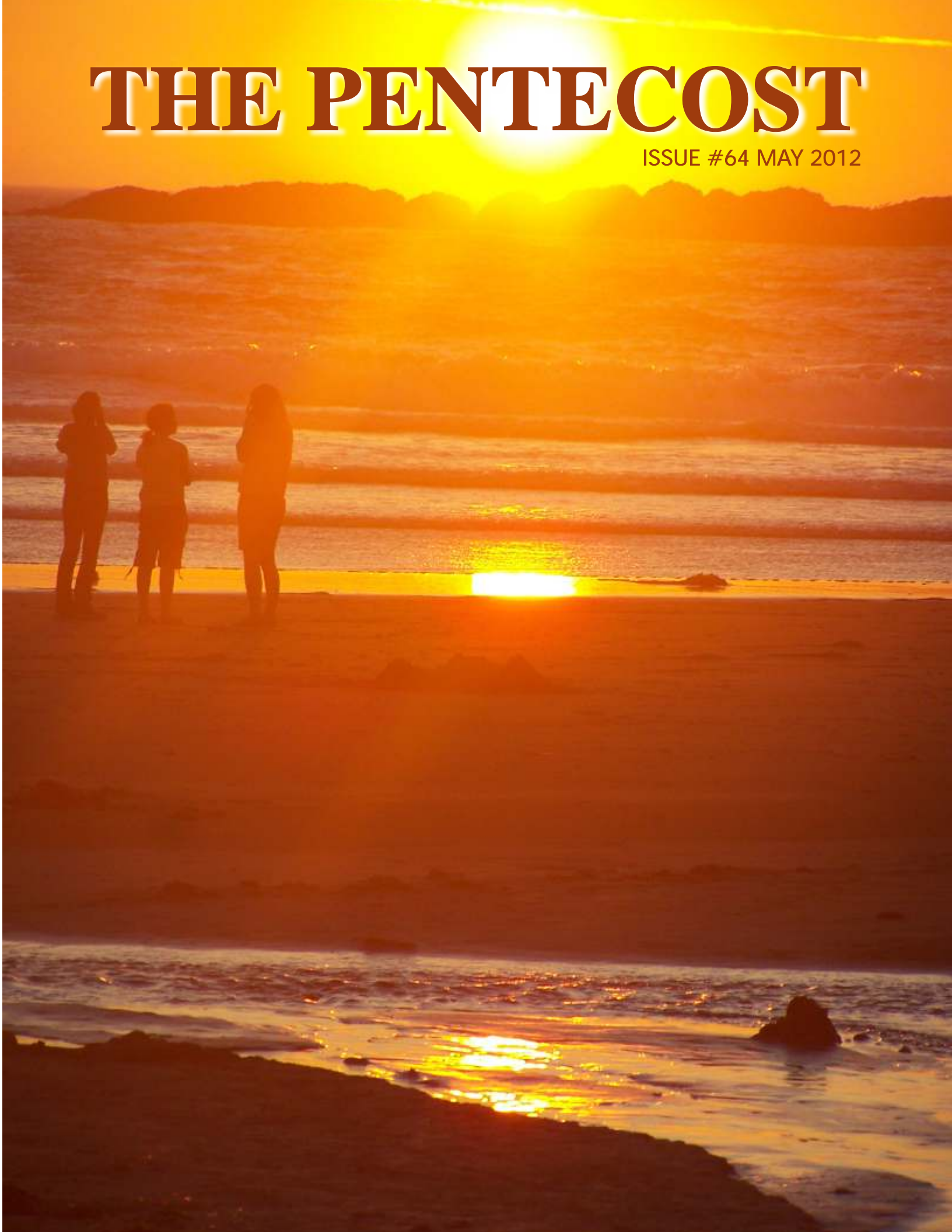


THE PENTECOST

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IN THIS ISSUE
HINDUISM AND
CHRISTIANITY

It is an ancient religion with hundreds of millions of followers on the earth – Hinduism. What does Hinduism teach about God and salvation? How is its teaching different from the Bible? We will open up these questions for scrutiny in this May, 2012, issue of *The Pentecost*.

God bless you!

Shawn Stevens

If you are searching for truth in spiritual things, then please have an open mind as you read and don't be afraid to pray and ask God to show you what is truth, and to show you Himself. “ ... God shows no partiality.” (Acts 10:34). He desires all to be saved. (See 2 Peter 3:9).

Ramona Stevens

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There are 900 million people in the world who adhere to the religion of Hinduism. Hinduism is a not-so-easy religion to define because it has no single founder, no single creed, no single system of ethics and no single religious organization. It is comprised of different religious customs which have evolved in India since 1500 B.C.

In attempting to trace Hinduism back to its early beginnings, we find that the religious beliefs of Hindus initially began being formed by those of the civilization that inhabited the Indus and Ghagger-Hakia River valleys (today Pakistan and India) somewhere between 4000 to 2200 B.C. Light-skinned, Indo-European tribesmen, called Aryans, originating from the steppes of Russia and central Asia, came into northern India around 1500 B.C. and brought Vedism religion with them. This was greatly mixed in with the existing Indian beliefs.

We know very little about the early religion of the Indian civilization that existed prior to 1500 B.C. We do know that they buried their dead with copper mirrors, pots of food and cosmetics. This suggests that they believed that those items could be used by the deceased in their afterlife. There are some seals made of soapstone and some portray Siva (an early version of the deity) as lord of the beasts. Some emblems suggest Siva-worship as well. The Indus River civilization came to an end around 1500 B.C.,

the time of the Aryan immigration. Aryans continued to pour into this region for the next 600 years. Historians once thought that the Indus River civilization was destroyed by the Aryans. However, modern historians admit that no one really knows what happened to them. What is known is that the Aryans had a huge influence on the evolving beliefs of this region. The Aryans themselves included several ethnic groups, such as, the Mitanni, the Kassites, the Sogdians, the Bactrians and the Hittites (mentioned in the Bible). We know that in 1400 B.C., a peace treaty between the Mitanni and the Hittites was signed and supposedly the gods, Indra and Varuna, were invoked. These gods play a significant role in the Vedas, ancient Hindu writings. From this, we can trace elements of Hinduism back to the Mitanni and Hittite civilization.

The Aryans apparently disliked the indigenous people and developed a system called "varna." This system categorized people in a hierarchy on the basis of skin color. In time, the varna became known as the "caste system." Four distinct castes developed; the Brahmins, who were priests and make up the aristocracy; the Kshatriyas were rulers and warriors; the Vaisyas were the common people such as merchants, workers and farmers; the Sudras were servants. This caste system came to dictate most, or all, aspects of social life. Rules for each caste governed marriage, occupation and food.

Indian and Vedic beliefs were passed down orally. However, written texts, known as “Vedas,” began recording Hindu beliefs around 1400 to 400 B.C. In this evolution of Hinduism, some major written works came about and are regarded as scripture by Hindus.

The “Veda” is the oldest Hindu piece of scripture and the word means “wisdom” or “knowledge.” It is a collection of hymns, prayers and ritual texts. The “Upanishads” are a composition of writings from around 800 - 600 B.C. Over 100 of them exist. The “Ramayana” is an ancient epic tale of India. The “Mahabharath” is also an epic. The “Bhagavad Gita” is considered the most sacred Hindu work.

What does Hinduism teach? Hindus believe that God is unknowable and impersonal. Sectarian Hinduism divides God into Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Hindus worship other gods and, in fact, believe in 330 million gods. Hindus believe in pantheism, that everything is god. Also among Hindu beliefs is the belief of “karma” and that each man's soul is mysteriously trapped in a human body and must undergo reincarnations to eventually escape his body. The caste system is also fundamental to Hindu beliefs. Hinduism does not really teach a doctrine of “sin” or “salvation.” Instead, efforts to reach “self-realization” is the goal and this is sought through yoga and meditation.

What does God's Word, the Bible, say about Hinduistic beliefs?

Firstly, the Bible teaches monotheism, that is, the belief in one God.

This is an important starting point in gaining an understanding of God, that there is only one God. The Bible states “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other.” (1 Kings 8: 60). As one of the Ten Commandments, God commands that “You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Exodus 20:3). God says:

I am the LORD, and there is no other;

There is no God besides Me.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me,

That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting

That there is none besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Isaiah 45:5-6

Also, we read; “To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.” (Deuteronomy 4:35).

Along with these Old Testament witnesses to the truth of there being only one God, the New Testament declares this as well. We read; “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John

17:3). Does not the Bible sometimes refer to other gods? Occasionally, yes. The Bible acknowledges the existence of angels, demons and other beings, but angels are angels by nature and demons are demons by nature. There is only one God by nature. The Bible teaches; "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods." (Galatians 4:8). This is a reference to false deities, false gods, spirits or conceptions of God which are not God by nature.

Not only does the Bible teach that there is one God, the Bible does not teach reincarnation. In fact, Jesus Christ spoke out against such a belief. We read from John's Gospel :

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

John 9:1-3

Here, Jesus' disciples asked Him if this blind man, who was blind from birth, had sinned prior to his birth, to be born blind. This concept that the disciples had is essentially the same as karma. Jesus said that was not it at all. The Bible teaches that men and women die once and then are judged by God; "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment," (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible speaks of the

righteous going to heaven (see Colossians 1:4-6) and the wicked going to hell (see Psalm 9:17).

Not only does the Bible differ with Hinduism by refuting reincarnation but the Bible teaches that mankind needs salvation and redemption from his sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

While Jesus Christ walked the earth, He taught that the day would come when He would leave this world, at least in bodily form, and that He would send the Holy Spirit of God to His disciples. Jesus said further; "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (John 16:8-11). So conviction is when God's Spirit impresses upon the conscience of a man or woman the truth about sin, righteousness and judgment. It is when a man or woman comes to the shocking realization that they are guilty of sinning against God, that God is righteous and that He requires righteous standards of all His creation and that there is judgment awaiting those who do not obey Him.

The Bible records an occasion, after the death and resurrection of Christ, when the Apostle Peter spoke to a crowd in Jerusalem about Christ's resurrection and ended his address with the

declaration; “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36). The people's reaction was; “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). They were “cut to the heart” or, put another way, Peter's words cut like a knife deep into their very soul. God's Spirit pressed these words onto their conscience. They had crucified Jesus and now they must face it. This is conviction.

The Bible also tells us of David, Israel's king in approximately 1000 B.C., who committed adultery with another man's wife and even had her husband murdered. God responded to this by sending Nathan, one of His prophets, to David. Nathan told David a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many sheep. The poor man had only one. The poor man loved his one sheep dearly. Yet, when the rich man had a visitor and desired to slaughter a sheep for the feast, instead of using one of his own many sheep, he chose to take and slaughter the poor man's only sheep. David responded to the story with anger, declaring that the rich man must die for what he had done, and for showing no pity. At this, Nathan thundered back with these words; “ ... 'You are the man! ... ’” (2 Samuel 12:7). He reminded David of God's goodness toward him in the past and questioned David, asking him how he could have

acted in this way? He said; “Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?...” (2 Samuel 12:9). Then he told David of the judgments that would befall him. These words were like a sharp arrow piercing David's heart. He now realized the horror of what he had done, and that God held him fully accountable for his deed. Full of conviction, David cried; “ ... 'I have sinned against the LORD'...” (2 Samuel 12:13).

We read:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12-13

A person may not feel very dirty, or out of place, when he works in the presence of farm workers and farm animals as he cleans out the stable. But transport him immediately to a wedding banquet, and how does he feel? He feels dirty. This is the effect that God's law has upon us as the Holy Spirit awakens our conscience, bringing us to the sobering awareness of our sinful state.

Friend, the life of the Lord Jesus Christ has been laid down for you and me. The death of Christ was not an arbitrary act. It had specific meaning and

specific purpose. The death of Christ was the requirement for paying the penalty for our sins. Like the crowd which stood before Peter on the Day of Pentecost, we must face the fact that we have sinned and need reconciliation with God. Friend, your life may be commendable when compared to that of your neighbor's, and it may be good when compared to the lives of the very worst in our society. However, this is not the standard by which God judges us. God judges unforgiven sin by His law. If our lives are judged by this standard, we become like the stableworker transported to the wedding. Friend, there is a great day on which we will stand before God. God wants to spare us shame and regret on that day. God wants to spare us from judgment. However, to be spared, we must respond to His way and his path to making things right. King David said; "... 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.'" (Psalm 32:5).

What is contrition? If conviction is awareness of sin, then contrition is remorse for sin.

We read in the Bible; "... 'But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.'" (Isaiah 66:2). Contrition is a deep regret for all the wrongs we have done against God and against our fellow man. It represents heartfelt grief, an inner agony that mourns over our sinful condition.

Two thousand years ago, a brilliant light shone into this dark world, a gift from heaven, the Lord of heaven Himself. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth, full of kindness. He grew up like a tender plant. He taught the people of the kingdom of God and healed them of their diseases. However, His purpose for being here extended beyond this. The day would come when He would die for your sins and mine. God's justice required a penalty to be paid for all the sins of humanity. Thus, the pure Son of God took upon Himself the sins of the entire world so that we could be set free and forgiven. He was despised and rejected by men. He was tortured and sentenced to death. With painful wounds in His body and nails in His hands, He alone paid this awful price. (See Isaiah Chapter 53).

Sin requires enormous penalty. This was the price; "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13).

A poet has written:

Am I a stone and not a sheep, That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,

*To number drop by drop Thy bloods slow loss
And yet not weep?*

Not so those women loved Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;

Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly; Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the sun and moon Which hid their faces in starless sky.

*A horror of great darkness at broad noon
—I, only I.*

*Yet give not oe'r But seek Thy sheep, true
Shepherd of the flock;*

*Greater than Moses, turn and look once
more And smite a rock.²*

While Hinduism teaches a theology of many gods, the Holy Bible shows us that there is one God.

This God has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to bring salvation to mankind. Salvation is more than self-realization and it can't be earned by meditation or yoga. Salvation begins with people first being convicted of sin and feeling contrition over sin. It continues as people come to Jesus Christ, surrender their lives to Him and ask God's forgiveness for their sins. Salvation is God forgiving the sins of a man or woman and then receiving them into His family. This happens only through the sacrifice that Christ made by dying and rising from death.

Friend, if you are reading and you are of Hindu belief, stop and reflect on the sins of your life. These sins are deeds you have committed. Realize that you cannot correct them in some future life. However, Jesus Christ can forgive you for them and make you His own. Cry out to Him now, repent and put your trust in Him. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES :

1 Anonymous quote, found in William Read, Ed. Authentic Records of Revival (Wheaton: InternationalAwakening Press, 1980), 119-120.

2 Christina Rossetti, as cited by John F. MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1985), 163.

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