
70 or 72 followers of Jesus in Gospels?

By Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi

(We give below extracts from articles Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi wrote in *Paigham Sulh*, replying to various allegations made against one of our books by a highly experienced and prominent Christian missionary of the Indian subcontinent, whose name was also Abdul Haq. One of the objections of the Christian critic was that a statement by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in a book referring to “72 emissaries of Jesus” was incorrect since the number given in the Gospels is 70. He claimed that no Ahmadi could show the figure 72 anywhere. We quote below from the Maulana’s reply, in *Paigham Sulh* of 26 August and 2 September 1964.)

In reply, we admit that in Luke 10:1 seventy followers are indeed mentioned. But learned people know that in Divine scriptures the numbers *seventy* and *seventy-two* stand for a large number. In English this is known as “round figures”, and these merely mean a large number. This was not such a serious matter that you should have accused a respectable Imam of a community of exaggeration and fabrication. However, God intended that you should be utterly vanquished in your combat with His champion (i.e. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad), and therefore He caused you to issue the challenge that the number of these followers was 70 and not 72.

The mention of 72 instead of 70 from the pen of the Promised Messiah is a miracle. Hazrat Mirza sahib did not know Greek, nor was he well-versed in English. In the Urdu and English translations of the Gospels, designated as authentic, the number of these preachers is given as 70. And in the Greek text published by the Church of England, their number is also *Ebdom* or seventy, *but in the margin it is noted that in some Greek manuscripts the number is Ebdom duo, or seventy-two.*

It was God, the Knower of the unseen, Who caused the Imam of the time to write these words, because he was taught by the Holy Spirit. The Christian missionary Abdul Haq did not know it despite studying and teaching the Gospels all his life, and this humble writer (Maulana) Abdul Haq would never have known it if he had not consulted that Greek text to reply to the missionary’s objection about the number 72. My faith in the Promised Messiah has increased. Certainly it was God Who caused Hazrat Mirza sahib to write these words, and today we can even show this self-styled Christian “conqueror of Qadian” the word *seventy-two*, not in the margin, but in the main text itself.

The top-most Christian clergyman of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent accuses Hazrat Mirza sahib of fabrication. Normally one would expect that a Christian missionary who has been studying and teaching the Gospels for over half a century, taking part in religious debates, and is the head of their theological college, is bound to be knowledgeable, indeed extremely learned, in the Gospels. On the other hand there is Hazrat Mirza sahib, who had definitely studied the Gospels, but he did not have the opportunity or the resources available to the Christian missionary for this study. It is certainly not an ordinary thing that such a prominent Christian theologian challenges the Imam of the age about a reference in the Gospels.

The challenge of the reverend, made after Hazrat Mirza sahib's death, is to every Ahmadi, not only those of the present time but the millions to come till the end of the world, that they shall not be able to meet his demand. As against this bold challenge, there is the promise of Allah to the Imam of the time as follows: *Lā nabqī la-ka min al-mukhziyāt dhikrī*, meaning, "We shall not leave behind you anything which can humiliate you", so that anyone trying to disgrace him will face disgrace himself.

It is perfectly true that in the Gospels published till the time of the Imam of the age, in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English, which were called the Authorised Versions, the number of disciples is given as 70 and not 72. However, when this Christian missionary issued what he firmly believed was an unassailable challenge, and accused Hazrat Mirza sahib of fabrication, then God, the Defender of the honour of His own Imam, manifested a miracle. A humble servant of the Imam set out to look through the Greek texts of the Gospels, and discovered the reference to 72 in the marginal notes of the Greek edition of this same authorised version, saying that in some manuscripts the number is given as 72. But after this, I received a Greek edition of the Gospels published in the U.S.A., in which not in the margin *but in the main text* the number of these followers is stated to be 72.

This is a miracle of the Imam of the age. I received this edition only two weeks ago, exactly at the time of need when I had to reply to this allegation. Although the Imam of the age did not know languages such as Greek and Sanskrit, but the Imam of the age is after all the Imam of the age. He is the Imam appointed by God, and it is not possible for the theologians of the world, be they eastern or western, to find faults with him.