

LESSON 28

World Religions – Hinduism (Part II)

Memory Verse (NKJV) : *Acts 17:29-30 (NKJV)*

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

Introduction:

The land of India stretches from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and 83% of our population follow Hindu religion. Only 3% of our population are known as Christians. Gospel is the power of God unto salvation of all people. Gospel is centered on Jesus Christ and His atoning death. India has a rich heritage of culture and spirituality. If we study ancient scriptures like *Vedas* and *Upanishads* written by ancient Hindu saints who were seekers after truth, we will discover messages that were given by God for man's salvation. Therefore, all Indians must try to obtain a basic knowledge about the teachings of Hindu religion.

The historical background of Hindu religion:

The word 'Hindu' is connected with the river Sindhu (Indus). People who traveled from Babylon (West Asia) eastwards reached India and settled on the banks of Sindhu river. They came to be known as Hindus and the land was called Hindustan (India). Read Esther 1:1. The names, Hindu and India came to be associated with the country, its people and its religion. Modern Hinduism has evolved through the influence of many cultural and religious thoughts during the last 5000 years. So, we cannot say when Hinduism began or who established that religion. Hindus numbering 525 million, who are spread over the land from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Punjab to Assam worship many different gods and goddesses and follow different traditions. There is no single religious philosophy or tradition that is common to all Hindus.

Six periods of Hindu history:

1. Period before the arrival of Aryans (B.C. 5000-2000): We learn about the culture of that period from the cultural traditions of Sindhu region which can be found from the relics of cities like Mohan-jo-daro and Harappa. Those were similar to the traditions of Babylon that

we studied in the previous lesson.

2. Period of the Vedas (B.C. 2000-600): After the arrival of Aryans, a mixed culture of Aryans and the Dravidians came into being. Vedas written by Aryans were accepted by people. Four main Vedas are: Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. Four castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Soodras came into being at this time. Brahmins became a dominant group.
3. Period of intellectuals and rebellion (B.C. 600 - A.D. 300): Intellectuals began questioning Brahmin domination, caste separation and animal sacrifices. Epics like Mahabharat, Ramayana were written at this time. Reformist ideas from Buddhism and Jainism began to spread and Brahminism began to lose strength.
4. Period of reforms (A.D. 300-1200): Acceptance of ideas from Buddhism and Jainism after A.D. 300 led to reformation in Hindu religion. For that reason, Buddhism and Jainism started declining in India.
5. Rise of Islam (A.D. 1200-1757): India could not withstand the onslaught of Muslim rulers from West Asia. India came under the rule of Muslims and many people were compelled to convert to Islam. The situation continues even today.
6. Modern times (A.D. 1757 onwards): Arrival of western rulers, work of Christian missionaries and modern education have awakened Indian population and brought improvements in Hinduism. Practice of Sati and many blind observances have been abolished. Prominent teachers like Swami Vivekananda, Shri Shankaracharya and Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa have brought about spiritual revival in Hinduism and high position among world religions. But Hindus have not yet realized that the truth that the Vedas and Upanishads were seeking for can be found in Jesus Christ.

Hindu religious scriptures:

No single book is recognized as religious scripture of Hindus like the Bible of Christians or Koran of Muslims. But there are many books written at different periods of time that have been traditionally accepted as religious scriptures.

Four Vedas:

1. Rigveda: This is the most ancient of the Vedas authored by rishis of nine generations between B.C. 1000 and 600. There are about 1000 poems in 10 sections. The initial sections are about praising gods associated with natural forces like sun, moon, wind, fire, etc. In the 10th section, a single god called Prajapathy appears. Thus, it can be seen that the thinking of Aryans has progressed from many gods to a single god. Prajapathy is described in ‘Purushasooktham’. ‘Prajapathy’ means master of creation. The poem says that the person, Prajapathy is a sacrificial offering and when cow is sacrificed, it should be taken as equivalent to sacrifice of Prajapathy.

2. Samaveda: This is the second Veda that was written after Rigveda. ‘Sama’ means song. Except for 75 incantations, the remaining verses are all condensed from Rigveda.

3. Yajurveda: This volume is mostly verses to be used for sacrificial offerings. War between gods and demons and snake worship are also described in the book. Siva, Rudra, Sankar and other names are also found here. Prajapathy has a prominent place in the writings.

4. Adharvaveda: This is a later Veda written by Rishi Adharva. Marriage rituals, medicinal details, etc. are described in the book.

Epics: There are two main epics: Ramayana and Mahabharatha.

Ramayan: This is the story of Sriram, the king of Ayodhya. Sriram is considered the incarnation of Vishnu. The epic is believed to have been written by Rishi Valmiki in around 300 B.C. Ten headed Ravana was probably a king ruling South India and Srilanka. Ramayana is the story of the war between Sriram and Ravana. The superiority of Aryans over Dravidians is portrayed in the story.

Mahabharatha: The story is about the battle between two sections of a royal family, namely, between Pandavas and Kauravas.

Srikrishna was on the side of Pandavas in the battle. The advices that Srikrishna gave to Arjuna (a Pandava) during the battle have been compiled into a volume, called Bhagavad Geetha. The principles found in the book are accepted as basic religious teachings by Hindus.

From the details that you have studied about Hindu scriptures in this lesson, what do you think is the main difference between them and the Bible? Although the 66 books of the Bible were written during a long period of time, the contents are similar in nature and about the redemption

of mankind through Jesus Christ. Some Hindu scriptures talk about belief in one God, eternal nature of human soul, sinful nature of man, sacrifice for pardon of sins, salvation, etc. Some other scriptures talk in contrary terms to these truths. We should try to deal with our Hindu brothers with this knowledge and point to them Christ who is the Savior of mankind.

Questions:

1. How did Hindu religion get its name?
2. Which are the six stages of development of Hindu religion?
3. Name the four Vedas. What are the main contents of the Vedas?
4. Which are the two main epics?
5. What is the content of Bhagavat Geetha? Whose advices are described and to whom they are given? In what circumstances?
6. Compare Bible and books of Hindu religion.