

## LESSON 31

### **World Religions (Contd.)**

**Objective:** There are many other religions in India. As Paul said that he is indebted to Greeks and the Gentiles, wise and the foolish, we should also be prepared to share the gospel to people of all religions in our land.

***Bible Reference:***

**Memory verses: (NKJV) Rom. 1: 14-16**

*I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first*

*and also for the Greek.*

### **1. Sikh religion:**

Most Sikhs are found in north Indian states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. The founder of Sikh religion was Guru Nanak. As Islam spread in North India, many Hindu pundits were attracted by its teachings like faith in one God, brotherhood, etc. They incorporated those teachings into Hindu religion and started the Sikh religion. Sikhs were led by 9 gurus after Guru Nanak. All the teachings are recorded in 'Granth Sahib'. They started carrying a sword ('Kirpan') to escape the persecution by the Muslim rulers. Sikhs can be distinguished by five objects:

1. Hair: They grow long hair and tie it above their head and cover it with a turban.
2. Comb: A comb is kept inside the turban.
3. Shorts: Shorts are worn inside the outer dress.
4. Bangle: A steel bangle is worn on the hand.
5. Sword (Kirpan): They are instructed to carry a sword. (One section is against carrying a sword).

Sikhs are generally brave, healthy and industrious. Sadhu Sunder Singh was a Sikh, born and brought up in Punjab. Sikhs are generally friendly to Christian teachings. There are many Christian missionaries working among them nowadays.

Golden Temple built in the middle of water in Amritsar is the most important worship place of Sikhs. They have temples called 'Gurudwara' in many parts of the world. Sikhs are instructed to read and follow the teachings in 'Granth Sahib' and lead a good, moral life. Let us be ready to share the gospel with our Sikh brothers.

### **2. Parsi religion (Zoroastrian religion):**

Parsi religion is an ancient religion from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Its founder is Zoroastrian who lived in West Asia. Their religious book is 'Avesta' (Knowledge). They teach that there is a war going on between good and evil and man has the freedom to choose any. They teach that there is an end to history when the dead will rise and pass through a bridge of judgement. Good people

will easily pass the bridge and enter heaven. Evil ones will fall into hell. They wait for a savior. They have many rituals to follow. Dead bodies are not burnt or buried. The bodies are kept on top of 'silent tower' to be eaten by birds. In a few places, dead bodies are electrically cremated. There are many rich Parsi industrialists in Mumbai. Their forefathers migrated to Mumbai from Persia to escape Muslim persecution. There are many similarities between their teachings and Christian teachings. More than 120,000 Parsis live in Mumbai and Gujarat.

### **3. Buddhist religion:**

The founder was Buddha, born as Siddharth in B.C. 503 to Sudhodana, the king of Kapilavastu. Troubled by seeing great sufferings in the world, Siddharth left his home and country and began a penance. He got spiritual enlightenment at the age of 35. He became Buddha from then on and spent his life spreading 'dharma'. He died at the age of 80. His main teachings are as follows:

Sufferings come because one is born. Reason for suffering is greed. Hence to escape from suffering, one must suppress greed and be generous with their wealth. Buddha does not believe in a God who controls the universe. The aim of life is 'moksha', but it is not clear what happens to man after 'moksha'. Buddhist religion does not offer a solution to any of man's problems nor any hope to man. Buddhism has declined in India, but it is a major religion in eastern countries like Japan, China and Sri Lanka.

### **4. Jain religion:**

The founder was Vardhman Mahavir, born in B.C. 599 in Magadha. He left his family at the age of 30 and became a 'sanyasi'. He used to wear dress for one and a half years but lived naked for the rest of his life. He got 'enlightenment' after 13 years. Then he began to teach people that one can attain 'moksha' by self-inflicted physical torture. After his death in B.C. 527, his followers began to worship him as god. Jainism's main teaching is 'Ahimsa paramo dharma'. No creature should be killed or harmed. Jainism may be the reason for the popularity of 'Ahimsa' in India. The aim of life is to free man's soul from 'karma'. The way of escape from the endless cycle of rebirth is through rigorous disciplining of the body like penance, self-inflicted torture, self-control, obedience, meditation and acquiring of knowledge.

There are not more than 20 lakhs of Jains in India. But they are a small community with great wealth and influence. They are the most literate group after the Parsis. They are willing to learn

about principles of other religions. Let us be prepared to share the gospel with them.

**Conclusion:**

Study of other religions is very extensive. We have dwelt with it only very briefly. All religions are aware of the miserable condition of man. Many accept the reason for such a state as man's sin. But what is the remedy? Man's need is, not a set of principles, but a Savior. That Savior has to lift man from the miry clay into which he is sinking. Here is the superiority of the gospel which presents a loving and almighty God who took the form of man and carried all the sins and curses of mankind. Our punishment was taken by Him. Those who put their trust in Him get remission from sin, eternal life and victory over sin. While other religions give importance to the works of man and religious rituals, Christian faith gives importance to the love of God and His grace. Other religions are products of man's wisdom and knowledge. But the gospel has come out of the heart of God. Man should stop trying to attain salvation through his own ways and accept the only way, the truth and the life through Jesus Christ to live a godly life. Let us try to win our friends from other religions by showing love and sharing with them the true way of salvation.

**Questions:**

1. Which are the main religions in India?
2. Briefly state the history and teachings of Islam.
3. Give the names of the founders of Sikh, Parsi, Buddha and Jain religions. Describe their life story briefly.
4. Explain how Christian gospel is different from the teachings of other religions.
5. Do you believe in the gospel? If you believe, give your reasons.