



Religion	Baha'i
Denomination	
Question answered:	Why might it matter that sacred texts are often open to interpretation? (KS3 Q2)
Key concepts, questions, and outcomes:	What are sacred texts? Who decides if a text is sacred? Who interprets texts and why? What gives people the authority to interpret texts and how do we know if it is true?
Key teaching points:	Different religions have different views on interpretation of Scripture. Different denominations within a religion is based on different interpretations of Scripture and this may cause disagreements. The way that sacred texts are interpreted, along with how God is viewed, determines how someone may live his or her life. Interpretation of Scripture is complex – who has the authority to interpret?
Prior knowledge:	Baha'u'llah, sacred texts How to 'read' a text – interpretation, context, experience, age, culture,

Core Vocabulary:			
covenant	Common good	sacred	unity
authoritative	civiliser	Oppression	amnesty
interpretation	disunity	prejudice	

Summary of answers:
<p>The first speaker describes the teaching of Baha'u'llah that the purpose of religion is to create unity and love. It should not become a reason for war and hatred. Baha'u'llah established a powerful covenant with his believers and it is clearly stated in his writings that only he, his son and his grandson can interpret the sacred Baha'i writings. In that way, there is only one authorised interpretation. At the same time, believers are encouraged to read the writings privately and to come to their own interpretations. This is important, as it is the fruit of individual faith. However, care should be taken to state that it is a personal interpretation and not the interpretation of Baha'u'llah – the interpretation is not authoritative. It is important that individuals study the writings to find the truths in there. Meanings may change from day to day for individual believers. Being mindful of what is a personal interpretation and what is an authoritative interpretation protects the Baha'i faith from division.</p> <p>The second speaker expresses a similar point of view. Baha'u'llah says the purpose of religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the whole human race and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Religious history shows that there have been times when religion has been the binding force that brings humanity together but there have also been times when it has been a source of disunity, oppression, injustice, violence, and bloodshed. Examination reveals that varying interpretations of sacred texts are often the root cause of divisions.</p> <p>If religion is to fulfil its true purpose, to be a haven for humankind and a source of wellbeing and prosperity, the question of who has the power to interpret sacred texts becomes a matter of great importance.</p> <p>The third speaker describes how Baha'i followers are encouraged to interpret the Baha'i writings to increase their knowledge and delve deeper into the faith. Followers cannot force their interpretations onto others. God is for unity and different interpretations create disunity. The</p>



Baha'i faith is the most recent and so does not have an interpretation issue as Baha'u'llah decided upon his successor and interpreter of his writings which is different to most other religions.

Next Steps:

Consider interpretation in other religions – how do they compare to interpretation in Baha'i faith? Possibly consider the role of interpretation in disagreements and divisions within a religion (other than Baha'i)

How is the authority to interpret texts 'given'?

Read a range of Baha'i texts and discuss various interpretations.

Interview some Baha'i followers to see how they handle these texts or use the [RE Online Email](#) a believer section.