousness in dreams. Our clear waking consciousness developed from it. At the time when in general a person's consciousness was dull and dim, though clairvoyant, a few were initiates. In what sense did this consciousness differ from that of the rest of humanity? It differed because those who were initiates already experienced something of the type of consciousness that mankind in general attained today. They reached at an earlier stage something that belonged to the future. Already they saw the world the way humanity in general sees it today. That is to say, they investigated the world through the physical organs, through sight and hearing, and grasped things through the intellect. That is the sense in which they were initiates. An initiate attained ahead of time something that belonged to the future. There are also initiates today; who have already developed the higher clairvoyant consciousness, that is, the higher

perception that mankind in general will possess in the future. The initiate was looked up to in ancient times by those who understood. They said to themselves: The initiate's outlook, his understanding of the world, is the outlook and understanding all human beings will possess in the future. He is the embodiment of a future ideal; through what he is, is revealed what we shall become. In the course of time the initiate will lead a great number of human beings to attain what he has attained.

In this sense, the initiate was a prophet or a messiah. He was also called a "first-born." But those to be initiated had to pass through many stages. Before the stage of initiation was attained, many different degrees of learning and schooling of the will must be passed through. As a plant must go through many stages from root through leaf and blossom before bearing fruit, so a human being strove upwards in stages of ever greater insight, till finally the pupil became an initiate. He attained progress by going through certain schooling that anyone can adopt. Those who deny that such a schooling is possible do so out of ignorance. They have as yet not discovered that through schooling, a person's spiritual eyes and ears can be opened so that he attains a higher kind of perception. It is the task of spiritual science to provide knowledge of such schooling. In my book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, you will find this subject is dealt with in great detail. There are many reasons why this knowledge is essential in our time. I will mention just one.

It is a tragedy that because human intellect and reasoning power have progressed too far, he is no longer able to believe in the ancient religious records. He no longer experiences them as the embodiment of the words of God. The fact that the human soul no longer receives the ancient knowledge causes it torment and depression. What is needed is the knowledge presented in a new form, and this is what spiritual science wishes to provide. Those who are initiates today are able — as were initiates in ancient times — to foresee humanity's future evolution. However, human development must follow certain rules. Just as one must adopt a definite method if one wishes to become an astronomer, likewise must a certain method be adopted if one is to develop spiritually. No one should wish to attempt to do so without guidance; that would be like wishing to become a mathematician without consulting any authority. Someone needs show the way, but no other kind of authority is required, and it is nonsense to talk about blind faith and dependence in relation to spiritual science.

Throughout the millennia, right back to antiquity, there were always books in existence, or rather not actual books, but traditions handed down by word of mouth, of the rules of initiation. These rules were not permitted to be written down. They consisted of indications that the candidate for initiation had to follow when setting out to attain all the stages of development that lead to initiation. Even today certain indications are not written down, but imparted directly to those worthy to receive them. These indications the neophyte must observe if he is to attain the highest goal. A principle of initiation was always in existence, that is rules for the birth of the spirit in man. He who dedicated himself to spiritual striving was guided through exercises and conduct of life an ever higher levels. Once the highest was attained, the initiate would reveal to him the deepest secrets.

One word more about this codex for initiation. Today things are different; the procedure of initiation also progresses. In ancient times, the neophyte was brought to a condition of ecstasy. This word had a different meaning; it did not indicate "being out of one's mind" but becoming conscious on a higher level. The spiritual guide led the neophyte to this condition of higher consciousness. Strict rules were observed; the prescribed length for the condition to last was three and one-half days. This procedure is no longer followed; today the consciousness is not subdued. But in ancient times a state of ecstasy, of rapture, was produced during which the neophyte knew nothing of what went on about him; to the external world he was like someone asleep. However, what was experienced in this condition differed considerably from the experiences of a contemporary person when the external objects disappear from his consciousness, on falling asleep. The neophyte experienced a world of

spirit; all about him there was light, astral light. This is different from physical light; it appears like a sea of spirituality out of which spiritual beings emerge. If a very high stage had been attained, sound would also be experienced. What in the ancient Pythagorean schools was called "the harmony of the spheres" was heard. (What today we understand intellectually as universal laws are experienced as a kind of spiritual music at this level of consciousness. Spiritual forces are revealed as harmony and rhythm, but must not be thought of as ordinary music. The spiritual world, the heavenly world, resounds in the astral light.) In this world into which the neophyte was led, he learned to know stages of godliness that humanity will attain in a far distant future. During the three and one-half days a person experienced all this as reality, as Truth.

These things may sound extraordinary to many, but there are, and always were people who recognize that a spiritual reality exists that is as real as the one perceived through physical senses. After three and one-half days the initiate was guided back to the sense world enriched with knowledge of spiritual existence, and prepared to bear witness of the spiritual world. All initiates on their return to the ordinary world uttered certain words that were always the same: "Oh my God, how thou has glorified me!" These words expressed the sensation felt by the one just initiated as he set foot again in the everyday world. Those who guided the initiation knew all the stages by heart; later when writing came more into use certain things were written down. But there always existed a typical or standard description of the life of an initiate. One said as it were: "He who is accepted into the cult to be initiated must live according to certain rules and pass through the experience which culminates with the words: "Oh my God, how thou hast glorified me!"

If you could depict the way an initiate necessarily had to live, the way you could depict someone wishing to carry out experiments in a chemical laboratory, then you would obtain a picture typical of someone striving to attain a higher development, typical of someone to be awakened to a higher life. Such a codex of initiation always existed or was at least known by heart by those concerned with initiation. Knowing this, we can understand why the descriptions of different initiates of various people are similar. This fact contains a great secret, a great mystery. The people always looked up to their initiates, insofar as they knew of them. What was said about initiates was not the kind of thing modern biographers relate about famous people; what was told was the course of the spiritual life experienced by the initiate. We can therefore understand why descriptions of the life of Hermes, Zarathustra, Buddha, Moses and Christ are similar. It was because they had to experience a certain life if they were to become initiates. Their lives were typical of that of an initiate.

In the outer structure of the spiritual biography we can always see a picture of the initiate. We can now answer the question: Who were the writers of the gospels? In my book, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, you will find this question answered in greater detail from the viewpoint of spiritual science, and also indications of the spiritual authenticity of the Gospels. Here I can only give a few hints! In my book is explained that what is written in the Gospels is derived from ancient records of initiation. Naturally what initiates wrote differs in regard to incidentals, but all essentials were always the same. We must realize that the writers of the Gospels had no other sources than the ancient codex of initiation. When we look into the details, we recognize in the Gospels different forms of initiation. They differ because the writers knew initiation from different regions. This we shall understand when we consider how the writers of the Gospels were connected with Christ.

The best way to form an idea of this connection is to think of the significant words at the beginning of the Apocalypse. [Apocalypse was a prophetic revelation about Armageddon. Jewish and Christian writings appeared in Palestine between 200 B.C. and A.D. 1500.] The One who dictates the content to John is named "The First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega." This refers to that Being who is always present, through all changes from generation to generation, from human race to

human race, from planet to planet; the Being that endures through all transformations. If we call this Being God, of whom a particle lives within each of us, then we sense our relationship to this Alpha and Omega. Indeed, we recognize it as the ultimate ideal, the ultimate goal of striving human beings.

At this point we must remind ourselves of a forgotten custom. Nowadays, names are bestowed more or less haphazardly. We do not feel any real connection between a person and his name. The further back we go in human history, the greater the importance and significance of the name. Certain rules were observed when a name was given. Even not so very long ago, it was the custom to consult the calendar, and give the newly born the name mentioned on the day of its birth. It was assumed that the child had sought to be born on the day that bore that name. When someone attained initiation he was given a new name, an initiation name that expressed a person's innermost nature, expressed what the spiritual leader had recognized to be his significance to the world.

As you know, we find in the New Testament many sayings attributed to Jesus. Their deeper meaning can be understood only if approached from the viewpoint of initiation and understanding of the significance of bestowing names. For example, if someone had reached an as yet not so high level spiritually, and one wished to give him a corresponding name, it would be one that expressed characteristics of the astral body. If a person had reached a higher level, the name would express characteristics of the ether body. If it was to express something that was typical, it would be derived from characteristics of the physical body. In ancient times, names were related to the person and expressed his essential nature. You will remember that in the Gospels Jesus often describes what He is in words that refer back to the word "I." This you find particularly in the Gospel according to John.

We must now bear in mind that we distinguish four members in a person's being: physical body, ether body, astral body and "I." The "I" will increase more and more. It is inherent in a person's "I" to develop towards initiation. In undeveloped people it is imperfect, in the initiate perfect and powerful. You will now understand from the way names were given that Christ did not refer to Himself as an ordinary human being with an ordinary human "I." In John's Gospel He often indicates that He is identical with the "I am, as in the sentence, "I and the Father are One." He describes Himself as identical with the human being's deepest nature. This He does because He is the Eternal, the Christ, the Alpha and Omega.

Those who lived at the time of Christ saw Him as a Divine Being who carried about Him a physical body, a being in whom the spirit is the all-important, whereas in human beings the physical is the all-important. For human beings the outstanding characteristic was expressed in the name. When we ponder this we find that it opens the door to many of the mysteries contained in the Bible. We shall understand what it means when Moses stands before Jehovah as messenger and asks: "Whom shall I tell the people has sent me?" And we hear the significant words: "Tell the people that the 'I am' sent thee." What does Jehovah refer to? He points to the deepest and most significant aspect of a person's being, to that which lies deeply hidden in every human soul, to the human's "I." We find that when we come to this fourth member, then the "I" is a name we must bestow on ourselves. The godlike within human beings must speak. It begins to speak in what appears to live in human beings as a mere point, as a tiny insignificant seed, which can however develop to infinite greatness. It is this aspect of a person's being that gave Moses his task and said: "Tell them that the 'I am' sent thee." A divine seed lies within every human soul enveloped in the physical, etheric and astral bodies. It appears as a mere point to which we say: "I am. But this member of our being, which appears so insignificant, will become by far the most important. The essence of the human being tells Moses: "I am the I am."

This illustrates the significance connected with the giving of a name. Whenever a reference is made to the "I am" it is also a reference to a certain moment in humanity's evolution that is indicated in the Bible, and often referred to in my lectures: the moment when physical man became an ensouled being. Physical man, as he is today, has developed from lower stages. Only when the Godhead had endowed him with a soul was man able to develop higher stages of his being. What descended from the bosom of the Godhead sank into the physical body and developed it further. In the Bible this moment is indicated in only a few words; it actually stretched over long epochs. Before that time, the human bodies did not possess what is essential — essential also for physical man today — if the "I" is to develop: the ability to breathe through lungs. A human being's physical ancestors did not originally breathe through lungs, which only developed in the course of time from a bladder-like organ. The human being could receive a soul only when he had learned to breathe through lungs. If this whole event is summed up in one sentence, you have the saying in the Bible: "And the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." In regard to the name Jehovah, we find that it means something like blowing, or rushing wind. The word Jahve expresses the inrush of breath with which the spirit, the "I" drew into man. The physical breath enabled man to receive his soul.

Therefore, in the name Jahve is expressed the nature of the inrushing breath with which the "I am the I am" poured part of its Being into human beings. What we are told in the Bible truly represents a world event depicting the entry into a human being of the eternal aspect of his nature. Whether we think of man as he is today or as he was thousands of years ago, the nature, the "Being of the I" (*Ichwesen*) always was. Think of the highest revelation of this "Eternal I," when all external aspects are irrelevant. Think of a human being in whom can be recognized the most inward nature of the "Eternal I" in all its greatness and might, and you have an idea how the first followers of Christ saw Him. What in ancient time was revealed on earth only as a spark, was revealed in Jesus of Nazareth in its highest glory. He was the greatest initiate because He was the most Godly, so that He could say: "Before Abraham was, I was." He incorporated that which existed before Abraham, [Abraham, the biblical father of the Hebrew people and first of the patriarchs, was regarded as the founder of the ancient Hebrew nation.] Isaac [Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah.] and Jacob. [Jacob of the Old Testament was the son of Isaac and Rebecca and was the father of the twelve patriarchs.] He is that to which striving mankind looks up as the greatest ideal. They are those mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount as: "Blessed are those who are beggars of the Spirit, for within themselves they shall find the Kingdom of Heaven." These words applied to the followers of Christ. But how could they give a description of the life of the highest God incarnated? What description would be worthy of Him? Only the one that was contained in the canon of initiation, describing the rules of initiation. There was described the way the one to be initiated must from stage to stage pass through certain experiences which culminated in the words: "Oh my God, how thou hast glorified me!" (The transcript of this lecture ends at this point.)

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