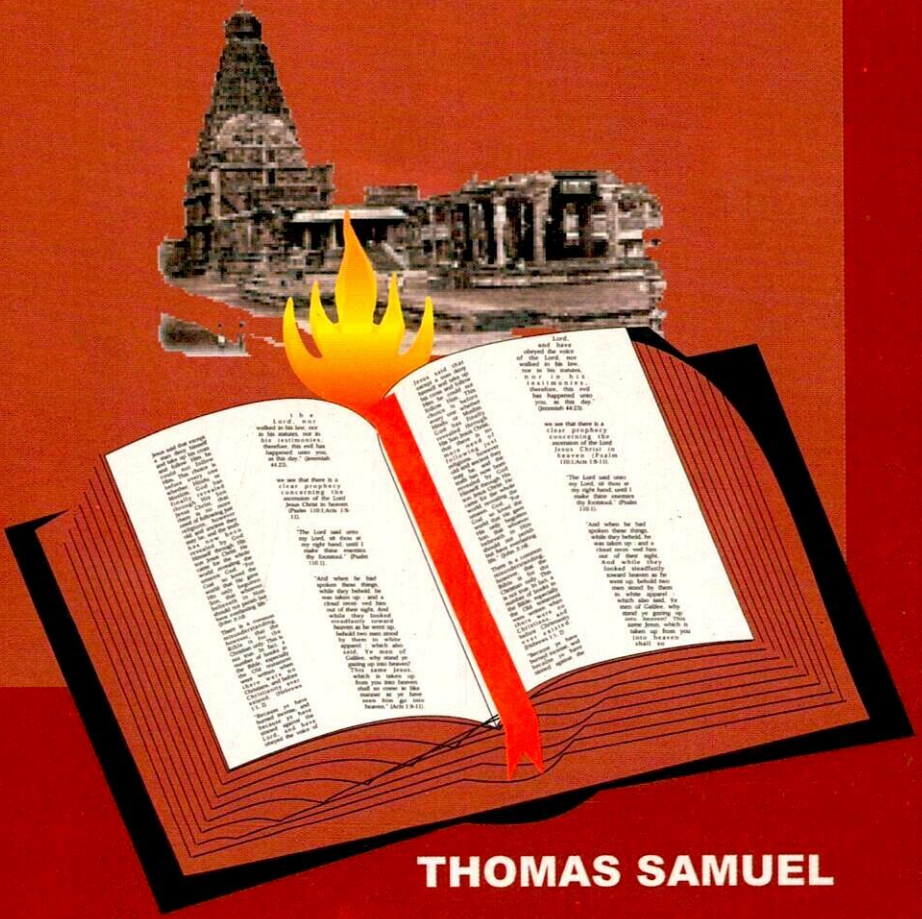
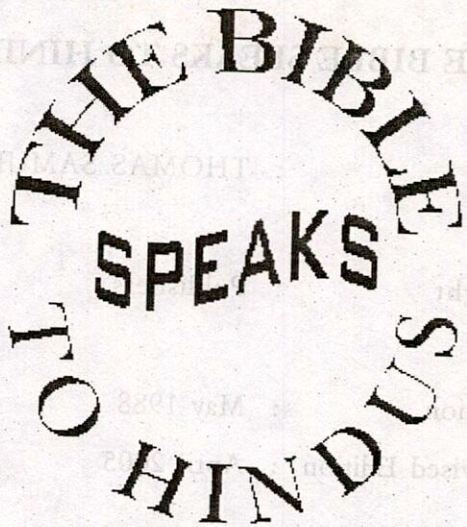
BIBLE SPEAKS TO HINDUS



THOMAS SAMUEL



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THE BIBLE SPEAKS TO HINDUS

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PREFACE

India our motherland is a land of many religions. She has given birth to two major religions of the world today Hinduism and Buddhism. In the quest for the ultimate reality, her sons and daughters have renounced possessions, kingdoms and material wealth and wandered around trying to satisfy the deepest needs of their own hearts. Religion runs through the veins of most Indians.

Philosophers, saints and sages have been engaged in their search for truth about the ultimate meaning of life, the purpose of one's existence on this planet earth and to get to know the 'Atma', the God behind the whole universe. The land is filled with such religious multitudes who are ready to pay any price in their search for God and the search continues and it is to such religious people the Bible is addressed, in order to show them the way to 'Moksha' that means salvation.

Indeed, the Bible does speak to the Hindus! It is the incarnation story of the living God, the greatest story ever told of the Lord Jesus Christ who came into the

world in the person of the Lord Jesus. Most people in India love and respect the Lord Jesus Christ. They have no problem with Him. As such, the purpose of this book is to enlighten our non-Christian friends, especially the Hindus to the message of the Bible. God's Word is universal and it is addressed to all mankind.

There is a common misunderstanding however, that the Bible is only for Christians. This is not true. In fact a number of books in the Bible especially the Old Testament were written when there were no Christians and before Christianity ever existed. (*Heb. 1:1, 2*)

Hence the message of the Bible is for the entire human race. How sad that because of misconceptions many of our non-Christian friends have not taken the pain to search for the reality and truth that is in the Bible.

*"Christ has to become incarnate in the East, not as a western teacher come to destroy what they have learned from tradition, but as He came to the Jews, as the **fulfillment of all their hopes and desires**. Doubtless this will present the same test for the east as it was presented to the Jews. There will be temptations to cling to the old forms and refuse to allow them to grow into the new life which Christ brings."* (*Griffith 196:75*)

This book is a small attempt to enlighten the minds of our Hindu friends as to what the Bible

has to say to them. Hence, the purpose of writing this book is not to argue, compare or defend one's own faith, let be it Christianity or any other; but its aim is to present to the non-Christian masses of this land, the message of the book, the Bible— God's Word. The aim is *to let the Bible itself speak to them* and allow them to see for themselves the message that God has given to mankind in general.

The Bible is addressed to lost mankind and in particular to those religious groups that is to say, the oldest of all of them - the Hindus or the Vedantists (*Romans 1:19*).

It is regrettable that in their zeal to communicate the unique message of Christ, Indian missionaries too have overlooked the worldview of the Hindus. The message has to be framed in terms of the cultural context relating it to the already established world - view of the Hindus. This approach avoids thus the general impression that Christianity is foreign. Only Christ can be presented as the **fulfillment of the highest spiritual hopes of the Hindus.** Will they truly have an opportunity to accept or reject Him?

If one reads the books of the Old Testament with an open, unbiased mind, one notices numerous rituals practiced by the people that were similar to that of Hinduism.

The message of the Bible as such is not only

for a particular group of people, be it the Jews, the Muslims or Christians, but for the entire human race in their search for God. Truly *"Man is incurably religious."* We see such a longing in the hearts of the Hindu saints too. The great poet Chaitanya sings:

> ***"I pray not for wealth, I pray not for honour, I pray not for pleasure or even the joy of poetry, I only pray that during all my life I may have love, that I may have pure love to Thee."***

The longing of the human heart to appease God can also be evident in the numerous sacrifices, karmas and rituals performed from time immemorial.

I would encourage the reader to go through the book with an open mind, devoid of prejudice or preconceived ideas and notions about Christianity.

There will be a number of references in the book quoted directly from the Bible and in order to understand and get the best out of it, it is advisable for the reader to **get a copy of the Bible** for personal and further reference. This will greatly help the reader not only to understand the message of this book better, but to also read for himself the number of verses from the Bible, that speak of similar Hindu customs and rituals. After all philosophers, sages, saints and scholars from all

over the world have read the Bible that is still the miracle book of mankind. (*A copy of the Bible can be purchased from the Bible Society, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore or from any other Christian Bookshops)*

This book will take you through a brief tour of the Bible, presenting God's Word as it was addressed to those ancient religious people who were practicing idolatry and a religion of their own.

Down through the ages man has been searching for an answer to the purpose of life here on earth and beyond the grave too! Adam, the first man with the fig leaves to cover himself began this search in the Garden of Eden and Aaron made a 'golden calf' to present before Israel as God! We also see different kinds of rituals and worship referred to in the Bible such as 'walking through fire', offering numerous sacrifices, the shaving off one's hair, 'bull-worship' 'goddess worship' chanting before the idol of a bronze serpent, making offerings of liquor to the Moon, Sun and the 'hosts of heaven' and many such practices. This may perhaps greatly surprise the reader, but will be of great interest to you as a Hindu.

It is mentioned in the Bible that the people of Israel had over 33 kinds of idols set up for worship, and many instances are known of sacrifices and

worship rendered to these.

The Bible also condemns idolatry. Listen to the Prophet Habakkuk in the Bible who described idolatry in the following quotations.

"Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it?

Or an image that teaches lies? For who makes it trusts in his own creation

He makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him, who says to the wood,

'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'wake up!' Can it give guidance?

It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it." (Habakkuk 2:18, 19)

Such an understanding of what the Bible says about idolatry helps us to appreciate and understand our own needs better and above all to see the wonderful and glorious plan of salvation presented in the New Testament after the coming of Christ, the Savior of the world, as a shining light against such a background!

Remember God has no caste, color or creed. He loves every human being whom He alone has created and His truth and His love can set a man free from bondages even religious ones. God has

no Hindu, Muslim or Christians for He does not look at the labels. It is 'Truth' alone that can save man and not any religion or philosophy.

May the God of Truth enlighten your understanding even as you read this book with an open heart. May the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth guide you as you go through it.

Thomas Samuel

Founder- President, Quiet Corner India

Bangalore

25th November 2000

HINDRANCES BEFORE NON-CHRISTIANS

The idea of Christianity in the minds of non-Christians in India is rather confusing. This is certainly understandable. For example Roman Catholicism with its numerous rituals, idol worship, could be confusing to a thinking Hindu in India, as he sees that there is not much of a difference from what is his own belief. Hence, a Hindu is tempted to consider the Lord Jesus as one among many other idols he worships. Protestant Christianity has also failed too, carrying a form of faith and not living the Christian life in the power of Christ.

This is a constructive criticism and there is some truth in it. Irrespective of these labels as Catholics or Protestants what people are looking for is the reality of life in Christ lived by a few Christians. Each Christian should be a living representation of none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Thank God, we do have such witnesses as one looks at the life of Mother Teresa who lived to glorify the Lord Jesus in all through her life.

The Christianity of the New Testament (the Bible) clearly testifies to the power of the risen Christ. The early Christians did not have large cathedrals, idols, and crucifixes nor did they worship the saints or pray for the dead. However, there are real believers in both among Catholics and Protestants who worship Christ as their savior. **It is the Lord Jesus, which matters to us and not a mere religious system**. Suffice it to say that what the Bible presents is not so much of Christianity to us but a Savior who has come to redeem all lost mankind whether they are Hindus, Muslims or Christians. No one can find fault with the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHO IS A REAL CHRISTIAN?

Another hindrance before our non-Christian friends is the alarming number of Christians who are not Christians at all. We call them 'nominal Christians' and it includes both Catholics and Protestants of every kind. These Christians are of course born into Christian homes and consequently carry a Christian name. In all likelihood they may have been baptized as a child in the church, attending the same regularly; but according to the Bible these things do not make one a true Christian. This is a fact, and many are unfortunately ignorant of it. **Hence such Christianity, without Christ has become a stumbling block to sincere seekers of truth.** Our non-Christian friends need

not pay attention to this but look to Christ instead:

As Christianity without Christ is dead, so is a Christian, without the presence and power of Christ's life in his or her life. Hence, all what we normally see around us are Christians without the life of Christ in them. Though they may carry the Christian label they have never been **born again**. They are in no way different from the man next door who profess to be religious in his own way. We have Christians with a label but in practice their conduct, behavior and lives betray the very name of the Lord Jesus. If you happen to be one of them, then you need to confess your sins to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to come into your heart.

NO ONE IS BORN AS A CHRISTIAN

The scriptures as well as the experiences of all true Christians clearly testify that **no one is by birth a Christian**. To be a Christian one need not be born in a Christian home either. The Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners no matter what religion one belongs to or is born into.

Both so-called Christians and non-Christians ignore this fact. To become a Christian or to follow Christ, one need *not* be born into a Christian home. This is a very important fact my reader needs to know. Like every other human being you have the privilege and the right to believe in the Lord Jesus and to follow Him. The Bible says: *"For God so loved*

the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but hath everlasting life" (John 3:16) This simply means that it is personal belief in the Lord Jesus that makes one a Christian.

To the Christian born in a Christian home, let me also emphasize again that mere church-attendance or baptism does not necessarily make one a Christian. This may be a baffling statement to many Christians, but nevertheless it is true. What makes a man or woman a Christian whether born in a Christian home or in a non-Christian home, is a 'supernatural spiritual birth.' The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, a religious Jew, ***"except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)*** is twice born; he has a natural birth (physical) as well as a spiritual birth–'born again.' **Hence the spiritual birth is what makes one truly Christian.**

This is a 'spiritual birth' by the working of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. Any man can experience this whether Christian, Hindu or Muslim if he or she allows the Holy Spirit of God to work in their heart bringing conviction of sin! Such a spiritual birth comes as an outcome of the Holy Spirit's working, bringing conviction of sin in one's heart. So a Christian cannot be blamed as such for conversion because this task is not of the persons making cannot convert any person whether Hindu

or Muslim. The spiritual birth is a personal transformation initiated through the working of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately today in our nation Christians or the Church is blamed for conversion.

We need to make a difference between conversion and proscelytation is the change of faith with no significant spiritual difference through material or non-material means. Conversion involves a significant change that has nothing to do with material aid. In reality there is such a thing as false conversion

No man or power on earth can convert a person to Christ except the Holy Spirit. If any one wants to blame an entity for conversion they should then blame the Holy Spirit the invisible person of the Holy Trinity. As such, this spiritual birth takes place as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Holy Trinity convicting a sinner, to turn from his or her sins and commit one's life to Christ. **One need not be converted to Christianity but to Christ**, the Living Savior! It involves the changing of one's heart and not one's religious label or name. You can be a Hindu or Muslim by label but still be a Christian at heart following the Lord Jesus.

This is how a man truly becomes a Christian. There are countless number of Christians who have only a label viz Christian, but they are lost

like anyone else unless, they too turn to Christ in repentance and faith. The Bible in that respect addresses to the entire Christian race as well as to all mankind.

IS CHRISTIANITY A WESTERN RELIGION?

This is another misunderstanding in the hearts of many of our non-Christian friends. Unfortunately they link the Christian religion with the West as its place of origin and some even dare to say that Christ was a westerner. Let us ask this question to ourselves: Is Christianity a white man's religion? Was the Lord Jesus born in America or England? Christ was actually born in the Middle East symbolically representing both East and West. It may be true that Christianity spread to the West first before entering India although according to a strong tradition the Apostle Thomas, one of the Disciples of Christ, is thought to have landed in the southern coast of India in the first century itself.

Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, once said "most men have not really rejected Christianity but only a poor caricature." They claim that Christianity is a white man's religion is just another fallacy in the line of many other misconceptions and poor discernment in the hearts and minds of many a thinking man or woman.

In order to be convinced of this one needs to take an honest look at the facts that are recorded in the Bible or in secular history. Suffice it to say that Christianity is not a western religion as some think.

Then there are the others who link Christianity and Western culture to be synonymous. This may be perhaps due to the missionary influence in India. It is also true that even indians who turned to Christ followed the culture that was brought from the West. But this is true of the secular man as well whom also wants to follow western culture in his habits and dress? People easily buy imported items considering this as better than the indigenous ones. But the Lord Jesus simply was not born in a western culture. He was born a Jew in the Middle East. The Lord Jesus never judged men by their outward appearance, caste, color or creed, but by what they were inside "for man looks at the outward appearance... The Lord looks at the heart."

The Lord Jesus made it clear in His teachings that He had come for the whole world. He preached the good news of God's love and forgiveness of sins to everyone who came to Him. He did not give a code of religious ethics for men to follow. They had already enough of it. He imparted new spiritual life to dead men for "*in Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*"

The message that the Lord Jesus proclaimed was for entire humanity, although even in the Lord Jesus time there were racists. Even the Jews felt that all non-Jews or Gentiles were unclean and thus do not have any part in God's plan. The Apostle Paul, a Jew whom God had chosen to be His instrument, boldly proclaimed that the Gentiles (non-Jews) were included in God's plan of salvation This was not pleasing to the Jews and Paul had to even risk his life many a times. **Every Hindu and Muslim is included in God's plan of salvation in Christ**. Yes to repeat again, ***"Go so loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave His Son so that every person that believes in him would not be lost, but have life forever." (John 3:16)***

As it was in Paul's day with the case of Jews in the time or Christ or today, unfortunately we see orthodox religious leaders and groups saying almost the same thing: "Christianity is only for the Christians, and it is a foreign religion." This is really sad and this has kept many from seeking the truth in the Bible. Little do they realize that there are thousands in the west itself who know little or nothing about the Lord Jesus and are lost without Him. Let my readers be therefore warned that all white men and women are not Christians either.

There are thousands of agnostics, atheists and indifferent Christians among those from the West.

There are also those who follow the religious "gurus" of India whether it is chanting 'Hare Krishna' or getting involved with Maharishi Yogi's transcendental meditation or Rajneesh in his spiritual abode preaching 'love' or perhaps even falling in love with Sai Baba. Little do they realize that these gurus are also in need of knowing the truth. After all it is truth alone that can set a man free from the bondage of self, sin and darkness.

The Lord Jesus never prescribed a 'transcendental meditation course'. He said with authority, 'Follow Me' for He was God incarnate and in Him rests all the wisdom of God—infinite in its scope. He never said there is a way; instead He affirmed : **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life!"**

As such, it is nothing but a fallacy to say that all Westerners are Christians, which is as good as saying that all Indians are Hindus! This of course is the understanding of those in the West that is equally a fallacy or a wrong deduction. Unfortunately these are some of the misconceptions and misunderstandings that have kept people from seeking the truth and appreciating the God of the Bible.

NO FAULT OR FLAW IN CHRIST

So Christianity is neither a Western religion nor

an eastern one, nor was Christ a Westerner. Such shallow thinking and conclusions get demolished in the broader light of His word in the Bible. But no matter how one looks at false Christians or the Western form of Christianity, **no fault can be found in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.** That is why in order to find the truth of Christ one needs to go right into the Bible—the book that tells all about Him and the purpose of His coming into this world. Even Pilate, the Roman Governor who ordered Christ to be crucified, said, "I find no fault in Him." **the Lord Jesus is not just another Prophet or an Avatar but is the One and only God who came to set all mankind free from sin and superstition and to give them "eternal life."** This may be a fact hard to understand at first, since our nation is filled with all kinds of gods and goddesses, as well as different religions and philosophies of every kind. As you continue to read, this truth will become more evident.

It is an historical fact that the rise of Christianity in the world has been the most amazing phenomenon of all ages. Its existence defies explanation except on the basis that Christ was more than a man. Christ lived in this world like any other man, yet his life was totally different. He was the greatest of all the Gurus the world has ever seen because He was God incarnate.

In His humanity as a man, He revealed all what

God is like and lived a holy and perfect life in all humility exhibiting mercy and compassion to the lost world. He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, fed five thousand people with a just a handful of food, raised Lazarus from the dead, walked on the sea, commanded the storm to be still and above all loved sinners and forgave the sins of all those who came to Him, even the woman caught in adultery. Who can do this except God? The Lord Jesus knew that no man can save himself or get forgiveness of sins and everyone needs a Savior.

No wonder, the Lord Jesus said: "*Come unto me all that ye labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest to your souls.***" There are religions and philosophies that offer quick fix solutions but in reality they do not work at all. You are the same after all the penance, pilgrimages and holy sacrifices that you have done. Your heart is the same and there is no change, but come to Christ and you will be a new man, a new woman for the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can cleanse you from every sin. This may sound too good to believe, but remember that Christ has paid the cost for your sins and laid down His life for you through shedding His precious blood for the remission of your sins.**

Once a brilliant young man in his desire to follow a Guru went to Dr. Radhakrishna our late President and said, "Sir could you recommend me to a true 'Guru' so that I could follow him." Turning

to that young man, Dr. Radhakrishnan remarked, "Follow the Christ of the New Testament." But this young man said, "How can I follow someone who is no more with us?" Dr. Radhakrishnan retorted, "Do not worry, go and get a copy of the New Testament and read it." This young man bought a copy of the Bible and began to read it for the first time in his life. The reading of the Scriptures convinced him that Christ was not only a Guru but also a Savior of all mankind, the one who came to save him from his sins. Committing his life to Christ, he became an ardent disciple of Christ. Perhaps this is the Savior, you too may have been searching for and seeking all through your life.

Let me remind you once more, to find Christ it is important to read the Bible. No prejudice and preconceived ideas of Christianity should keep one from seeking the truth. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "No Hindu is perfect unless he studies the whole New Testament" which is one part of the Bible. The New Testament had a profound influence on Mahatma Gandhi and he carried a copy with him all the time. It is the teaching of Christ on loving your enemies that gave force to Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence.

As mentioned above, I would suggest the reader that you procure a copy of the Bible that will greatly help you to understand the message of this book. You can get a copy form the Bible

Society of India, or a Christian Book Shop or even get hold of one from a Christian neighbor. He will be happy to present you with a Bible. The Bible will help you immensely in your desire to know more about Christ. May God open your understanding to know Him whom to know is life eternal.

HAS GOD SPOKEN?

Has God really spoken? This a million dollar question which haunts the minds of many and surprisingly so in the existing confusing of multifarious religious systems of the world, when each one claims to be true! In fact, this has led many a thinking mind to come to the conclusion that there is no point in searching or contending for the truth and that, "All is the same" whether one were to follow the crude religious systems of the people or the modernized form of "monism" which says all is God believing that all religions lead to the same path.

Nothing can be far from truth. However, if this argument is truly followed and taken into the practical day-to-day affairs of the world, we are bound to hit upon untold problems. No one ever can say that all religions are the same. We can see how absurd it is if we apply this philosophy to our day today life. For example, even in the case of commodities that one buys from the market, one is naturally inclined to seek and search for the genuine and the best. One would not be content

with what one sees first because one knows that 'all that glitters is not gold'. There are religions, which are poles apart in their belief and practices. There are religions that condone murder if that pleases his god. Then there are religions that encourage one to belief and practice horrible rituals and even sanctioning human sacrifices and shedding of innocent blood.

In our fallen world of sin, ruin, confusion and chaos we can hardly say that all religions are the same. Truth is mixed with untruth, counterfeit poses as the real, tainted as genuine is confused with counterfeit and one has to be careful all the time in looking for that which is pure and genuine. The Bible exhorts, "Oh! Man of God, follow after righteousness, truth.... think on these things."

Religions differ so widely in practices and religious teachings. There are numerous man-made religious codes, and there is no shortage of saviors of mankind. All over India one can find many Prophets who call themselves as the "liberators" and some even do not hesitate to claim themselves to be incarnations of God themselves. Many are being led away from the path that God has provided for mankind in His love. We have many "Babas" and "Swamis" as pretenders of truth corrupting the minds of men and women, who are hungry for truth and reality. In some of the "*darshans*" men and women all in the name of

acquiring peace through God shock one to see such obscene demonstrations. It is tragic that many are fooled in the name of God, and what more; one dares to say that all is the same. Such practices are not something new. It has been in existence since time immemorial.

The saddest fact is that honest seeking souls who are after the truth are trapped in the devil's net.

It is no wonder that God could not shut his eye to such confusion and chaos any longer as He looked at humanity. This is all the more a fact as well as a logical conclusion, that there needs to be a clear revelation of God to mankind through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, thus God becoming man. This is quite opposed to man becoming God. This is what we see in the Bible. Think of the numerous gods and goddesses that we have in our land. Who made them? Can a man make god for himself or should God make a man?

Unfortunately, there seems to be a communication break between God and man. But this is not quite true if we look at the God of the Bible. The Bible repeatedly mentioned that God has spoken. **He has spoken in the Old Testament through His chosen vessels namely the Prophets. In *Hebrews chapter 1:1-3* we read,**

"God who at sundry times and in diverse manners
Shake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

hath in these last times spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." (Heb. 1:1-3)

Yes, God has been speaking in the past, but He has spoken in a verbalized form through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. This is God's final communication to lost mankind.

Dr. Francis Schaeffer a Christian apologist, in one of his book states, "God has revealed in three ways to mankind such as through His creation, through His Son, and through the written Word, — "The Bible."

CREATION

It was Immanuel Kant, the great philosopher who said, "The starry host above and the moral law within me testify that there is a Living God." David the Psalmist of the Bible declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handy work." The starry heaven with its billions of galaxies studded with stars and the vastness of the empty space up above with all the heavenly bodies, who can fathom? Science of our day is nothing but a candle trying

to search and discover, that which is in this vast cosmos, the Universe.

Then let us turn to the wonder of this very earth which is but a tiny particle in the whole universe. Look at the many created things and nature alike. The beautiful flowers that bloom at every season, the birds that fly in the air, the fish that swim in the ocean and the green valleys, mountains, and snow-covered peaks as well as thick forests filled with wildlife, all of which defies human explanation and creates great wonder in our hearts about God's creation.

In addition to this, God has also provided us with His Word, the Bible. This is God's written communication to mankind. This is the basis of Christian faith and conduct, in which God has clearly defined His purpose of creating the world and man. No other religious book gives such a profound truth about the creation of this world or the purpose of human existence. In our modern generation what the Bible has said about the earth, science has proved it to be true. Who said that the earth was round? It is the Bible that has said first. The Bible also gives us light concerning the origin of sin as well as the way of salvation through His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus. That is why it is so important for you and me to read and study the Bible.

Without the Bible our faith will have no meaning or foundation. The Bible has gone through the critical analysis of several scholars and saints alike, faced all kinds of criticisms but ultimately has been found to be true to its very letter. The Bible is timeless and it has numerous insights. One day a patient went to see a famous psychiatrist and noticed a Bible lying on his desk. "Do you as a psychiatrist read the Bible?" he asked. "I not only read," the psychiatrist told him, "but also study it." "It is the greatest text book on human behavior ever put together. If people would just absorb its message, a lot of us psychiatrists could close our offices and go fishing", said the psychiatrist to the patient. All books inform, but the Bible transforms. It is the only book written in heaven and published on the earth because it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as its author.

Due to contact between the East and the West there has been an intermingling of cultures that brought people close to one another's customs and practices of worship as well. This contact began primarily because of commercial interest and served to spread many phases of culture from one country to another. The 2nd millennium B.C. witnessed the migration of the Indo-Europeans to the Near East which resulted in the establishment of the Hittite and the Mittani kingdoms. One of

the obvious results of the movement was that they made a tremendous impact on the Near East.

THE CULTURE OF THE HINDUS

However, in the Vedic literature and the sacred writings of the Hindus we see certain parallel truths to that which is written in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.

THE VEDIC LITERATURE

"One of the earliest literatures of ancient India are those that go back to the period of the Indo-Aryan migrations. The precise date of the invasion or the date of the literature that they brought with them is not known. It has been generally held that this literature known as the "vedas" were orally circulated long before they were committed to writing. The earliest of the Vedas is the RIGVEDA. The culture which is reflected in the RigVeda is a copper-age culture." **In the Cambridge History of India, K. Nilakanta Sastri writes:*

"The Rig Veda which Max Mueller translates as songs of Spiritual Knowledge comprises 10 books and 1028 hymns. These songs, many of which are addressed to deities, show a preoccupation with God and a mystic conception of the universe. A notable song is the song of Creation whose opening lines are as follows:

"Then 'was not non-existent nor existent, there was no lump of air, no sky beyond it. What covered, in and where? And what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depths of water? Darkness there was at first concealed in darkness : this All was in discriminated power, all that existed then was void and formless by the great power of warmth was born that unit."

This song compares well with the Biblical account of creation in *Genesis 1*. While there are significant differences in these accounts one cannot fail to note the common features such as 'the watery depths, the primordial chaos and darkness'.

The gods of the Vedas are of importance to those who are interested in a comparative study of religions. During the vedic period, four gods were recognized as chief deities and each had a distinctive function. **Indra** was the "sky-god" who hurled thunderbolts. **Agni** was the god of fire and light. **Varuna** was the god of the air and sea. **Surya** was the god of the sun. These gods can be compared to the gods of Mesopotamia, the Canannite and Egyptian pantheon who had particular phases of influence among the people of the Old Testament. Later on these gods were added to the pantheon and consequently the gods of the heroic age superceded the gods of the vedic age. This phenomenon also appears in the literature of the Near East.

The legal institutions that existed from the Vedic times deserve specific mention. The law books were called *Dharma Sastra*. There are several courts law, which are ascribed to many ancient worthies among whom Manu generally holds the chief place.

Among the literature of ancient India there are only two works which can be called Epic literature the MAHABHARATHA and the RAMAYANA. Although god figures in these works, the heroes are human characters. Sidhanta a scholar, points out that these epics have several characters, which are shared by standard epic literature including the Homeric epic.

There are similar things of parallel interest mentioned in the ancient literature of the Hindus as well as in the Bible. For example, Leverite marriage, which is a well-attested institution in India from ancient times, was also practiced in the Near East. Dr. Gordon points out that the Indo-European people introduced this to the Near East. It is significant to note that the parents of the heroes of the Mahabharata were born out of a Leverite marriage relationship. The main object of this type of marriage is the perpetuation of the family line which otherwise might become extinct. The concern is reflected in the Bible as well, especially in the Old Testament.

It is of great importance to notice here that sacrifices and rituals are strongly emphasized in the Indian epics. Sacrifices may be made daily as well as on special occasions. Arjuna is said to have performed daily sacrifices while he was in exile. A special sacrifice called the "Ashwamedha" (horse sacrifice) was to be made once in several years. The chief feature of Asvamedha was the sacrifice of many horses in addition to the offering of oblations and the recitation of hymns. The sacrificial fire was also worshipped. The worship of sacred groves was also a feature of the epic religion.

Several of these features appear in different forms in the various traditions of the ancient Near East. It is to be observed that while ancient Israel's religion regarded sacrifices as a small part of their religious activities, there was a strong reaction against the planting of trees near the altar of Jehovah. This was perhaps due to the reaction against the fertility cult associated with Asherah, whose symbol was the trunk of a tree.

The examples quoted above show that there are several features that were common to the ancient Indian and the Israelite people of the Near East. There has been contact between India and the Near East from the historic times, which has been attested by archeological evidences too. Further these show that there is much in common

in the surviving ancient scriptures of the Hindus and that of the Jewish people as found in the Old Testament.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF IDOL WORSHIP

The Bible not only gives instances of idol worship but the Bible also speaks clearly what its views are on idolatry, which is considered as false worship. Let me quote the following verses from the Old Testament.

"Thou shall not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." *(Exodus 20:4)*

"Ye shall make no idols nor carved image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it, for I am the Lord your God." *(Leviticus 26:1)*

"The carved images of their gods shall ye burn with fire; thou shall not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God" *(Deut. 7: 25)*

"Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and yet turn aside, and serve other gods and worship them." *(Deuteronomy 11:16)*

"I am the Lord; that is my name and my glory will I not give to another or my praise to idols."*(Isaiah 42:8)*

"And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." *(Deuteronomy 4: 28)*

"He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation, choseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh a skilful workman to prepare a carved image that shall not be moved." *(Isaiah 40 : 20)*

"Assemble yourselves and come, draw near together, ye who are escaped of the nations; they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their carved *8* image and pray unto a god that cannot save." *(Isaiah 45: 20)*

"They are upright like the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good." *(Jeremiah 10:5))*

So the Scriptures clearly warn and exhort people from idol worship. Israel, although they knew the One, True and Living God, did backslide and as a result they turned to idol worship again. God had to exhort them time and again to turn **away from such practices and to repent for their sins. The Old Testament is filled with such exhortations and warnings to Israel.**

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

It is interesting to mention here that the early Christians were not those who were born in Christian homes as we see them today. Presently, there are many Christians who are born in Christian homes and who have Christian names, but are far from the truth of what the Bible says. Christians are not manufactured in that way. No man can come to know Christ unless he experiences a new birth spiritually, being converted to Christ and not to any ritual or dogma.

The intelligent Hindu must not look to such namesake Christians to find Christ. He must come straight to the Master, through His own Word in the Gospel. In other words the seeking Hindu must take the pain of reading the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, as it is the Scriptures that testify of Him, the Messiah and the Savior of the world.

The early Christians who had come to know Christ were both from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Most of them were practicing the religion, which their forefathers followed, and the majority of the Gentiles were worshippers of idols like the religious masses of our times. It is from

this background that many heard the gospel, believed in Christ and turned away from their idolatry to the Living and true God.

Paul speaks about such a group of people in *I Corinthians 12:2*, "You know that you were Gentiles carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led." Yes, these people were ardent worshippers of idols before they came under the influence of the gospel, which delivered them from sin and superstition.

From this verse it is quite clear that Paul is addressing these early Christians, Gentiles who were at one time carried away, unto these dumb idols. In fact Paul is reminding them that they were once worshippers of idols but are now turned to the reality that is in Christ the Lord Jesus. Paul's desire in exhorting them in this way is to continue to give them the desire to follow the truth, as it is revealed in the Bible.

Of course, we can see many instances where some of them were tempted to follow the old practices which they have been following in their idol worship such as eating food offered to idols and so on. However, as they received more light from God's word, many gave up their practices once and for all, and accepted the way of the gospel. The early Christians were as such, a group who turned from Gentile backgrounds and practices to the living Christ.

Today in India Christ offers the opportunity in the same manner for those who are followers of idol worship. Religion cannot be enforced upon any one, but each Indian should have the liberty and freedom to choose his or her faith, and not to cling to the traditional ties however old they may be. The Government has no business to interface with the faith of its citizens. They should never be guardian of the faith of its citizens though for political interest they are tempted to do so.

FREEDOM OF FAITH:

There is a common misconception in our country that the chief purpose of religious leaders is to induce people to change their religion. For this reason it is argued that all religious propaganda must be prohibited. Of course, some historical processes could be responsible for creating such a bad impression. Foreigners who invaded India and established their rule here have possibly or by judicial law converted people. They did it to strengthen their hold on the country and they considered it a good policy to get as many people as possible to accept their religion as well as their political authority. This can be said of both Christianity and Islam. It is said that possibly rulers took delight in compelling large numbers of people to become Muslims at the point of the sword.

Of course, there could also be other reasons

why certain groups of people have changed their religion. Some of them could be probably justified in the face of their aversion to fanatical practices such as *sati*, offering human sacrifice to idols etc. Of course, conditions have now radically changed and in free India there is no place for religions intolerance. All the major religions of the world have made their home in our land today. Each religion is serving and enlightening man. It is a legitimate duty of the free people to choose their own faith intelligently rather than clinging to age-old ties. As such, religious freedom is our birthright.

For instance, we have numerous political parties in our land today. They are actively engaged in propagating their ideals and trying to win the people to support them. Some of them do not believe in any religion or god whatsoever. They publicize their programmes, hold meetings, criticize and condemn all their rivals, their motives and in such campaigning they usually stoop down to unhealthy methods, and even stir up agitations. If these things are tolerated as a necessary evil of democratic life and are looked upon as basic rights of a free people, religious freedom too must have its rightful share.

Christ offers not a new religion or philosophy because we have plenty of both. What he offers to mankind is "life" which results from forgiveness of

sin and restoration of fellowship with God. The Bible says **"in Him was life and the life was the light of men."** ***(John 1:4)*** It is to this life He welcomes every human being upon this earth. When Christ died, He died for the whole world. He bore upon Himself the sins of the world and paid the price. It is Calvary that sets a sinner free from his sins as well as from his religious rites.

God offers no religion to man and the religions of the world are man-made approaches to God. Whereas in the Bible we see a loving God taking the initiative for mankind, revealing Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ.

ABRAM, AN IDOLATER, CALLED OUT FROM UR OF THE CHALDEES

One of the significant things in the Old Testament that we see is the call and selection of the people of Israel. The beginning of this was the call of Abram who in many ways was an idolater worshipping the moon-god and lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. The Living God called out Abram from such a pagan worship for a particular purpose. When the call of God came to follow Him (as we read in *Genesis 12*), asking him to leave his own kindred, people and idolatry which he practiced, Abram heard the call and obeyed to follow the Living and True God, although his understanding of the God who called him was very limited, but in faith he launched out.

This was a sovereign call from God. What made God to call Abram is not known, since God is sovereign in all His ways. However, we know that though Abraham once did worship idols ignorantly and followed a religion of his forefathers it did not disqualify him in being called out by God, a privilege you and I now enjoy. The Bible does speak that his father Terah, too was an idolater but followed his son in this call. Thus both Abram and

his father, worshippers of the moon-goddess' followed the call of the Living God who appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees.

It is interesting to mention here that thus the ancient message came to a people whose practices are parallel to that which we see in India today, mainly Hinduism. Most pagan religions were religions of rituals and idol worship and Abram was like one of us. In the same way, God is still in the process of calling out many from Hinduism and Islam today to follow the true God although many still are ignorant of this God of the Bible.

It is mentioned that the place Haran that like Ur was a center of the moon-god cult. Whether Abraham's father Terah was a worshipper of the moon-god and refused to break with his idolatry or not we do not know *(Genesis 11:31,32).* At any rate when his father Terah died at Haran, Abraham and his nephew Lot and their families continued their migration southwest into Canaan, passing through the hill country of Shechem and on to Bethel. The story of their journey is beautifully written in *Genesis chapter 12* the first book of the Bible.

So we see that when God called out to Abraham, it was from an idolatrous background that He did choose him. The people of Haran were worshippers of the moon-goddess and the

neighboring countries of Haran such as Nahor also were people who had given themselves to idolatry. From this we can also see that God is not a respector of particular persons or nations and He does call people from every background, irrespective of their own religious beliefs. Perhaps we could compare Abraham to a Hindu in our day, who God loved and revealed himself to. When God called Abraham God said, "I will bless you and will make you a blessing. I will bless and make you as a great nation." And we see today that the Jewish nation is a proof of God's promise to Abraham

JACOB'S FATHER-IN-LAW

We also see Jacob's father-in-law about whom the Bible speaks too was a worshipper of idols and he too could be compared to one of us. Jacob's father-in-law had his own household gods as we do have. Rachel when she left her father's home to go with Jacob took some of the images (the household gods) as well with her. In fact she stole her father's gods. From this we see again that they had believed in household gods and had a religion of their own but it was from this background that Jacob chose a wife for himself. Thus it shows that although God has nothing to do with idolatry yet he loves the idolater. His desire is that all humanity may know the truth and follow Him.

From these brief accounts we see that this

message of the Bible is for people who are idol worshippers and those who have had numerous household gods as we see today. God is still searching for such people and among them a "remnant" who will hear the voice of God and follow Him.

God is still the same. Today as we see in India, God is calling out to the Abrams from many different religions to follow the Living God. The only difference between Abram and us is that when God revealed Himself to Abram and called him, he heard His voice and obeyed Him. But today, because of the cultural and traditional religious ties of our non-Christian friends, although many hear the call of God through the preaching of God's word, by reading the Bible as well as meeting true Christians, all do not take the step of leaving behind everything to follow Him, and in some cases the fact is that they find it hard to pay such a heavy price. But the time has come to pull down such barriers that hinder us in our faith.

The Lord Jesus said that except a man deny himself and take up His cross and follow Him he could not be His disciple. This choice is before every one whether Hindu or Muslim. God has finally revealed through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ that there is no need of following just religions, however old and ancient they may be since God Himself has now revealed the truth

through His son the Lord Jesus Christ. He came for the whole world revealing the unseen God.

As we look around in India today we see too much religion and religious practices, but without the knowledge of the True and Living God. Even following Him from one of the ancient Upanishads does show that through all these the people are still worshipping the unknown God without knowing the True and Living God.

The Lord Jesus didn't come to destroy any culture or religious sentiments of people but to meet the longing in the heart of every man whatever religion he may profess and to fulfill all the aspirations and longings of mankind for God. He came not to destroy but to fulfill, but when one makes up his mind to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot hang onto the old as well. Those who like Abraham want to follow God have to leave behind all their customs in order to accept the One who revealed Himself to them. Even the Apostle Paul who was an ardent preacher of the gospel had to give up his Pharisaical pride and Jewish customs after the Lord Jesus met with him on the road to Damascus, when Saul of Tarsus became the Paul of the New Testament, he became one of the greatest evangelists in the history of the world and one of the pioneers of the early church.

The early church took its roots too from a

pagan and non-Christian world. As has already been mentioned, many of the "converts" to Christianity were those who were once practicing different religious systems. Of course, among them a good number were from Jewish backgrounds as well. The Apostle Paul mentioned concerning the early Christians that they were those who had left the idols to serve the Living God and we read about this in his epistle to the Thessalonians, and he exhorts them as such to continue in the faith and not to be tempted to lean back to those gods whom they have left.

It is my prayer that today, the Almighty God, may call out hundreds of Hindus and Muslims and others from such religious backgrounds, that they may also humble themselves and be willing to hear His voice and thus follow Him! God is not a respector of persons, people, culture or nation. God's love surpasses all human barriers and today He continues to speak through the Gospel of His Son to seek and to save those who are lost, including those who are religious.

The opportunity given to you are to search the religions faith in which you are today and yield yourself to the voice of God. God has seen your religious inclination and sincerity and wants to save your soul. No religion can ever save man or has saved any in the past but only the Savior. The verdict on the face of many of our millions in India

is that "they are religious, but lost." You may be religious but lost for eternity.

There are no religions that can save your soul nor can you approach God in your own way? God has reached out to us through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and has made the way for the forgiveness of sins and also through Him given you the privilege to be His Children. This is the offer of God to every human being who is willing to repent of his or her sins and return to Him. India needs Christ as never before and Christ needs you.

THE PARALLEL IDOLATRY IN THE BIBLE

It is hard to understand the height of idol worship between Israel and the Bible speaks clearly about it and also names the various gods and goddesses. In their backslidden state Israel turned to pagan idolatry. It is said that Israel had worshipped about 83 idols of different kinds and of different description although the Bible named them as "false gods." Some of these were: -

Molech - The national god of Ammon (*Lev. 18:21*)

Baal - The national god of Phoenicia (*Num. 22:41*). There are numerous other references too concerning Baal in the Bible.

Beelzebub - god of the dunghill, a name of Satan (*Matthew 10:25*)

Chemosh - god of Moab, the same as Molech of Ammon.

Golden Calf - god of backslidden Israel (*Deut. 9:16-21*).

Golden cows - gods of backslidden Israel of Bethel & Dan (*1 Kings 12:28-32*).

Neshusta - brazen serpent gods (*2 Kings 18:4*).

Sun, Moon - Objects of worship of Israel & Star (*Deut. 4:19; 2 Kings 17:16*).

Succoth & Nenoth - god of idolatrous dens of in immoral orgies (*2 Kings 17:30*).

Jupiter - Supreme god of the Greeks (*Acts 14:12,13*).

Mercury - The Roman god of commerce (*Acts 14:12*).

Unknown God - The Greeks (*Act 17:23*).

Diana - God of the Greeks (*Acts 19:24,25*).

Israel has worshipped these idols and offered sacrifices to them and as such is no way different from a Hindu of our day.

In their idolatrous practices there were numerous references to human sacrifices too, as they offered their sons and daughters to such deities. They also had the practice of praying to the dead (*Deut. 14:1*). Today such superstitious

practices or praying and performing rituals to the departed souls are common both among Hindus and so-called Christians. The Syrian Christians of Kerala and the Roman Catholics still follow the custom of praying for the dead. Although this is quite contrary to the teaching of the Bible. The Bible speaks of any salvation or hope for anyone once they are dead. What awaits one is the Day of Judgment after death.

Regardless of many commands both in the Old Testament and New Testament against idolatry, millions indulge in the love of images and their worship today, even in so-called Christian lands. Idolatry was God's biggest problem, which faced the new converts from pagan religions to Christianity. Christian leaders rebuked various peoples for seeking to introduce images of even Christ and the saints into worship. The Church Fathers have fought against such worship of idols of saints or even of Christ statue, despite the fact that we see among the Catholics such practices.

SOME OF THE PROMINENT IDOLS WORSHIPPED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BAAL - a god of Phoenicia and the Canaanitish tribes (***Numbers 22:41;Judges 2:11,8:33; 1Kings 16:32; 18:19***) "and it came to pass on the next day, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal and from there he might see the utmost part of the

people." (*Numbers 22:41*) **Baal-peor - a god of the Moabites (*Num. 25:3; Deuteronomy 4:3; Joshua 22:17; Psalm 106:28*).** "And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." (*Numbers 25:3*)

CHEMOSH - **a god of the** Moabites **(*Numbers 21:29;Judges 11:24; 2 Kings 23:13*)** "Woe to thee Moab! Thou are undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon, king of the Amorites." (Numbers *21:29*)

DIANA - **a god of the Ephesians (*Acts 19:24; 28:35*).** "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen." (*Acts 19:24*)

These were some of the main gods and goddesses that were worshipped by the people of Israel as also the Canaanites and Hittites among whom they lived.

In addition to these gods and goddesses that were worshipped there have been other objects of worship, which the Jewish people themselves have made. Quoted below are some of the idols that were made by the people of God.

1. THE GOLDEN CALF:

This golden calf was made by Aaron who was Moses' brother (*Exodus 32:4;Deuteronomy 9:16;Nehemiah 9:18;Psalms 106:19).* a And he received

them at their hand and fashioned it with an engraving tool, after he had made it molten calf, and they said, "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."(*Exodus 32:4*)

2. THE GOLDEN CALVES OF JEROBOAM:

These Golden Calves were set up in Dan and Bethel (*1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 10:29,12:16; 2 Chronicles 11:15,13:8*). Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold and said unto them, "it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem, behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." (*1 Kings 12:28*)

3. HEAVENLY BODIES:

The worship of heavenly bodies were also common and the references are *Deuteronomy* And *4:19,17:3; 2 Kings 17:16,21:8; Job 31:27; Jeremiah 8:2,19:13,44:17; Ezekiel 8:16.* lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou see the sun, the moon and the "stars, even all the host of heaven do not be enticed into bowing down to worship them, and serve them which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven." (*Deuteronomy 4: 19*) **This is a clear indication not to worship the sun, moon and stars.**

4. TERAHIM - HOUSEHOLD GOD:

Genesis 31:19; Judges 17:5,18:14; 1 Samuel 19:13. "And Laban went to shear his sheep and Rachel had stolen the images that were her fathers." (Genesis *31:19*)

5. MAN DEIFIED AND WORSHIPPED:

Acts 12:22,14:11,28:6. *"And the people gave a shout, saying, it is the voice of a god and not of a man."* (*Acts 12:22*)

This idea of worshipping a man who claims to be god is very common in India. In fact, there are a number of such individuals today who claim to be the incarnation of God and hundreds throng around them to worship these human beings. It was Sardar Pannikar who said, "There have been always five hundred living gods in India." Many have been sidetracked in their pernicious ways and people without giving thought as to whom they worship are blindly following them. Also, there are a number of idols and semi-gods to be found throughout the land. With their miracles, magic formulas, yoga's and meditations and exercises, they are being deceived and deceiving others too who are ignorant of the truth and reality and do not practices in their holiness walk and conduct. The recent happening in our nation clearly proves this fact. They themselves are morally weak.

6. DEVIL WORSHIP:

Added to all these is Devil worship which is very common, not only in India, but also in various parts of the world today. It is mentioned in the Bible in a number of places that people have literally worshipped the Devil. (*Leviticus 17:7;*

Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:16; Psalms 106:37; Rev. 9:20,13:4). "And they shall no more offer their sacrifice unto demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever unto them throughout their generations." (*Leviticus 17:7*)

PLACES DEVOTED TO IDOLATRY

There have been a number of instances of areas or places mentioned as being completely given to idol worship. Such places are common in the history and life of the people of Israel. Some of these places are: -

(a) IDOLATROUS ALTARS:

1 Kings 16:32,18:26; Isaiah 27:9,65:3; Hosea 8:11; Acts 17:23. "And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria." (*1 Kings 16:32*)

(b) IDOLATROUS TEMPLES:

1 Samuel 5:2; 1 Kings 12:31; 2 Kings 5:18; 2 Chronicles 36:7;Daniel 1:2;Acts 19:27. "When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon." (*1 Samuel 5:2*)

(c) HIGH PLACES:

**These are again places which were devoted to idolatry and the name of the high places are mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament (*Numbers 22:41; 1 Kings 11:7,12:31; 2 Kings*

18:4,21:3,23:14; 2 Chronicles 11:15,17:26). *" And* it came to pass on the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him into the high places of Baal, that from there he might see the utmost part of the people." (*Numbers 22:41*)

(d) GROVES:

These are basically plant groves. (*Deuteronomy 12.2,16:21; Judges 6:25; 1 Kings 14:15,16:33; 2 Kings 18:4,21:3,23:14; 2 Chronicles 14:3,17:6; Isaiah 17:8*) "Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills, and every green tree." (*Deuteronomy 12:2*)

HUMAN SACRIFICES

Examples are given in *Genesis 22:5,42:26; Exodus 34:8; Joshua 5:14; Judges 7:15; 1 Samuel 1:28; 2 Samuel 12:20; 2 Chronicles 7:8; Job 1:20; Nehemiah 8:6.* And Abraham said unto his young men, "Abide ye here with the ass, I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." (*Gen. 22:5*) **This is a mention of human sacrifice although God never permitted Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.**

From these various references one cannot but come to the conclusion that idol worship was not something new but it has been rooted in time immemorial and even among people who have

been partly enlightened by God as we see in the case of the Jewish people. Whenever man has failed to recognize and understand the truth that has been revealed by God, they in their backslidden state have turned to worship the gods that have been made by their own hands.

WORSHIP OF HEAVENLY BODIES

In *Jeremiah 7 verse 18* we have again a reference concerning the worship of heavenly bodies done by the people of Israel. "The children gather wood and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger." A striking similarity is we seen here in India. Here, we see people have taken themselves to worship the moon god. Idolatry was committed right in the streets of Jerusalem by all members of the family.

Yet it is interesting to mention here that it was again from such a background of moon worship, from Ur of the Chaldees, that Abram who was renamed Abraham, the great father of the righteous, a worshipper of the moon god was called out and separated by God. Although Abram was sincere in following the religions his forefathers practiced and had a hunger of God, yet until God spoke to him and called him out when he was in darkness bound by idolatry.

This in some ways is a great encouragement to the reader that no matter how deeply one has gone into idolatry and superstition and is involved in the worship of the heavenly bodies, God can still give grace to separate him or her from such a bondage to follow the Living God.

As Abram worshipped the moon god, today we can see people still worshipping the sun, moon, stars and the heavenly bodies. We can see among our non-Christian friends, a man taking some water early morning and turning to heaven to offer his worship to the Sun god. Such worship has been forbidden in the Bible because God alone is to be worshipped and God has finally been revealed to all mankind. You do not worship God by worshipping such things as mountains, trees, fire and even seas. We are exhorted to worship the Creator God and not His creations.

CUTTING OF HAIR

In *Jeremiah 7 verse 29*, we have another interesting reference to the cutting of hair. "Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places, for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." **We see today that a number of Hindu pilgrims make trips to different temples to shave off their hair. Although the one who does cut off the hair has no idea of its significance, such practices continue to**

exist. Here in this particular verse, we see that in the streets of Jerusalem people have cut off their hair and cast it off. In the Bible, this is a symbolic way of lamentation and rejection by God, because people have backslidden, yet it has a very striking similarity to that which is practiced by many in our land today.

These are but abominations in the sight of God. Whenever Israel loved, served and walked after, sought after and worshipped Jehovah, they have been richly blessed but whenever they have departed from the commandments of God they turned away to all kinds of superstitious practices and idolatry. God has been still speaking to them, sending prophets and warning them to turn from such backslidden stages. The same God is speaking today to the multitudes in India to turn away from such practices and follow the true and Living Way.

It is through the constant speaking of God to such backslidden people that finally Israel has turned back to the Living God.

The need of the hour is again for us as those who practice similar worship and idolatry to turn to the Living God. Today, this very Jehovah of the Bible is revealed as the Savior of the World in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CALF WORSHIP

This is yet another idolatry that the Bible speaks of. Many of our non-Christian friends have no idea that the Bible has some reference to the worship of the bull or calf. It was "Aaron", Moses brother who made a molten calf in the wilderness for worship.

We can see as we read the Old Testament that "Calf Worship" was a very prominent factor in the lives of the backslidden people of Israel. In *Psalm 106:19*, we read, "They made a calf in Horeb and worshipped the molten image." I think that again this is a reference to the worship of the calf made by the people of Israel. We have another reference in *Hosea 8:5,6*, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off, mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be that they attain to innocence? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it: therefore it is not God; but the calf of Samaria **shall be broken in pieces." Here we see that the gods of Samaria were known as the idol calf. Contrary to the commandment of God, again Israel has worshipped the calf, which they have made with their own hands.**

The last reference to calf worship is found in *Revelation 4:7* where we see an animal in heaven likened to that of a calf. "And the first beast was like a lion, and the third beast had a face as a man

and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle." (*Revelation 4:7*) And so we see right through the Bible the idea of "calf" worship, which we see among Hindus. In the South of India the idol of Nandi Bull is a prominent one and people come from different parts of India to offer worship to this idol.

From the foregoing time, we understand that the inclination and worship of the people both in the Old Testament and in our present generation especially in this land of India involved around the great desire to worship a Bull or a Calf or a Cow. This idea of worship has been continuing from time immemorial although we see that the people of Israel have turned away from all such idolatrous worship in answer to the call of God to repent.

The only difference between the Hindus in India who worship idols of all kinds including calves and the people of Israel is that the latter recognized the light God had given them and so had forsaken not only making gods with their own hands but also worshipping them and began recognizing and worshipping the True and Living God. Who is a Spirit? The Bible says God is a Spirit and they who worship Him must worship in Truth and Spirit.

Although there is a vast difference in the meaning of various sacrifices done by Israel and

the Hindus of today, in their performance of various rituals and sacrifices, one cannot but see that to some extent, the Brahmin priests are comparable to the Jewish High Priest of those days, in their role. But the sacrifice in the Bible was only a fore shadow of that great sacrifice on the cross where the Lord Jesus became the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the world. Hence, there is no need for any sacrifice, as the Lord Jesus Christ became the supreme sacrifice for the sins of the world i.e. for your sins and mine.

The sacrifices were supposed to be made at the right time in the right way and failure in performing these sacrifices meant the loss of salvation. Unfortunately, the people were left in doubt whether their sins were actually forgiven or not as they could not be sure of its effect. There was no assurance of salvation or *Moksha* in sacrifices. The Bible not only speaks of sacrifice of animals but also human sacrifices done to appease God.

As mentioned earlier Israel had even sacrificed their sons and daughters before the idols when they backslid from following the True and Living God. Today in India, despite the fact that human sacrifice is forbidden by law, we still hear of such sacrifices done in certain remote parts of our land, not knowing that God has done away with all forms of sacrifice once and for all.

From various references in the Bible we realize the importance given to the worship of Baal, the

chief deity in the lives of Israel. Can we say that these people were not idolatrous? Yes, Israel too had fallen a victim to idolatry like millions of Hindus in this land.

In such unmistakable terms we see in the Bible that idolatry was prevalent. As Christians, instead of condemning our kinsmen, the Hindus, we must lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the full revelation of the unseen God. Jesus said to Philip, His disciple, he that's hath seen me, hath seen God.

Although the Bible thus speaks of human sacrifices in some places it is highly condemned by God. However it does speak the truth that Israel has sacrificed their daughters unto idols, and as such does not hide the horrible sins committed by Israel in their backslidden state.

Today in India through law, human sacrifices are forbidden. It was through the efforts of pioneer missionaries who came to India with the gospel like William Carey that the conscience of the colonial Government in India was awakened to such terrible crimes of sacrificing human beings to appease Gods. However, though the Bible speaks of such instances where Israel had fallen yet it condemns the same and God too judged the people because of it. It is the Word of God, the Bible that throws light upon such stark superstitions like offering human sacrifices. Here we see the sad

plight of degenerated religious rituals to appease God.

Religious rituals, incense burning, drink offerings and eating things offered to idols are common practices we see among Hindu religious rites. The Bible speaks of incense burning and drink offerings connected with the worship of the "queen of heaven" which is a deity again set up by the people themselves.

> "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, for then had we plenty of victuals and were well, and saw no evil." (*Jeremiah 44:17*)

In spite of the fact that God has forbidden Israel to make such sacrifices of their children to Molech they have continued to do so. We see such exhortations in *Exodus 20:4*, saying, "You shall not sacrifice your children to be burned in the fire to the God Molech." **Against such pernicious ways of backslidden Israel, God's Word keeps on coming to them exhorting them to listen, obey and walk according to His way.**

Since fallen man has a temptation to walk in his own ways and to follow a god of his own choice, God has continually commanded him in

unmistakable terms to turn and walk in the light and pay heed to His voice. God has often sent prophets with a word from Him to warn and exhort them. Those who have followed such commands of God and obeyed, taking heed of such exhortation and warnings have found favor with God.

In such terms God also addresses us here in this land of India where many millions have given themselves to such idolatrous practices. God's word comes to us that you shall not worship an idol or follow the ways of such a god, but instead must turn to the Living God.

Since in such unmistakable terms we see idolatry practiced in the Bible; how can we as Christians, condemn the Hindus of today who are idolatrous without understanding the deep-rooted craving in the hearts of men down through the centuries to worship man-made created beings rather than the creator. In practicing idolatry, all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Hence God has to initiate a way of salvation to all mankind without caste, creed or color. We do not come to God with such labels as Hindu, Muslim, Christian or black or white but as sinners lost for eternity and in need of salvation.

THE BIBLE CONDEMNS IDOL WORSHIP

The Bible not only exposes idolatry, but it also condemns it. The penalty of our idolatry as being treason against the Divine King was death. The offender's nearest relative must denounce him and even be the first to stone him.

"He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed." (*Exodus 22:20*)

Especially Molech's worship with human sacrifices and passing through the fire, entailed death as the penalty. The Canaanites were exterminated for it.

"Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods and one can call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; and thou take of their daughters and go a whoring after their gods and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."

(*Exodus 34:15, 16*)

"When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whether thou goest to possess them, and thou succeeds them and dwells in their land;

take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee, and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, how did these nations serve their gods, even so will I do likewise. Thou shall not do so unto the Lord thy God; for every abomination to the Lord, which he hates have they done unto their gods, for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods." (*Deut 12: 29-31*)

Israel's disasters were the punishment for their idolatry.

"For though thou wash thee with soda and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God." (*Jeremiah 2:22*)

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

This too was practiced among Israel. The worship of the spirits of the departed ones. We can see this as a custom among the Hindus and such worship flourished among primitive people. Many rituals are done to appease the spirit of the departed and many feared such spirits.

God has seen the deep hunger and thirst of man to know the unknown. In the midst of such ignorance and superstition at the right time God spoke to His people revealing His Purpose and plan through His son Jesus.

THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF ORNAMENTS - QUITE PARALLEL TO INDIAN CULTURE?

Our country is a land where we see many modes of clothing, wearing of ornaments and painting bodies. The tribals of Orissa and Bihar prefer to wear bangles on the entire arm while other tribals cover their legs with bangles and tinkling bells. No matter where you look, one thing is common that the idea of wearing ornaments is a common thing. It is interesting to see what the Bible has to say about this. "The monuments of ancient Egypt exhibit the wealthy ladies loaded with rings, earrings of very great size, anklets, armlets, bracelets of most varied character; richly ornamented necklaces and chains of various kinds." **There is sufficient evidences in the Bible that show the inhabitants of Palestine were equally devoted to finery.**

Numbers 31:30 **and** ***Isaiah 3:18-23*** **gives us the kind of ornaments the people wore in those days. It speaks of ornaments of the feet, nose, chains, bracelets, bonnets, ornaments of the legs, earrings and pins, glasses and fine linen, wood and veils. People wore all these ornaments in those days and we see a great similarity in the manner of wearing these ornaments among the Hindus.**

In some parts of India, Christians wear nose jewels but it is commonly considered as a practice

of Hindu women to wear them than the Christian. In fact you will find the Christians of Kerala wearing nose jewels or bangles. Most of the ornaments mentioned here forms particularly a part of Hindu customs and rituals. Though the Bible speaks about these ornaments, we see that it is more common among the Hindus than the Christians.

Such customs and culture once again prove that the Bible is similar in some ways to the culture of the Hindus of our days. Such passages in the Bible do link us to a common understanding that man is the same no matter what creed or culture he belongs to. He has the same desire and does have a longing for spiritual reality and this is true of both the Hindus and the Christians. The Hindus often question the Christians that their forefathers must have been Hindus and not Christian. The answer to this is "yes" as both have a common origin. It is from such a background that God called out a people to follow Him.

In fact, we can trace our pedigree right back to the Garden of Eden and to the great grand parents Adam and Eve. I don't mean to say Christians have a different type of father and Hindus have another, but one thing is true that both our grandfather and grandmother have followed these religions but the only difference is that God has spoken through Christ and Christians

have turned from their idol worship and other such practices to the Living God. They have shed all their rituals and customs because of the truth they have received from God. The difference is that others continue to carry these rituals and practices although God has already spoken to them through His Son.

Wherever the gospel has penetrated we see the light shining in the darkness. People were more enlightened both in their culture and in their thinking. The gospel has a direct and indirect effect upon the people. We also see that material blessings have also followed people and nations where the gospel has penetrated. This is true in the case of land of Kerala where the Christians unlike many other parts of India (except perhaps of Madras, Andhra Pradesh and Assam) have a better education and standard of living and are very prominent in their vocation.

Those who turned away from paganism have been brought into the fellowship of the gospel. However, let me remind my reader again that Christianity has now become a religion and among the numerous churches and Christian groups that populate our country today, there are only a handful of true Christians who have experienced Christ in their own lives. Though many carry their Christian names they don't know the Christ whom they worship. They have inherited Christian names by being born into Christian families but this was not so in

the case of the early Christians. As we read in the New Testament we see that these Christians were not born in Christian families but they have come from pagan backgrounds and have been transformed by their faith in Christ. It does not matter what name a person carries but the main thing is that whether he or she knows Christ or not personally and has His living presence in their hearts.

So from these practices one cannot but see that we have common origins and bonds and this should encourage my reader to study the Bible more sincerely and with an open mind. Indeed the Bible continues to speak to Hindus.

IDOL WORSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

As mentioned earlier the Bible clearly says that idolatry is sin against God and as such the Bible condemns idolatry in no uncertain terms.

"What does the word 'idolatry' suggest to your mind—the second commandment says, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.' (*Exodus 20:4*)

God says quite clearly, 'thou shalt not make any likeness of anything' **for use in worship. This clear statement rules out not simply the use of pictures**

and statues which depict God as an animal, but also the use of pictures and statues which depict Him as the highest created thing we know - a man' (*J. I. Packer)*

Images dishonor God for they obscure His glory. The likeness of things in heaven (sun, moon and stars) and on the earth (men, animals, birds, insects) and in the sea (fishes, mammals, crustaceans) is precisely not a likeness of their creator. "A true image of God' wrote John Calvin, "is not to be found in the entire world; and hence.... His glory is defiled, and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form... Therefore to devise any image of God is itself impious; because of this corruption His majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is." **The point here is that an image represents God having a body and parts, whereas in reality He has neither. The heart of the objection to pictures and images is that they inevitably conceal most, if not all of the truth about the personal nature and character of the Divine Being whom they represent."**

Images not only dishonor God, but also deprive Him of glory due to His holy name. "And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." (*Romans 1:23*) This is the degradation to which man has fallen by worshipping idols.

IMAGES MISLEAD MEN:

Images and idols convey to men false ideas about God. The very inadequacy with which they represent Him prevents our thoughts of Him, and plants in our minds errors of all sorts about His character and will. Aaron, by making an image of God in the form of a Bull-calf led the Israelites to think of Him as a Being who could be worshipped acceptably by frenzied debauchery. There is no holiness in such worship. It is all a man-made idea of equating true worship that comes out of a true knowledge of the Living God. Just worship of something out of mere being is not sufficient. Worship can only become meaningful when we know and experience the true and living God.

Again it is a matter of historical interest that the use of the crucifix as an aid to prayer has encouraged people to equate devotion with brooding over Christ's bodily sufferings; it has made them morbid about the spiritual value of physical pain, and has kept them from the knowledge of the risen Savior. The Bible says we should "worship God in the beauty of holiness." (*1 Chronicles 16:29*)

These and many other such examples show how images will falsify the truth of God in the minds of men. "Psychologically, it is certain that if you habitually focus your thoughts on an image or the picture of the one to whom you are going to

pray, you will come to think of Him and pray to Him as the image represents Him. Thus you will in this sense 'bow down' and 'worship' your image; and to the extent to which the image fails to tell you the truth about God, to that extent you will fail to worship God in truth. That is why God forbids you and me to make use of images and pictures in our worship."

The realization that images and pictures of God affect our thoughts of God points to a further realm in which the prohibition of the second commandment applies. "Imagining God, in our heads, can be just as real a breach of the second commandment as imagining Him by the work of our hands. Many people think of God as they like." They do not have a correct conception of God as the Bible says. They have only a distorted idea of God. Such ideas come from what they have seen or have known of God in their particular cultural setup. For example the idea of God in the minds of Muslims is quite different than what a Hindu might think of God.

To follow the imagination of one's heart based on his traditional understanding in the realm of God is to remain ignorant of God, and to become an idol-worshipper—the idol in this case being a false image of God, 'made unto thee' by speculation and imagination.

The God of the Bible tells us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways are my ways ... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (*Isaiah 55.8*) **Paul speaks in the New Testament,** "O the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His Judgments and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (*Romans 11:33*)

God is not the kind of person that we are; His wisdom, His aims, His scale of values are quite different from ours. We cannot know Him unless He in His mercy speaks and tell us about Himself. This in fact He has done. He has spoken to and through His prophets and apostles before and now He has finally spoken in the words and deeds of His own Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Through this revelation, which is made available to us in the Holy Bible, we may form a true notion of God and without it we never can. God has indeed revealed Himself as a man, and this is the height of the revelation of God to mankind.

In *Deuteronomy 4*, Moses himself expounds the prohibition of images in worship along exactly the same lines, opposing the making of images to the heeding of God's word and commandments as if these two things were completely exclusive of each other. He reminds the people that at Sinai, though they saw tokens of God's presence, they saw no

visible representation of God Himself, but only heard His Word and He exhorts them to continue to live as it were, at the foot of the mount, with God's own word ringing in their ears to direct them and no supposed image of God before their eyes to distract them.

The point is clear. God did not show them a visible symbol of Himself, but spoke to them to simply obey His word. It is said that Moses was afraid of the Israelites borrowing designs for images from the idolatrous nations around them. He was concerned about all man-made images of God, whether molten or WHAT IS THIS mental, are really borrowing it from the stock-in-trade of a sinful and ungodly world, and are bound therefore to be out of accord with God's own holy Word. To make an image of God is to take one's thoughts of Him to a human source, rather than from God Himself; and this is precisely what is wrong with image making.

In a land such as ours we see idols and images of every kind. Does the Living God approve of such worship however, sincere it might be? When God has finally given us the light about Himself, should we continue to indulge in idolatry? What is the message of the Bible to us? Yes, like Abraham of old whom God called out of idolatry from the land of Ur of the Chaldees, He is calling you to come out from such worship of idols and to know and

follow the Living and True God. This is the message of the Bible to the non-Christian masses of this land. God's love for all mankind is the same. The Bible clearly tells us that God is not a respector of any person or nation. He has revealed His truth to all mankind for "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (*John 3:16*)

This salvation is offered to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus, who in our stead has offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. When you put your faith in Him, God sees you through Him. Not only are your sins forgiven, you also become a partaker of eternal life, the greatest gift to mortal man.

This could be the end of your search for God and salvation. Hundreds of men and women from all over the world, of every possible kindred and tongue have experienced this to be true. And before the end of time and of this world, God is in the process of calling out a people through the Lord Jesus Christ and today God extends this invitation to you as well.

Though the Bible clearly condemns idol worship as sin, yet the Bible also offers great hope to those who have been idolaters. The prophet Isaiah speaks about this hope in unmistakable terms. "They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly

ashamed, they that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, ye are our gods." (*Isaiah 42:17*) **The Bible further says that** "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I'll lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto thee and not forsake thee." (*Isaiah 42:16*) **Yes, God will bring light out of darkness and make the crooked ways straight and will not forsake them. Who can deliver the captives of idolatry from darkness into light? In fact, every man lives in darkness until he experiences the light, which God has given to all mankind.**

Who is this light? In the Gospel of St. John we have a wonderful description of this light. "In Him (The Lord Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (*John 1:5,6,9*) Jesus said again about Himself, "I am the light of the world."

There is light and darkness set before all mankind and the choice is left to each individual, whether to choose the light and follow the One who is the Light of this world or to continue in darkness. But the tragedy is that the Bible also says that man prefers darkness instead of the true light because their deeds are evil. Today this is the case with many a so-called wise men of this world. It is

not that they do not know the truth, but having known the truth they rejected it because of their sinful deeds and the pride of their own hearts.

RE-INCARNATION OR RESURRECTION

It is important for us to realize what God now expects of every human being. As we have briefly mentioned there are many religious philosophies and ideas that are floating around the world. Many young men and women are willing to give themselves to something they have falsely come to believe. Without really searching the truth many have given themselves to such philosophies of this fallen world. Today we hear about Gurus and Saviors all around us trying to or promising to give a new life to mankind. Some of these gurus ironically speaking themselves are in great disillusion and are deceiving themselves while deceiving others too. While claiming to be the propagators of new philosophies whether it is through practicing Yoga or through transcendental meditation they have not finally given the answer to the deep problems of mankind.

Concerning this fact, it is interesting to mention that Arnold Toynbee, the great historian predicted some time ago, in the matter of religious choice. "Many of us are bound by the culture and

religious ties in which we were born and we find it difficult to break such bondage. One cannot be free to accept the truth." **Toynbee adds,** "Today I think, we can see the world changing to one in which a man's religion used to be decided for him—a priority by his birthplace, by the accident of birth, into a world in which, to a greater and greater degree, as the world grows together he will be able to make a free choice as an adult, between alternate religions."

So Toynbee emphatically predicted that there should be religious freedom that will inevitably come upon mankind, as the world grows smaller in size. It is time for us as such to get loose from the lies by which we are bound for centuries together so that we may make a choice intelligently regarding one's own faith and salvation.

It is not re-incarnation that we should think about but what the Bible speaks of regeneration. The God of the Bible wants to make a new man out of the man He created and not allowing him to incarnate into different animal forms according to his deeds in the years to come. This is a polluted form of philosophy that man is re-incarnated into some animal life either as a dog, donkey or a snake in the coming life, according to what he has done. This is a perversion of the true meaning of being born-again.

The Bible speaks not of re-incarnation but of regeneration. Regeneration means that a man or woman

can experience the salvation of his or her soul and the true life of God beginning in this world itself while alive. The Bible says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away and behold all things are become new." Here the Bible clearly speaks of new nature imparted to the man who has put his faith in Christ the Lord Jesus as an act of the Holy Spirit of God. He is given a new nature and is truly born again. This new birth is not after death but in the present life. It is not changing one's name or adopting a new philosophy of life, or a religious label, but truly an inward change wrought by the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, a great religious leader of His day, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus could not understand the new birth because he asked, "How can I be born again? Can I enter into my mother's womb again?" Nicodemus could not understand the new birth because he never could realize that a man could be spiritually born again and not physically for the second time. The Lord Jesus spoke of this new birth, or this regeneration by the Spirit and through the Spirit. We read about this is the Gospel of John in the Bible.

You need not wait, without any assurance as to what type of form you are going to be born in the next birth and continue to keep such fear within your heart. The Bible says that you can be a new human being right now. Therefore, what you need is not just reincarnation but a new birth. This is exactly what Christ offers to you, when

you repent for your sins and ask him to come into your heart.

The Bible says, "It is appointed to men once to die." This throws out the whole belief and philosophy of man concerning re-incarnation. Man is created once and he is to die only once. Also every man has to stand at the judgment seat of God once. The Bible speaks many times concerning the certainties of these things. As such, your present life as a man on this earth is of such crucial importance. The Bible promises no hope beyond death if a man or woman dies in his or her sins without Christ and without espousing their new-birth, which Christ offers to all as a free gift.

This salvation has to be achieved before one departs from this life. There is no purgatory ahead or any other way of getting oneself cleansed of ones sins. These are again pernicious ways of man to keep him bound to sin and darkness upon the earth. If man is lost it is purely his choice especially when he had opportunity to know the truth of God's salvation as it is presented in the Bible. It is this reason why the gospel is being preached to men and women who have never heard of it before.

We do not know exactly how God is going to judge those who have not heard the gospel, although the Bible clearly teaches that there is no

other salvation whereby man may be saved apart from what God has done through Christ. It is not "Tantra", "Mantra" or "transcendental meditation" or dip in the river Ganges that is going to bring you to that life in God, or give eternal peace or salvation to your soul but that which God has provided through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is quite possible that you can have some idea of what the Bible teaches about the plan of salvation and also about the Lord Jesus Christ yet completely fail to grasp the whole truth. You can be so close to the plan of salvation and yet be lost. This is a paradox. Hence, do not miss this opportunity God offers you in Christ.

We see in India that there were great men from non-Christian backgrounds who have appreciated the gospel in the New Testament and in fact loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet have gone out from this world having failed to recognize Him as their Savior. These are men who have missed the boat although they were very close to it. If salvation is achieved through self-efforts and righteousness of man great man like Mahatma Gandhi would have the first place in heaven and would be saved but we know that there is no salvation that is provided for mankind through the efforts of man's own ways. There is only the salvation that is given to all mankind by God through the Lord Jesus Christ as a free gift.

But in order to receive this salvation you must be born again, in other words, you must experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

How can this be possible? What you need to do is consider the next question, which needs a reasonable answer. In other words who can forgive your sins. Who is the promised Messiah?

THE PROMISED MESSIAH, THE SAVIOR

Hebrews 1:1,2 says, "God at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds."

We have been considering this question of Biblical Hinduism or the Bible speaking to Hindus. God has been speaking in times past in different manners and at different times of history. It does not say God has been speaking to any particular caste or group of people and the Bible clearly says that God has been speaking to mankind in general.

But Paul goes on to say that although God has revealed and spoken in the past in different ways, the revelation was not complete. As such in these closing days of time he revealed himself, in other words the Invisible God has been revealed in the form of man so that we may get to know this God who has existed from eternity. The Lord Jesus

Christ who being the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person came into this world so revealing God to mankind.

So, every inclination for God and desire in the heart of mankind has been fulfilled. The main purpose of writing this epistle in the New Testament to the Hebrews has been to show to the Jewish people that Christ has fulfilled the law, which was given by God to His people. In other words, Paul's arguments goes on to show that every desire of these people and their longing for Jehovah who to them was then the unknown God, has now been fulfilled through the coming of the Messiah—The Lord Jesus Christ. This is the argument that the Apostle Paul used in making known Christ to his own people. Paul did not condemn the Jewish culture or customs of their religious inclination for God, in other words, he through the help of the scriptures and the special revelation given by God to him, was enabled by the Holy Spirit to show to these people that Christ was truly the fulfillment of all their desires and longings for God.

To my faithful kinsmen, the non-Christians of this land, the Hindus and Muslims, let me say this with all reverence that the Lord Jesus Christ did not come to condemn your religious culture or customs or tradition however superstitions or false it may be. Out as a fulfillment of such religious longing, the God of the Bible has appreciated this

desire for seeking God and thus has come to reveal this unknown God to you. So all your desires for God and your longing for truth has been fulfilled with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world. The Bible also declares that there was no other God before Him and there will be no other God after Him. Listen to what the Prophet Isaiah says in this regard in the Bible:

> "You are my witnesses declares the LORD and my servant whom I have chosen so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me, no god was formed, nor will there be one after me." (Isaiah 43:10)

This puts all other gods out of business, and there is no other gods.

Christ came to this earth not only to reveal God to mankind but also to become a sin bearer of lost humanity. The Bible says: "by Himself, purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." **Here we see Christ having laid down His life on Calvary's cross for your sins and mine and has broken the grave and risen from the dead, conquering death and the grave, today Christ is seated in the heaven at the right hand of God. Christians meaning, every one who puts their faith in Christ and redeemed from every religious background (whether Hindu or Muslim) are worshipping the Living God. The Lord Jesus is**

alive and He is the "same, yesterday, today and forever." Henceforth we need not worship God ignorantly, but we have been given the choice to know the True and living God and the True Way that leads to righteousness, holiness and eternal salvation. For the Bible says:

> *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become Children of God – Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12)*

This is a mystery no human mind can explain or comprehend. But any man on this earth who is willing to commit himself to Christ can experience it. The revelation of God through the Lord Jesus Christ is a mystery.

In simple words, God was incarnated in human form to reveal Himself to mankind. This is what happened on Christmas day, the birth of this unseen God of the Universe in human form, the Christ the Lord Jesus. The birth of the Lord Jesus is not by accident but was prophesized in the Bible over and over again many hundred of years prior to his actual birth. This also proves that the Bible is a miracle Book. This prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ has been mentioned many hundreds of years ago in the Old Testament. Even the name the Lord Jesus was given before His birth

and the place and the purpose for which He would be born. We do not read anywhere in history of the birth of any religious leader or prophet of their time of birth or the purpose for which they came before they were born

Let us look into this a bit more briefly before we go in to the plan of salvation. The Bible says that God will send a Redeemer in human form. This promise stated very clearly in *Genesis 3:15*, the first Book in the Bible: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." **It is here right in the beginning God, in spite of the fact that Adam and Eve have disobeyed Him and fallen, has given a promise of redemption, and victory over the serpent—Satan who deceived Adam and Eve into sin. Christ fulfilled this on the Cross-!**

The Bible also prophesies that the Savior would be of Jewish nationality. In God has simply selected the Jewish nation as a means through which He could bring this *Genesis 12:1-3, "Now the Lord had said to Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."*

As you note from this verse, God is not a respecter of persons or nations, but showers salvation and blessing upon the whole earth. Although the Jewish people have failed in this purpose of God and have not understood the way of salvation, and even rejected the true Messiah, when He did come, still God's promise was that through the Jewish nation the Lord Jesus would come.

Not only from the Jewish nation would He come but that He would be of the tribe of Judah (*Genesis 49:10*). The Lord Jesus Christ was born of the tribe of Judah and came from the house of David (2 *Samuel 7:1; 1 Chronicles 17*). The Jesus came as prophesied in the Bible.

Again the Bible says that the Lord Jesus would be born of a virgin (*Isaiah 7:14*). Many hundreds of years ago, God through the Holy Spirit spoke through His chosen prophet Isaiah that the savior would be born of a Virgin.

The mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ being truly human as well as truly God is also prophesied in the Bible (*Isaiah 9:6,7*). He would suffer as a substitute for sinners (*Isaiah 53*). In this chapter we have a very clear description of how the Savior would take the place of a substitute for sinners like you and me and suffer. He, as a lamb was led to the slaughter and laid down his life and shed His precious blood. If you have a Bible, it would

be wonderful if you could read the whole chapter of *Isaiah 53* which you will find in the Old Testament.

Not only would Christ would die as a substitute but also He would be raised from the dead and this was also recorded in the Old Testament (*Psalm 16:9-11*). This is a clear prophecy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one grave that is open in the whole world today and that is the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem.

Jesus would be received as a Savior by the Jewish nation although rejected by them in the beginning (*Zechariah 12:10*). About this, it is said that although the Jewish people have not recognized the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah, eventually history would be repeated and that they would return to their own country Israel, which is happening today and finally would recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah. He would also reign with the Jewish nation upon the earth. *Zechariah 14* paints a clear picture of what is ahead. These are prophecies yet to be fulfilled and we are living in an age when the whole nation of Israel is used as God's time clock. **What is happening in Israel today is affecting the whole world and we know that this is true.**

Again, we see that there is a clear prophecy concerning the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to heaven (*Psalm 110:1; Acts 1:9-11*).

"The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psalm 110.1)

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up: and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel: which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same the Lord Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11)

Here we see that He not only conquered death and the grave but also has ascended into heaven and is reigning as King of kings. The Bible also prophesies very clearly the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this very earth where He had come first to die for the sins of the world.

From the foregoing we realize that God's final plan of salvation was not something that just happened but one that has been prophesied in the times past. The Old Testament has given sufficient proof that God will fulfill this plan and finally He sent His only Son the Lord Jesus into this world as the way of salvation to every man upon this earth.

We would see the fulfillment of all these promises concerning the coming of the Messiah,

the Savior, in the New Testament. We see that the Lord Jesus Christ did come from the tribe of Judah and from the lineage of David and was born in Bethlehem and his earthly parents were Mary and Joseph. The Virgin Mary was conceived of the Holy Ghost and we have a beautiful description of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the gospels. The angel appeared to Mary and said that He that is conceived in you is of the Holy Ghost. Here we see the clear fulfillment of what is said in the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah many hundreds of years before. How we see that God's word is so true and what God has said must come to pass. The Bible itself testifies to the authority of God's word saying, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away."

Upon the birth of the baby in Jerusalem we see that even in heaven the angels sang songs of peace and goodwill upon mankind on the earth. There was great rejoicing in heaven because God had finally provided the way for lost mankind. Man who in the times past groped in darkness not knowing which way to turn for the salvation of his soul has now found the way!

There is now no need for sacrificing goats, chickens or bullocks. That which was practiced by the Jews and Gentiles alike in the Old Testament has now been finally dealt with, as the Lord Jesus became a sacrifice for all mankind.

The promise made in Genesis has been fulfilled—that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ has truly bruised the serpent's head. Sin has been dealt with on the cross as the Lord Jesus laid down His life and shed His blood for the salvation of mankind.

As we look on Calvary's cross we see that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son on that cross. As mentioned repeatedly before, we read in John's gospel chapter 3 verse 16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should have everlasting life." Yes, indeed, God loved this world; God loves you and me to the extent that He came upon this earth to pay the tremendous penalty for our sins. We need not listen to the accusations of the evil one anymore. We need not make pilgrimages to Badrinath, Tirupati, Sabarimala or any such holy place. We need not light candles in the churches or offer oil in the temples or bow down and worship in the mosques not knowing whom we are worshipping. We see the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled the sacrifice demanded by God for our sins. The Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Yes, there has got to be a price paid for sins. In the Old Testament times, it was the shedding of the blood, which was accepted as the price for the sins one committed. But these were all a shadow to what would take place finally in the great sacrifice on the cross.

God's love and God's justice has been fulfilled

both on the cross. Although the Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins God's Word also talks about His great love in the same way. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ", says the Bible.

Yes, God has given us the promised Messiah and He has come into this world to redeem you and me and to lead us into the way of Moksha, the way of salvation for our sins. We see that He was the Nishkalankar,(the sinless incarnation of God) as only a sinless person can die for mans sin.

There are many religions, customs; faiths in the world today and also there are numerous saviors, sages, gurus, swamis and saints all around us especially in a land such as ours. However if you look into the history of these gurus and swamis or these self-made god-men, you will see that none of them have ever made the claim unless they deceived themselves, that they have come to forgive the sins of mankind or are saviors for lost mankind. None of them claim that they are The Way, but each of them claim that there is going to be 'The Way' and there is a way and that you need to find. But these "gurus" and "swamis" have no idea of what this way means to them.

They have been involved in religious philosophies and advocating rituals and mantras

and meditations, including the transcendental meditation of our day in order to find the *Atma*. Whereas the Bible clearly shows that in Him, was the fullness of the wisdom of God. As a result of the false teaching and promise of supernatural experiences, many young people, particularly from the West, are being sidetracked into this kind of thinking and philosophy. True there could be some manifestations and experiences through meditations and practice of a '*yoga*' and so on but all these people are evading the true spiritual things which are not achieved by man's effort but by acknowledging that which God has provided through Christ. Many of these god-men do not know the word of God and even if they do know the Bible, they have taken chosen verses conveniently to suit their philosophy of life.

Some time ago I remember asking a hippy the question, "Have you found truth from following this so-called Maharishi or mediating on the philosophy which he has recommended to you?" She said that these Maharishis and gurus also believed in the Bible and quoted the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Search the truth and the truth shall set you free." Yes, quite true to the Bible, this statement was right. The Lord Jesus challenged the people to search the truth and he mentioned about the truth. I then asked this young woman if he told her anything further about the truth. She

replied, "No, the guru and I are together searching for that truth which would set us free." So they took the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ to confirm their own stand and convictions. Then I asked another question, "Did the Lord Jesus mention anything else about the truth?" She said that she did not know. It is then I mentioned this wonderful verse in the Bible, which Christ spoke about the truth when He said, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*." Here we see although the Lord Jesus Christ said the truth shall set you free, He goes on to say that this very truth is He himself. Yes, He is the truth and the way and the life. So we see in this encounter that the above swami has not quoted this verse and he have only taken part of the truth.

This is the case with many of those who have some passing knowledge of the Bible. The Bible is not something from which we can pick up isolated verses and statements and build up our own philosophy. The Bible is God's word addressed to lost mankind. In fact, it is the light that leads men from darkness to light. The Psalmist says, "the entrance of your word gives light"

Therefore, the reader is exhorted to go through the claims the Bible makes for it needs no defense or recommendation. The truth of the Bible shall indeed set you free and you shall come to know this very God for whom you have been searching all your life.

Yes, the time for sacrifice ended once and for all. As we come to the New Testament, we see that Christ became our greatest sacrifice on the cross; He shed his blood, as a remission for the sins of the entire human race, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." In the death of Christ, He included the entire humanity.

As stated earlier, no one needs to take a goat, chicken or dove any longer to an idol and make an offering to it. You need not shed innocent human blood to satisfy the god, whom you ignorantly worship! As the Bible says, "the time of ignorance is over..." God has spoken. He has made the provision.

As you look at Calvary's cross, you see that the sacrifice for your sins has been already provided for. This is love of God in action. The God of the Bible is a God of Love. He has provided a way that sinners can come back to God. Yes, there is a way back to God. There is mercy and forgiveness with Him.

On the other hand, sinful man can never offer a holy sacrifice to God. Therefore, God had to provide a perfect sacrifice through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ tur. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." **Here we see that it is for man to receive the gift of God**. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord."

Wherever we see, man continues to offer sacrifices, killing animals and shedding their blood, it simply reveals that the light of the gospel has not yet gone to them. They are fulfilling age-old customs and rituals ignorant of the way of salvation that God has provided. Hence the necessity of taking the gospel to the many, who still have not heard the good news, is a great need. This is a solemn responsibility of all those who have found forgiveness of sins through Christ the Lord Jesus. This was the greatest burden and love that compelled missionary, pioneers to cross oceans to bring this light to those who were sitting in darkness. In our own century we see this in the efforts of preaching to the headhunters of the North American jungles and in North East India.

The story of the Christian Church is a story of battles, hardships and sacrifice. The church had to pay the price to communicate this love of God to lost mankind. Many pioneer missionaries have laid down their lives in taking the gospel for the sake of those living in the jungles of Africa like Dr. Livingstone is an example as he was a missionary mission to the Africans. Others have gone with the gospel to various primitive and barbarous people. They have all risked their lives true to the call of the Master. "If any man follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross."

The cross means suffering and death. The one who carries the cross is already a dead man.

As the saying goes it is true that 'the seed of the church is in the blood of the martyrs.' **Many mighty men and women of God have laid down their lives to bring this message of hope to those who sit in darkness down through the ages.**

WHAT SHOULD I DO FOR MY SINS?

The idea of shedding blood for one's sin can be traced in almost every religion of the world. This idea comes from the fact that man has sinned and something has to be done in order to pay for the wrong he has done. Chickens, goats and cows are sacrificed before the deities every year all over India and their blood is shed to satisfy sins one has committed. This is particularly true of primitive religions and such sacrifices are very much prevalent among tribals and rural people. Each year people bring their sacrifices before their deities and shed such blood in the hope that their sins are forgiven.

One can see this parallel in the Bible. The people who lived in the Old Testament have also practiced various sacrifices. The Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." As such, this idea of the shedding of blood is common to the people of the Old Testament times as well as of those other religious groups of people from time immemorial. However, in other religions and Hinduism the shedding of blood is acceptable as a ritual as there is no commandment

mentioned in their books. One fails to understand the reasons why such sacrifices are given to the idols but it is again here in the Bible that we read, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." The Bible as such does throw light on some of the practices that we see all around us here in India.

One cannot but see in the Bible the progressive plan of God in redeeming man from the curse of sin. For the Bible not only talks about the shedding of blood for the remission of sins, but it also goes on to show us that all sacrifices though intended for the good purpose have failed to fulfill their required purpose of God as these sacrifices are in sufficient in themselves. Finally God Himself made the way possible in providing a universal and final sacrifice **for the whole of humanity, which we see on Calvary's cross where** the Lord Jesus became the Lamb of God and shed His blood to take away the sins of man.

Here in India, the famous Kali temple in Calcutta witnessed the massacre of thousands of goats in the past, and many idols, especially worshipped by people who live in the forests, have practiced cutting up hens and goats. The forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament was very much dependent upon the effect of the sacrifice but the tragedy of man is that he degenerated to the low level of sacrificing even human appease or please his God, the Idol.

Not only animals but food, which can feed man, too was offered to idols. In one prominent temple in India, which is a famous pilgrimage center, almost 100 liters of milk is poured over the deity in one day. When people are starving without proper food such practices involving colossal waste ought to make people think of the awful sad place where man has failed in his search for God. There is no wonder that religions put off people when they see such waste and display of such ignorance.

But again the Bible speaks about this very clearly mentioning that these people have offered burnt incense to the 'queen of heaven' and poured out drink offerings unto her. According to the Bible such practices are condemned.

> "Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies, therefore, this evil has happened unto you, as this day." (*Jer. 44:23*)

There is also a ritual, which is known as offering prasadam to idols. Prasadam means eating food that is offered to the idols. We read about it both in the Old and New Testaments.

In fact, among the early Christians who have turned from paganism to God a few have also continued to practice eating food offered to the

idols. We read of Apostle Paul speaking about this in his epistle. The God of the Bible again condemns this practice, which comes out of superstitions. Though you may have eaten, the idol can neither eat it nor can it bless that which is offered to it. Throughout we can see such practices in the Hindu rituals. Burning incense, pouring out drink offerings, eating "*prasad*" (food offered to idols) are all practices that come to be part of an age-old religious custom about which the Bible has spoken against many hundreds of years ago. This is evident that the Bible is more addressed to such a group who have been changed from an idolatrous background than to a Christian who knows nothing about it. Indeed, the Bible has a word to our non-Christian friends in their deep search for God.

Therefore the Bible clearly teaches that there is now no more need for shedding of blood or offering of food to the idols because God has already accomplished this through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This salvation is now offered free to every man who receives the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior. In other words, God is calling all mankind to repent and to follow the Living God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the Bible clearly concludes that there is no need for any more sacrifice and shedding of blood.

THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION THE CLIMAX OF HISTORY

The greatest event that has taken place in the entire history of mankind is that what has happened on the cross of Calvary, where Christ died. It was both the climax of God's plan for lost sinners as well as the climax for man's search from time immemorial to find his way back to God. This totally makes the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ the greatest climax in history.

We do not look at the cross just as a mere symbol. Just looking at the cross that is set in a church or on top of a church building or hanging it around the neck does not make anyone a Christian. Behind the symbol of the cross is the greatest act of God's love and sacrifice for the sins of man.

Before we realize the greatness and depth of what God has done on the cross for us, as lost sinners, we must realize that man is spiritually dead as a direct result of his sin. This disobedience as we have seen in the Garden of Eden has brought spiritual deadness into the lives of every human being. The Bible teaches that man is God's

creature, living in God's world, which was made by God, and must live for God. If, through willful disobedience man has died to God he has also thus lost his contact with God resulting in man becoming godless. Though there is a desire for God, this has been only a superficial longing in the heart of man. He has lost the true meaning of worship or the true knowledge of God. There are men even today that dare to deny the very existence of God. All this shows that mankind has become godless.

The question comes to our mind, "Can man help himself in this situation?" The answer is obviously "No." Therefore it will be seen that if man's sin is to be forgiven and new life is to be imparted to him God again must take the initiative. Man with all his wisdom is incapable of doing anything for his own salvation. Man must come to the end of himself and must recognize that his self-righteous deeds or the goodness that he seems to present does not forgive him of his sins or give him eternal life. The great philosopher Seneca of Rome once said, "Though man may reach very close to heaven with his good deeds and righteousness there must be an arm still to let down from heaven to lift him up to the presence of God." This must be an act on the part of God to help man in his lost condition. It is not that alms giving, undertaking pilgrimages, feeding the poor, may bring salvation to man. All these may sound good yet but for God's forgiveness of sin and getting right with God, man must accept the gift of salvation God has provided through

Christ. The Bible says that God has exactly done this. He did take the initiative and it is this we see as a climax on the cross by the death of Jesus.

The question comes to our mind, "Why is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ necessary?" Cannot God forgive and forget sin in any other way? It is not that easy, although God is merciful and gracious and loving, He is also a God of justice and righteousness. This does mean that God, in order to be God, to be righteous must hate sin because God is holy. Because God is righteous He must not only hate sin but also punish sin because He is just as well. Therefore we see that before God could forgive sin He had to judge sin. This is exactly what we see, when Christ died for you and me as a substitute on Calvary's cross. The Bible clearly says, "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (*Roman 5:8*)

From this verse we realize that even while we were yet sinners God has loved us and made provision for the forgiveness of our sins. Christ died for us while we were still living in sin.

In this we see both the love of God and the justice of God being fulfilled. Sin cannot be forgiven without the price being paid. A righteous God cannot ignore the hideousness of sin. The penalty of sin must be paid. There must be a sacrifice made for the sin. But God has made this sacrifice, taking the initiative and Christ on the cross

has died for us. The sinless substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, died for my sins and yours, taking upon Himself the judgment and penalty of our sins. Having thus judged your sin and mine through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, God is in a position now to forgive your sin and mine. This is the great plan of salvation. Once for all Christ has died. Once for all salvation has been accomplished for every man who believes in Him and who accepts this gift of God through the Lord Jesus Christ—that of eternal life. The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

(*Romans 3:23*)

There is no one upon this earth who has not sinned against God. Consciously and unconsciously man has sinned and thus has fallen short of God's plan and purpose. Think of the first commandment i.e. to love God with all your heart and with all your soul. Is there any man who has loved God with all his heart? Most of our love for God is with a selfish purpose in mind. We go to Him in order to get healing of our bodies and wanting some help in trouble. But God's Word says that we should not only go to God for these things but should love Him with all our heart. Man has sinned in not loving God according to His Word.

We see that material things instead of God have taken a place in the heart of man. The craving for position, the desire to satisfy the lusts of one's flesh and to have a high position in life and along with it pride, jealously, hatred, anger have taken root

in the heart of every man and woman. Can we say that we are righteous? Can we say that we have never lied, cheated or given a bribe, or have taken a bribe? These are the symptoms of a decayed self. In every human being we see this to be a reality, which is evidence of man's sinful nature.

There are philosophies today, which talk about the goodness of man. Whatever may be the goodness of man, man is a slave to his passions and he is bound and needs deliverance. He cannot save him-self and as such God has to liberate him from his own sins that have bound him from his child-hood. Whether we call it 'I' consciousness or self-consciousness or use any other philosophic term, we are saying that man is lost in his sinful ways.

It is not only God's desire that man should be forgiven of his sins but that henceforth he must lead a righteous life before Him. God is concerned that the man who has been forgiven, cleansed, reconciled and born again should now live in the new nature. This is the highest purpose to which God has created man. A man who is forgiven and one who has experienced this salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ as a reality has established his reunion with God, in other words he has found his way back to God. Henceforth his desire is not to live for himself only, but to live the rest of his life to fulfill the purpose of God in and through his

life. The first commandment of God is to "love God with all your heart and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself."

No one can love God with all his heart or love his neighbor, unless such love comes from God alone. However, even when we try to be good or show kindness to our fellows we see that deep within our hearts we see that even our act of kindness has been out of selfish motives. We serve others because we want blessings. We feed the poor because we want a better rebirth in the next world according to Hindu philosophy. In other words, we make use of the poor in order that we might be rich in our next birth. All these are false philosophies that have bound men for centuries.

WHAT IS PURE LOVE?

Pure love is love that comes from God in that we love others because we love God. We don't expect anything in return and even any blessings from God and we are just made to love because God has shed in our hearts this very love of God.

This is what happens when a man finds Christ as his master and Lord in his life. Such love towards God which is holy and pure and love towards one's neighbor which is unselfish is a true sign that a man has found the way of salvation, as it is found in the Bible through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is this love that has made possible for great men of God, and missionaries not only to preach the glad tidings to all men but also to give themselves to the welfare of mankind. Great hospitals, educational Institutions, Orphanages, Caring for the poor and down trodden have all been a result of God's love in Christ the Lord Jesus, acting in love through the hearts of men and women who have dedicated themselves to Christ. Without such love no one could live such a reckless life even to the point of risking one's own life that some of these workers of God have done. Some of the missionary- pioneers and God's men went even to the peoples in the jungles of Africa and North America with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ because they were filled with the love of God and love for their fellow beings.

As such, what God has done through the Lord Jesus Christ in the world is a clear evidence of the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has made sinners saints, cruel and wicked men to be pure, meek and humble before God. **How is this possible? Just doing some sacrifice or taking a trip to some holy place or lighting a few candles in a church or temple will never bring this change in one's own heart. This is a result of the new birth through the Holy Spirit.** What you need is a new birth experience in Christ.

This change can only come when the love of

God comes into a sinner's heart through the conviction of sin and asking God for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. Thus it is the Love of God that is revealed in the climax of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

HUMAN RESPONSE TO GOD'S OFFER

We have seen the plight of mankind in his search after God and the ways of pagan religions in times past and how all these have been fruitless. God has taken the initiative and He has acted in His love and mercy and it is now up to man to respond to this great plan of God's salvation and the offer of eternal life.

Responding to God's salvation and following the way that God has provided through Christ, not only brings man into reconciliation to God but also gives meaning and purpose to his own life. A great saint of God, St. Augustine says, "O God, thou hast created us for thyself and our hearts are restless until we find rest in thee." This is a profound statement of a man who was the greatest human leader of the early church. This is so true and as we search our own hearts, we can find that often there is emptiness, meaninglessness in spite of our being religious, there is a great vacuum within us. One of the famous psychiatrists, Carl Jung, said, "the central neurosis of our time is emptiness."

There is a void within the heart of every human

being that cannot be satisfied until one finds his way back to God. This vacuum has been created by God Himself so that man, no matter which way he turns and clings to things to find meaning and purpose in life shall never find full satisfaction. In some ways this hunger for God is a healthy sign.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I came in to this world that you might have life and have it more abundantly." (*John 10:10*) It is not only finding salvation of your souls but finding also life abundant. This abundant life begins when a man receives forgiveness of his sins. Life can never be meaningful with a guilty conscience. There are things that you and I have done in our lives, which bother us although we try to suppress or forget about it. We need to be purged from our conscience by being forgiven of our sins.

In order that God might forgive us through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ there must come first a recognition of one's own acceptance as a sinner. Only a sick man needs a physician. You need to come to Christ as a lost sinner and need to recognize that even though you were religious and were following the traditions of your forefathers, having done all religious rituals and even pilgrimages you have not found forgiveness of sins or salvation of your soul. Christ knows all about you and you need to accept this as a reality in your life.

It is this acceptance that leads you to repentance. Not only do you need to recognize that you are a lost

sinner but you also need to confess that you have done things, which were sinful. It is recognition of your own sins and a sincere desire to be forgiven that makes God to act in His mercy and grace in your heart. It is here that God and man meet together.

The Word of God says in *Isaiah 1:18*, "Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Here is an invitation from God to come and meet him at the foot of the cross. There is no need for mourning over one's own failures and sins. There is a way that God has made through the cross. It is by accepting the way of the cross and pleading for forgiveness you become a child of God. The Bible says, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." God calls a sinner to Himself not to just forgive his sins but to a new relationship with God. We, by the act of confession and faith in Christ, become the sons of God with a new relationship and with a new understanding of God as a Father.

There is no religion in the world that gives us the idea of God as Father. Many religions say that God is angry and the worshippers go to God in fear trembling, and there is no love and forgiveness in coming to God. The Bible speaks of God not only

as a Father but also as one who pities His children. It is this fatherly love and concerns that brought God upon earth and made this way of salvation for you and me.

THE FINAL PLAN OF GOD FOR MAN'S SALVATION

Dear reader, you have come towards the end of this book in which we have seen together the numerous sacrifices and practices, rituals, idol worship that are common to the Hindus of today such are similar to the people who lived in the Bible especially those who lived in the times of the Old Testament. We have seen the parallel truth that is running right through the Bible and Hinduism and the best way to search for man to find salvation.

It is a matter of choice before one to find the truth and follow it between alternate religions. Already by now you may have come to grasp that the message of the Bible is not a code of some religious teachings but the Bible presents the way of salvation, which God has prepared for the whole of mankind- A way of life.

To this fact it is interesting to mention what Arnold Toynbee, the historian has predicted some time ago in the matter of religious choice. Many of us are bound by culture and religious ties in which we were born and we find it difficult to break the

shackles of such bonds. But without breaking such bondage one cannot be free to accept the truth. To quote Toynbee, "Today I think, we can see the world changing to one in which a man's religion used to be decided for him—a priority by his birthplace, by the accident of birth, into a world in which to a greater degree, as the world grows together he will be able to make a free choice, as an adult, between alternate religions."

Thus Toynbee emphatically predicted that there should be a religious freedom that will inevitably come upon mankind, as the world grows smaller in size. It is time for us to loosen the ties by which we are bound so that we may make a choice intelligently as to one's own salvation.

Indeed, God has finally spoken. We read in the book of Hebrews that 'God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds has finally spoken to us through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ." (Hebrews 1:1,2)

God has no more to say concerning man's salvation. This message of course is not for any particular group but is addressed to all mankind for the whole world. He has sent the Savior to the world to save men from their sins. God's

progressive revelation of salvation has finally been accomplished as we see in the New Testament.

Now the Bible confidently offers salvation to mankind irrespective of religion, culture, creed and color. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (*John 3:16*) **This offer as such is for all mankind and for every man particularly to the one who accepts this truth and receives the way of life.**

The Bible does not say of any sacrifice, almsgiving or pilgrimage for one to receive salvation. God in His love has paid the penalty of our sins and as such His mercy, goodness and long-suffering we see demonstrated on the cross of Calvary.

What mankind needs is not certain religion or religious ritual or philosophy for that matter, but a Savior who can save them from the perils of sin. It is this Savior that the Bible presents to every man. God is not a respecter of persons, color, or creed for he loves every man and it is God's will that none should perish but all may come to the knowledge of this truth through His Son. This message is a comforting one that the God of the Bible is a forgiving God. The Bible says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. God has made this salvation for you and me not because

we were worthy to receive the same but because we were sinners and God knows the condition of the sad plight that we are in and He loved us and gave Himself for us.

This is true love in action for God is love. The message of the Bible is basically a message of love. The relation, which the God of the Bible would like to establish between mankind and Him, is a relationship that is born and maintained in love. No matter what your sins are and how tragically you have lived your life so far; only God and you know it. But the message of the Bible is that God offers you complete forgiveness on the basis of what He has accomplished on Calvary's cross.

The only condition that God puts on us to reveal such a salvation is repentance. If you do not feel grief for your sins you cannot have salvation. If you think that your religion and the philosophy you are following are going to save you, you don't need a Savior either. But the Bible goes on to say that "there is a way which seems right unto a man but the ends thereof are the ways of death." Broad is the way that leads to destruction says the Lord Jesus but narrow is the way that leads unto life. It is up to you to find out whether you are on the broad way or on the narrow path.

The Lord has called foolish the things of this world to confound the wise. There are today many

religious teachers, sadhus, gurus and semi-gods all over India but little do these men and women realize that they themselves are lost without the knowledge of the way of truth that is in Christ the Lord Jesus. Many have been confused in their search for God.

As stated earlier, Bible further says that God has called the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. All over India there are sadhus, gurus and semi-Gods speaking to know the way of truth but are groping in darkness and some of them have been searching for many years. Little do they realize that apart from the philosophy and the religion that they follow they are still lost in God's sight? Some of them even have come to know the truth as to the way of salvation in the Bible and have rejected the same, for to them this is foolishness. This is the state of many so-called wise men and gurus that we see in India today. The Bible says that in their wisdom they have lost the true knowledge of God and have rejected the way of life. If salvation is to be achieved, it must be all of God and not any of man's work in God's Word.

Man-made religion and philosophy continue to crumble in the light of the truth that is mentioned

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

The choice before every man: God has done all that He can do in terms of saving lost humanity; however, the choice is still left before every man. This seems to be a paradox when we think of how God could make a man free to make such a choice. The Bible says that God has created man as a moral being and not as a robot. Man has the freedom to choose which way he will follow—either to follow his own way or the Lord. Man can either chose to love his own plans and worship his ego or worship the true and living God and love Him. Therefore after all has been said and mentioned concerning God's ways and man's religious quest, the final choice is still left to you and me.

The question is will you reject this plan of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and follow your own religion and be satisfied with it. This is not an easy choice because in it lies the way of life and death. You make your own choice concerning your eternal destiny by the decision you make. This is a serious matter and one cannot look upon this decision lightly as insignificant. Your life

hangs on nothing and you do not know what tomorrow may bring forth. If you die tonight, without accepting the way of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ you die in your sins as a lost soul. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Dear reader what will be your choice to this important question? Do you still linger on in your own imagination and in the philosophy of your own religion or do you follow the way of life God has provided for you? "He that hath me hath life" It is life that Christ offers to lost sinners.

By the decision you make you can turn over a new leaf in your life from now on. All the prejudices, misconceptions and wrong ideas you had towards Christ and Christianity can be forgiven once and for all as you seek God's forgiveness. As has been already mentioned in the book it is not Christianity that saves you but the Savior. As you look into his life and study his life as it is given in the Bible you will find no fault in Him. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect and holy life as well as a sinless life. He was both God and Man. This Savior who died for you on the cross rose again from the grave, triumphantly, conquering death and the grave and declaring openly as the Savior of the world. The Lord Jesus is alive today. Many religious teachers have died and gone and we can see the sepulchers of Mohammed at Mecca and

many swamis and gurus all over India but there is only one grave that is open today in the world, that is the grave of the Lord Jesus Christ where His body was laid in Jerusalem. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is another proof that He is the only Savior and is the living God.

The greatest miracle that He can do in your own life is the proof that He is alive today. As you commit your life and as you ask His forgiveness for your sins you can experience a new joy and peace, which you have never experienced before. Such a change can only come from God.

This is a final choice before you, the way of life and the way of death. You need not make a choice to carry on the way of death because you are on that path but if you need life and forgiveness you need to make the choice and follow the Lord Jesus Christ right now.

WHO IS YOUR GOD?

7 Qualities of the True and Living God

Finally, let me ask you: Who is your God? How do you know that He is a true God? Check the qualities of a True and living God.

Multitudes of people every day say that they believe in God, not only so they are doing everything possible to be true to that, doing their pooja in their home, temple, praying in the church or mosque, out in the city, in the office, in the factory in the farm or in the cave!

We have gods of every type and imagination and in fact, it is said that in a land like ours, we have over 33 crores gods and goddesses. We have also wayside gods and hillside gods, rain god, thunder god, fertility god, god for the higher class, god for the lower class. From morning, until we lay our weary head in bed at night in our house, hut or the pavement we live and conduct our lives in the knowledge of some god of our forefathers or ancestors, in one way or the other.

WHICH GOD SHOULD I FOLLOW?

But the problem remains, who is the true God that I should follow? Are all' these real gods? Is there any hope to know the true God if there is such a God? Is there a place where we can find light? Some may say that religions are the same and that all gods are the same as well, but the fact is that we have so much confusion as to who is the Living and True God. If we say all are the same, it is as good as saying that you vote for anybody, for all parties are the same; or you buy any rice in the market, for all rice is the same, you buy any pot in the shop, for all pots are the same, but our markets are filled with spurious and duplicate stuff and our godowns are filled with rice that an animal can't eat and one has to choose the right pot in order to make sure that, it is not broken and does hold water.

Despite the multitude of gods and goddesses on every side, we continue to live in poverty and suffering and corruption of every sort are on the increase, with selfishness, greed, immorality and drunkenness driving thousands to despair. We look for love, sympathy, justice, but there is no justice and gods seem to be blind to the plight of mankind.

The Bible says: **"Then you will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free."** (***John 8.31***)

In the midst of such situations, it is my birth right to see and to find that God is Living and True, at any cost, and not be satisfied with a god with whom I have no relationship whatsoever, though I am born into that faith of my forefathers. Who is that God who loves mankind and who created all human beings without color, creed, caste or culture? Not just a god for Indians, Africans, Americans, Chinese, Hindus or Muslims, and so on, but a God who loves and cares for all mankind, and whose qualities embrace them all equally, in fact, every human being born into this world and who will be born! Who is that God? Is Jesus Christ that God? Does he possess such qualities that would qualify Him to be True God or is He only the God of the Christians? Let us look into some of the facts concerning Him.

1. A GOD WHO IDENTIFIES HIMSELF WITH THE POOR

Jesus identifies Himself with the poor in their struggles and sorrows - had no place to lay His head though He was Creator of all mankind. Jesus was born in a cattle – shed and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Though rich He became poor for our sake.

He was crowned with thorns unlike the gods clothed with gold and crowned with diamonds! He was a Sadhu of sadhus and had no possessions on this earth and had no comforts. His means of travel when weary was a donkey, a despised animal. Truly

He was a friend of sinners and comforter to the comfortless.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed." (*Luke 4:18*)

2. A GOD WHO FORGIVES SINS & HEALS SICKNESS

The root cause of all ills and sorrows of mankind can be traced to this fact of sin, and no man of god in heaven or earth can forgive sins except Jesus. Others may, say be good, and live a good life, do alms and penance, but none can save you from your sins. Not only so, while Jesus was on earth He healed and comforted those who were sick, and above all paid the penalty of our sins and bore our sins on His body upon the cross.

"But so that you may know that Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... Then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home." (*Matt. 9:6*)

"But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we were healed." (*Isa 53.5*)

3. A GOD WHO LOVES US

The mark of God of the Holy Bible is "Love", for "God is Love", says the Word of God. Not only He loves us with an everlasting love, but He also commanded us to love one another. Where else do you see 'such love? Jesus commanded us, even to love our enemies and He prayed for His enemies from the cross.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (***John 3:16***)

"But God demonstrates His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (***Rom. 5:18***)

"A new commands I give you: Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (***John 13:34***)

4. A GOD WHO IS HOLY

In order to be God He must be holy. Jesus is holy and righteous and He exhorted His followers to live a righteous and holy life, and gave them power to do so. Where is holiness these days? We see, on the contrary, sin of every type - sexual immorality, drunkenness and perversion - on every side, and the Bible says that in the last days "men shall be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

Jesus calls you and me to live a holy life. Listen to the Word of God.

"Be holy. Because I am holy." (*I Pet 1:16*)

"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

(*I John 3:3*)

5. A GOD WHO IS NOT MADE BY MAN r

How can I make a God with my own hands and then bow down and worship it? I give him the fashion, the color and size, I carry him on my shoulders and I worship him as my God! Am I the creator of my God or is God my Creator and I his workmanship? (***Eph. 2:10***).

"Before the world was I am ...I am Alpha and Omega. In the beginning was I." Jesus Christ He was in the world and the world was made by him but the world knew Him not.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these days, he has spoken to us by His Son, who made the universe.

6. A GOD WHO CONQUERED DEATH AND THE GRAVE

Jesus is the only One who conquered death and the grave and broke the power of the grave and came back alive. Can you think of any great person,

holy man, prophet, king, conqueror, poor or rich who rose from the dead? Is there any grave in the world that is empty? **There is only one open tomb and that is the tomb, where Jesus' body was laid in Jerusalem.** Jesus is the only One who knows what lies beyond the grave.

Some worship the hair of saints, the bones of prophets and holy men, but if you can find a bone of Jesus our faith is gone, there is no hope. However, Jesus has risen, and He is the Living Savior of the World. The words of Jesus confirm this.

"Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (*John 11:25*)

"I am the living One: I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (*Rev. 1:18*)

"He is not here, for He is risen as He said, come see the place where the Lord lay."
(*Matt. 28.6*)

7. A GOD WHO WILL RETURN SOON AND ESTABLISH PEACE ON EARTH

There is only one hope for the present world, and that is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus in glory to establish His Kingdom on this earth. We shall enjoy peace on this earth then and then alone. The Middle East War, the return of the Jews to

Israel, Wars, Rumors of War, Famine, Earthquakes etc., are but the beginnings to the end as Jesus said and thus proclaim the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, is nearer than ever. He will then punish Satan and all his followers in the lake of fire and the children of God shall inherit the Kingdom of God ever and ever.

"In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (***John 14:2***)

"Men of Galilee, they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." (***Acts 1:11***)

The last but one verse in the Holy Bible has this promise:

"He which testifies to these things says, Yes I am coming soon." (***Rev. 22:20***)

Jesus Christ will establish His Kingdom and then there shall be peace upon this world.

(***Rev. 21:22-27***)

...Friends, where will you be found? Is Jesus your God? You may have a name even as a Christian but that doesn't save you! Or you may have never heard the name of Jesus before and you have a god of your own. Your

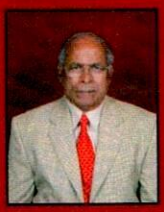
greatest need is to believe in Jesus and follow Him as your God and Savior.

Which way will you choose? This is a crucial and an important question before you and may God help you to make the right decision.

BIBLE SPEAKS TO HINDUS

Christianity is not a religion from the west nor is the Bible just for Christians, as some think. In fact, Christ was incarnated in the East and the entire Old Testament of the Bible was written when there were no Christians! This book is feeble attempt to enlighten our Hindu friends as to what the Bible has to say them. The message of the Bible—God's Word, is addressed to all people, irrespective of caste, creed or culture, including the oldest of all religious groups - The Vedantists. I suggest the reader to obtain a copy of the Bible for ready reference.

READ IT, THE TRUTH IT CONTAINS IS JUST FOR YOU . .



The Author Thomas Samuel committed his life to Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade in India in 1956. In 1961 he resigned his job with American Express for full time ministry and since then he is involved in mission. God has used Dr. Samuel to launch Operation Mobilization in India in 1964. He is presently the Founder, President of Quiet Corner India and United Prayer Movement for Nations. He has a Bachelors degree in Philosophy from Kathmandu University, Nepal, and M.A in Sociology from Mysore University, Karnataka. He was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa, by the Gospel for Asia Biblical Seminary, India. He has discipled many young men who are presently in Christian leadership in India and abroad.

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