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PAUL'S GOSPEL APPROACH TO THE ATHENIANS: A
MISSIONAL IMPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY
NEPALESE HINDU CONTEXTS

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PAUL'S GOSPEL APPROACH TO THE ATHENIANS: A
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For the glory of God

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PREFACE

I imagine that if I was still a Hindu, I would not be a priest. To serve as a priest in Hinduism means to be born as a Brahmin. My karma would not allow me to serve as a priest as I was not born as a Brahmin. Thanks be to God for his redeeming work through his Son Jesus Christ. In 1988, Christ found me and ransomed me from the bondage of Hinduism. Since 1992, I have been serving Christ as his ambassador and pastoring congregations in which God has entrusted me with reaching my own people from Hindu, Buddhist, and animist backgrounds.

My dream has been to document the gospel approach in Nepali Hindu context accurately and effectively to reach my Hindu relatives and friends back in Nepal. As a gospel worker for the last thirty years, I have made countless mistakes that I regret and cannot change, but God has helped me reach Nepali Hindus, Buddhists, and animists successfully. I have also planted and pastored Nepali churches here in the United States. At the time of writing, another Global Mission Nepali church is launched in Charlotte, North Carolina. From 2011 to 2016, the North American Mission Board hired me as a Church Planting Catalyst to reach South Asians and to plant churches in the Northeast, United States. During my tenure, God has helped me to initiate more than a dozen churches, mostly among Nepalese Hindus and Buddhists. In addition, I founded Global Mission Nepal, a church-planting network, in 2014. Since then, Global Mission Nepal has planted 149 churches throughout Nepal and one in Charlotte, North Carolina, United States. Nevertheless, all of the above would not have been possible without the help of the many people around me. I would like to thank my wife, Mandira Pokharel, who not only gave her undivided support and time, but also engaged in this great church-planting movement along with me. I am also thankful to my oldest son, Anugrah Pokharel. During

my coursework, he has reviewed my writing and has given me feedback. In addition, my youngest son, Aaron Pokharel, was a constant source of encouragement. As a teenager, he allowed my time with him to focus on my studies when he needed the most. I pray he will follow us to fulfill the Great Commission. Second, I am so thankful for my supervisor, Dr. John M. Klaassen, for his outstanding knowledge of the mission field and for his wisdom to guide and gently correct my work—all of which has helped keep me on track. Third, I am so grateful to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Hazel Green, Alabama, and Bardstown Junction Baptist Church in Shepherdsville, Kentucky, for their faithful love and support for my family and me. Fourth, I am grateful to the North American Mission Board, which allowed me to experience a church-planting movement in the Northeast, United States and which resourced me during my ministry in New England among the Nepali-speaking population. Fifth, I want to thank my leadership team of Global Mission Nepal and the church planters in Nepal and United States. Without their lives, stories, and works, this thesis would not have been possible. In addition, I am thankful for the Southern Seminary Writing Center staff and for my editors, Dr. Dan Gurtner, Torey Teer, Ann Riedling, and Nicholas Campbell. With their help, my rough draft became easy to read.

Finally, I praise God for his amazing grace that saved me, a sinner. He then lifted me up to serve him and brought me to the United States to be a missionary to the unreached Nepalese. I thought it would be impossible to be a missionary in America, but with God all things are possible, “for no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37 NIV). He alone is the history maker; we are just laborers. He alone is worthy of all honor, glory, and praise.

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Charlotte, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion. It originated in the Indus Valley and Ganges River in South Asia. The Himalayan Mountains isolated the region from the outside world, allowing Hinduism to develop its own culture and unique traditions.¹ Hinduism birthed three major religions: Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.² These three religions heavily borrowed their belief systems from their mother religion. Hinduism has become a global religion that has also spread its philosophy all over the world and “provides an important theological background for many cults and sects that have risen in the West.”³ In addition, mainstream Hindu cults and sects—their social lives, culture, economic impact, and educational influence on academic institutions and businesses—are well established.

Hinduism was a regional faith in South Asia until India became independent from the British Empire in 1947. From 1950 to 1970, Hindu adherents migrated to the United States, Europe, and Australia.⁴ The ten countries with the largest number of adherents are India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the United States,

¹ Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 115.

² Garry R. Morgan, *Understanding World Religions in 15 Minutes a Day: Learning Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, Christianity, and Many More* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 94. For example, the New Age movement, Vedanta Society, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and Transcendental Meditation are influential in the West.

³ Larry A. Nichols, George A. Mather, and Alvin J. Schmidt, “Hinduism,” in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 123.

⁴ Rasamandala Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism: A Comparative Guide to Hindu Philosophy, Its Traditions and Practices, Ritual and Beliefs, with More Than 470 Magnificent Photographs* (Cambridgeshire, UK: Anness, 2019), 13.

Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Myanmar. Pew Research Center projects that by 2050 the United States will become home to five million Hindus, only being behind India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in Hindu population.⁵ Hindu terms such as “guru,” “yoga,” “avatar,” “karma,” “moksha,” and “reincarnation” have been added to the vocabulary of ordinary North Americans in recent years. It is no surprise, therefore, that Pew Research discovered that 19 percent of American evangelical Christians and 33 percent of all US adults believe in reincarnation.⁶ Reincarnation is the belief that the human soul is immortal and never dies but, instead, is reborn repeatedly until all karma has been resolved and moksha—that is, liberation from the cycle of rebirth—is attained. Through this process, one has experiences, learns lessons, and evolves spiritually until finally he or she graduates from physical birth.⁷ Nearly one billion Hindus and a half of a billion Buddhists hold this concept, and now, so do many American Christians. This concept is greatly appealing to Westerners young and old, and it is a challenge for evangelical churches to keep members from this unbiblical belief.

Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁸ Bible-believing Christians must obey the Great Commission to witness to lost family members, relatives, next-door neighbors, and coworkers. However, when Christian’s encounter people from differing cultures and faith traditions, such as Hindus or Buddhists, it becomes more of a struggle for them to begin gospel

⁵ Pew Research Center, “10 Countries with the Largest Hindu Populations, 2010 and 2050,” April 2, 2015, https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/hindus/pf_15-04-02_projectionstables96/.

⁶ Claire Gecewicz, “‘New Age’ Beliefs Common among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans,” *Pew Research Center*, October 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/>.

⁷ Nichols, Mather, and Schmidt, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*, 127.

⁸ All Scripture references are quoted from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

conversations. It is difficult and confusing to reach Hindus because Hinduism is polytheistic and lacks an identifiable founder, historical evidence, a distinct set of doctrines, and clear practices. Hinduism intricately blends a way of life with cultural values, tradition, and national identity.⁹ The unique thing about Hinduism is that it somehow integrates with the national identity of whatever country a person happens to be from. Unfortunately, Hinduism is thriving in the West, impacting public schools, colleges, universities and other public places, leading people to a false hope and, ultimately, spiritual death. It is imperative, therefore, for Christians to witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to make Christ-followers and faithful disciples.

Background

I was born and raised as a Hindu in South Asia. Like other Hindus, I believed that Hinduism was the way of life. As a young man, I strongly held to traditional values, participated in everything that my former religion offered, and was a firm believer of Hindu nationalism. I participated in Hinduism up to the age of twenty. Yet, like other Hindus, I was dissatisfied with my traditions and practices.¹⁰ Believing in karma and the hierarchical caste system was troubling. Hinduism holds that the “Dalit are born into their state due to karma from previous life—to seek improvement is to only make things worse next time around.”¹¹ Furthermore, cross-caste marriage is still unthinkable in the rural villages of Nepal and India. Even modern Hindu practitioners view the union between a

⁹ Nathan Bhattacharya, “Hinduism Insights for an Effective Witness to Hindus,” in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ*, ed. Scott Dawson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 225.

¹⁰ S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought*, Currents of Encounter Series 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 22.

¹¹ Morgan, *Understanding World Religions*, 103.

member of an upper caste and a Dalit as unacceptable and a humiliation to the upper caste member's family.¹²

In my own experience, the year I was born, my father took another wife and ran away from my village. My mother had to provide food, shelter, and protection for me and my five older siblings. We had a small farm in an agrarian community; it was enough to provide food for us for half a year. For the rest of the year, my mother and older siblings worked as day-laborers to provide food for the family. Whenever we experienced a scarcity of food, my mother used to blame her karma. She would say, "Oh, because of my previous deeds [i.e., karma], my husband took another wife and left us as poor." While we were going through poverty and suffering, my extended family members and community members would comfort my mother and say, "Look, you had bad karma; you cannot escape from it. We are so sorry for you and your family."

In 1988, a Hindu friend of mine shared with me about an unknown God, Jesus. Since I was born, raised, and lived on a mountain in Nepal, I had never heard the name Jesus. While my friend shared with me about this unknown Jesus, the only thing I remembered was "whatever we ask in Jesus's name will be granted" (Matt 7:7). For Hindus, praying to any god or goddess is permissible. Talking with my friend about this unknown Jesus, praying in a secret room for healing, and asking Jesus to fulfill my dream to go to the Middle East for work changed my life. Jesus answered my prayer for healing and fulfilled my dream. In the beginning, I did not understand Jesus as Savior. It took me approximately two years to learn and accept that fact. Once I did, I began witnessing to my mother and siblings.

When I began witnessing for Christ, I did not have a proper understanding of my new faith. I shared the gospel to my close Hindu friends, relatives, and many others.

¹² Joanna Slater, "Indian Father Hires Assassins to Kill Daughter's Husband Because He Was from Lower Caste, Court Claim: Influence of Age-Old Caste System Remains Pervasive in Modern India," *Independent*, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indian-couple-father-assassins-caste-wedding-amrutha-varshini-pranay-perumalla-a9071206.html>.

My message was “Jesus can heal you. He can deliver you from the demons and witchcraft. He is a more powerful God than all Hindu gods. You do not have to celebrate any Hindu festivals because it gives you nothing. If you believe in Him, you will have eternal life.” My methods of witnessing for Christ produced no fruit. Reading the book of Acts, I discovered that the gospel of Jesus has power over every other power. As I grew into a more mature Christian and a gospel minister, Acts 17 became a more applicable text for pointing Hindus to the Creator God.

Understanding the basic teachings of both religions, Hinduism and now the gospel, I began witnessing for Christ. I shared the gospel with my Hindu mother, who accepted Christ. In addition, all five of my siblings accepted Christ. I have presented the gospel of Jesus Christ to poor Hindus, Dalit community members, upper caste members, highly educated Hindus, and even family members of dignitaries in Nepal. In my work in Nepal and North America, I have focused on reaching Hindus and Buddhists. My approach to Nepali Hindus and Buddhists has resulted in many baptisms and churches planted. Since 2006, my witnessing in the United States has led to church plants in Dallas, Texas; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Manchester, New Hampshire. From 2011 to 2016, I worked with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) as a Church Planting Catalyst overseeing South Asian ministry in New England.

Furthermore, in the fall of 2013, God gave me a vision to reach Nepal through church planting. I named this church-planting organization Global Mission Nepal. In 2019, my cross-cultural approach resulted in a multi-ethnic church plant, called Global Mission Church Charlotte, which I led until October 2019. Currently, my family and I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, pastoring Global Mission Nepali Church, which was launched in 2021 and continue leading Global Mission Nepal.

Contemporary Nepali Hindu Context

Hinduism has become a global religion though faith developed in the Indian sub-continent. Adherents are no longer just the local South Asians; they are now part of the global community. In the Nepalese context, poverty, illiteracy, limited opportunities, and caste discrimination have existed since the very formation of Nepal. Lack of opportunity drives people to search for a better life and a higher standard of living within the country. When their expectations and desire for a better life are not attainable within Nepal, many young Nepali men and women emigrate to neighboring countries, such as India, Thailand, and the Middle East in order to achieve their dream. This search for betterment is not limited to simply traveling to Asian nations; Nepali youth are also migrating to European nations and North America with the hope of even greater opportunities. It is amazing to see that people from the relatively small land-locked nation of Nepal are dispersing worldwide.¹³ Great Commission believers are therefore finding themselves as neighbors of Hindus. In this background, local churches are investigating the best practices to witness, yet they to find the best missional approach.

Thesis

Jesus commanded his disciples to witness to the lost in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The newly founded Christian community endured tribulation and severe persecution in the first century, yet they never gave up on witnessing Christ. The first-century Christians took the gospel seriously; they fasted, prayed, prepared, and commissioned missionaries to reach nations (Acts 13:1–3). Christians went as missionaries knowing their context, living out their lives like Christ, and sharing the gospel with burning zeal. Stephen Neill writes about the early church states, “Every Christian was a witness.”¹⁴

¹³ Cindy L. Perry, *Nepali around the World* (Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 1997), 357.

¹⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 22.

In the Nepali Hindu context, witnessing and church planting are difficult if one does not have a basic understanding of the Hindu belief system. The polytheistic worldview and practices of the first-century Athenians are somewhat similar to the modern Hindu context where adherents are worshipping many unknown gods. Knowing the Athenians' worldview, culture, context, and belief system, Paul presented the Creator God and monotheistic worldview that were new to Athenians but attracted many of them. Therefore, I will argue that Paul's emic gospel approach to the Athenians (Acts 17:16–34) should be applied in modern Nepali Hindu contexts.¹⁵

Methodology

This research will focus on gathering available and relevant scholarly books, online resources, documents, and published materials on Acts 17. Over time, various scholars have investigated and interpreted Paul's preaching to the Athenians. These scholars produced countless academic works to fit their times and contexts, and those resources do not lack practical implications. Comparative research of religion in Paul's time, Paul's emic gospel approach to the Athenians, and its missional implications for contemporary Nepali Hinduism open up numerous points of application to a Nepali Hindu context that requires investigation. When encountering Nepali Hindus, there are limited resources available that specifically address how to reach them authentically.

My background as a former Hindu and my present identity as a follower of Christ allows me to understand both worldviews—Hinduism and Christianity. Therefore, I am able to provide an emic perspective and practical analysis to bridge the two traditions and thereby offer gospel presenters basic worldviews, authentic approaches,

¹⁵ Carol V. McKinney, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research* (Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 179. "Emic" refers to understating culture-specific sounds, behaviors, ideas, and religions through an insider's perspective rather than an outsider's account. The goal of an emic perspective is to understand the culture through deep anthropological understanding and full immersion. For example, McKinney states, "Any health worker who works within in an African health services context would need to know the local illness etiology. The local people operate from that perspective, and information communicate with patients by medical personnel should be understandable to them" (179).

and practical tools for reaching Hindus for Christ. The following methodology expresses the main purpose of this thesis.

First, I will investigate Paul's missiological approach in Acts 17:16–34. I will research literature that discusses the Athenians' worldview, including their culture, context, and religions. Then, I will research appropriate commentaries and missiological works pertaining to Acts 17:16–34. These relevant commentaries and missiological works will provide significant evidence to know the Creator God. Next, I will explicate Paul's claim concerning five theological concepts and his presentation of the gospel. Paul argues that (1) there is one true God as sovereign Creator; (2) he is the source of every good thing; (3) the work of Christ is sufficient for salvation; (4) without Christ, there is no hope; and (5) response to good news requires repentance of sins and asking God for forgiveness.

My second methodological step is to comparatively examine the teachings and worldviews of Christianity and Hinduism. I will give attention to Christian teaching on the sovereignty of God, creation, men and women as created in the image of God, sin, the work of Christ, grace, the priesthood of believers, and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In Hinduism's teaching, I will investigate the core Hindu worldview concerning deities and issues of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva and the cosmic egg, all of which contradict Christian teaching about God and his creation. I will examine the meaning of Brahman, Brahma, Brahmin, karma, reincarnation, avatar, atman, and moksha in the literature on Hindu religion and, specifically, the Nepalese variant. Further, I will show that Hinduism claims that humans were created in four castes; sin in Hinduism is considered the effect of karma; God has no role in saving sinners; God in Hinduism is obligated to protect the righteous, which is in sharp contrast with Christ's teaching (Luke 5:31–32; John 10:10); moksha is available only to the devotees who stay faithful to their designated caste; one has to be born in the Brahmin caste, which is

ordained by Prajapati, in order to be a priest; and, finally, Hinduism's belief in eternal life leads nowhere—that is, utter nothingness.

My third methodological step is to apply Paul's emic missional approach to the Athenians for contemporary Nepali Hindu contexts. In order to apply the first and second steps, I will compare Athenian philosophies with Nepal Hindus' worldview. I will argue that the first-century Athenians' belief in Epicureanism and Stoicism are similar to the Hindu worldview and its practices. Further, I will argue that the Creator God is to be worshiped, but creation should be cherished and subdued rather than worshipped. Fallen humanity has no hope. Christ has bridged the gap between the holy God and fallen humanity. In Hinduism, salvation is available only for certain people or castes. In contrast, I will argue that Christ has done the final work to redeem all people, including people held captive by karma. The only responsibility for them is to accept Christ's free gift of salvation.

Fourth, I will conclude with findings from Paul's emic gospel approach to the first-century Athenians that apply to a contemporary Nepali Hindu setting. As Scott A. Moreau explains, contextualization is “the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a *whole*—not only the message, but also the means of living out of our faith in the local setting—understandable.”¹⁶ In order to apply my findings from Paul's gospel approach for the Nepali context, first, I will briefly highlight Nepali Christianity and practices. Second, based on the pattern in Acts 17, I will delineate step-by-step guidelines for evangelism. Third, when the gospel is effectively presented, church planting is a natural result. I hope that my careful model and the missional implications therein may grant

¹⁶ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Model* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 36.

boldness to Great Commission-believing Christians who are confused and struggling to reach Hindus in their neighborhood, workplace, and on the mission field.

Limitations and Delimitations

This thesis has a few limitations. First, due to the global pandemic regarding COVID-19, traveling to Nepal for field research is not possible. Second, Nepalese Christianity is very young, and fine scholarly works on the subject are few and scarcely available. Thus, there is a lack of scholarly resources to rely on for current practices in Nepal. Third, when one views Hinduism in South Asia, it is tempting to apply the methodology and missional implications beyond specific geographical boundaries. However, South Asian Hinduism is so broad and complex that each country and region has its own specific beliefs and practices. The missional approaches that are effective in reaching Hindus in one region may not be applicable to Hindus living in North America, and vice versa.

Concerning delimitations, this thesis specifically focuses on the Nepali context—that is, applying the gospel approach that Paul employed to reach the Athenians to sharing the gospel with Nepali Hindus in Nepal and in the diaspora.

Definitions

In this research, I compare Athenian Epicureanism and Stoicism with the modern Hindu conception of gods. Therefore, it is necessary to define these terms.

Epicurean. A philosophy founded by Epicurus, who was born in 341 BC. The belief refers to finding, “contentment in limiting desire and in the joys and solace of friendship. The pursuit of extravagant pleasure, which gives perversion of their quest for

happiness.”¹⁷ In other words, the chief life-goal of Epicureans is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Stoicism. Zeno founded the school of Stoics. There were two thoughts in this school: (1) life is full of both good and bad, and one cannot really avoid the bad so one has to “grin and bear it”; (2) “I can’t control everything that is going on out there, and things are going to happen to me that I will not like. But I am still in charge of myself. Therefore, I am going to stand tall, stick out my chin, and take it—whatever comes.”¹⁸

Brahman. The ultimate reality that is identified with the human soul and the final cause of everything in existence. Hinduism teaches three aspects of the divine: God existing everywhere, God situated within the heart, and God residing outside or beyond this world.¹⁹ In Bhagavad Gita 18:61, Krishna teaches, “Arjuna, in the center of the heart of all beings their lord stands still, mechanically revolving all creatures through his magical power.”²⁰

Brahma. The creator god in Hinduism sometimes identified as Prajapati. He is believed to be self-born and one of a trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva) and to have four faces looking in each of the four directions.²¹

Brahmin. “A masculine word referring to a member of the first varna, the priestly class. Through their ownership of Veda and through their monopoly on its

¹⁷ M. H. Cressy, “Epicureans,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas et al., 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 340.

¹⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 295.

¹⁹ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 78.

²⁰ W. J. Johnson, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 80.

²¹ Diana L. Eck, “The Deity: The Image of God,” in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 51.

associated sacrificial ritual.”²² Brahmin dominants over other the three classes, exercises ideology over the others, and maintain a caste system in Hinduism.

Karma. “The law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.”²³

Reincarnation. The belief that “the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.”²⁴

Avatar. In Hinduism, “*avatar*” (“descent”) and “*incarnate*” (“to take on human flesh”) interplay in meaning. For example, “Vishnu is god who from time-to-time becomes incarnate in order to rehabilitate the world.”²⁵ Bhagavad Gita 4:8 states, “To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreant, as we are to establish the principle of religion, I advent Myself millennium after millennium.”²⁶

Atman. “A term that can be used either as a reflexive pronoun (‘myself,’ ‘yourself,’ ‘itself,’ etc.) or as a noun meaning ‘the self’ (sometime translated as ‘soul’).”²⁷ Nepalese pronounce “*Atma*” the real self or eternal soul that never dies.

Moksha. The concept of moksha, or the Nepali term mukti, is connected. Liberation from the chain of all karma (bad actions) and release from temporal reality (suffering) to eternity (rebirth or *samsara*). The concept *moksha or mukti* is connected “with the development of the doctrines of karma and rebirth, since it is predicated on a

²² W. J. Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 68.

²³ *Hinduism Today*, “Question Two: Do Hindus Believe in Reincarnation?,” accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5664>.

²⁴ *Hinduism Today*, “Do Hindus Believe in Reincarnation?”

²⁵ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 91.

²⁶ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, trans., *Bhagavad-Gita as It Is* (New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972), 69.

²⁷ Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, 36.

belief that in the unaltered, worldly course of events, beings will inevitably continue to suffer, die, and be reborn as result of their action.”²⁸

Chapter Summaries

This thesis argues that Paul’s emic gospel approach to the Athenians (Acts 17:16–34) should be applied in modern Nepali Hindu contexts. The research projects the following summaries of each chapter.

In the first chapter, I briefly introduce the origin, spread, and global impact of Hinduism from South Asia. This information is necessary in order for Christians to be able to engage Hindus with the gospel message. I highlight my Hindu background and current Christian ministry reaching Nepalese Hindus in the US and in Nepal. I state the four methodologies that I will use in carrying out my research project: (1) investigate Paul’s gospel approach in Acts 17:16–34; (2) comparatively examine the basic teachings of Christianity and Hinduism, which contradict each other; (3) apply Paul’s missional approach to the Athenians for contemporary Nepali Hindu contexts; (4) and conclude with essential findings from Paul’s gospel approach to the first-century Athenians that apply to a contemporary Nepali Hindu setting.

In chapter 2, I focus on Paul’s gospel approach to the Athenians in Acts 17:16–34. When Paul presents the gospel to the Athenians, he relates to his audience with their culture, context, and pantheism (Epicureanism and Stoicism), and he makes a theological case as it relates to the one true God as Creator, his creation, God as source of every good thing, the work of Christ and salvation found through in him, fallen men have no hope without Christ, and believing the good news of the free gift of salvation that Christ offers with repentance and accepting Christ as the Lord and Savior.

²⁸ Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, 208.

Chapter 3 comparatively examines the core teachings and worldviews of Christianity and Hinduism. The subjects covered include the God of the Bible as sovereign, God as the Creator of heaven and earth, the creation of man and woman in God's image, sin, the work of Christ, God's grace, the priesthood of believers, and eternal life through Jesus Christ. I then contrast Hinduism's teaching and worldview with those of Christianity. In so doing, I cover the following subjects: Hindu deities and a pantheistic view of God who is not sovereign, the creation of the world by a cosmic egg, the creation of humanity into four castes, sin, karma, moksha, the priesthood reserved for Brahmin, and eternal life that leads to nowhere. While investigating, I focus my argument on drawing out the differences between the two faiths, differences that support the application I make in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 brings together the findings of chapters 2 and 3 and applies the approaches that Paul employed to the Athenians to contemporary Nepali Hindu contexts. I show the similarities between the two core teachings and worldviews—namely, ancient Greek Epicureanism and Stoicism in modern Hindu belief and practice. This comparison demonstrates how Paul's approach to the Athenians is relevant for contemporary Nepali Hindu contexts, focusing on worship of the true Creator God, the creation mandate, the fallen state of man, Christ's work on the cross, and his resurrection, which have implications for eternal life and judgment.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with practical implications for reaching contemporary Nepali Hindus in the diaspora. I summarize the thesis, briefly overviewing Nepali Christian belief and practice and outlining certain outreach strategies that lead to churches being planted and Nepali Hindus being reached so that they might have an opportunity to worship their Creator through Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

PAUL’S GOSPEL APPROACH IN ACTS 17:16–34

In order to communicate the gospel effectively, the presenter needs to understand the audience’s worldview, which includes the culture, context, and basic belief system. Craig Storti notes that without these elements, “cross-cultural interactions are subject to all manner of confusion, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation.”¹ When Paul encountered the pantheistic Athenians, he presented the gospel without confusing them or leading them to misunderstand and misinterpret what he was saying.

Paul was born and raised as a Jew, trained to be a Hebrew under rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5). Paul spent his early life in the Greek city of Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 21:39), which was considered a center of education. He had spent time in other Roman-controlled towns where he was likely exposed to Hellenistic ideas, especially Epicurean and Stoic philosophies.² In Paul’s day, Athens had lost political power and was commercially insignificant due to Roman invasions. Nevertheless, the city continued to represent itself as glorious, with a rich culture of fine arts, history, and philosophies. Four philosophies: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Neoplatonism dominated the Roman world and impacted the religious belief of the Athenians.³ F.F. Bruce writes. “Stoicism and Epicureanism represented

¹ Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2001), 25.

² H. D. McDonald, *Foundation for Faith: The Christian View of Man* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 15.

³ C. Stephen Evans, *A History of Western Philosophy: From the Pre-Socratic to Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 95.

alternative attempts in Pre-Christian paganism to come to terms with life, especially in terms of uncertainty and hardship.”⁴

Paul’s familiarity with Athenian cultural context, religious beliefs, and history enables him to communicate the good news to his pantheistic audience effectively. Paul’s witness to Athenians shows that he did not just recite Jewish history or Athenian religions but built bridges between two separate religious worldviews: a pantheistic Athenian and the one true Creator God.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief background of the Athenians’ context, culture, and religions, Paul’s reasoning attracted the Athenian philosophers: the Epicureans and Stoics. Next, background and analysis will elucidate a model for cross-cultural missions that will serve as a paradigm for subsequent chapters. Finally, in order to proclaim the gospel to the Athenians, Paul presents five key theological concepts: (1) the One True God as Sovereign Creator; (2) this same God is the source of every good thing; (3) the work of Christ is sufficient for salvation; (4) without Christ, there is no hope; and (5) response to good news requires repentance of sin and asking God for forgiveness.

Athenian Culture and Context

Athens was an ancient city, the capital of Attica, located in the province of Achaia under the Roman Empire.⁵ Athens began as a small Mycenaean community as early as 2500 BC. Archaeological evidence finds that the Acropolis was fortified around 1600 BC. John Polhill claims, “Athens flourished under the Mycenaean culture until the

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 331.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 560.

invasion of the Dorian tribes. The Dorians initiated a period of general cultural deprivation, the so-called ‘dark age of early Greek civilization.’”⁶ Persia suppressed Athens from 490 to 479 BC.⁷ Athens’s fame returned to life when she repelled the Persian invader Xerxes’ armies. For the fifty years from 480 to 430 BC, Athens prospered in the arts, drama, painting, sculpture, and architecture. Athens expanded in power during this period and enjoyed culture in a “golden age.”⁸ As Athens’s political power expanded, Spartan fears of the Athenians’ expansion ignited, leading the Athenians into war with Sparta, which they defeated in the Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BC). Athens then resumed leadership in the greater Mediterranean region, which it held until the fourth century. Finally, the Macedonian king Philip defeated Athens and acquired her political power at the Battle of Charonea (338 BC). Philip’s son Alexander the Great, who was taught by the Athenian philosopher Aristotle, succeeded his father as Macedonian warrior-king. Bruce writes, “Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity.”⁹ During the Hellenistic period, Athens became the center of arts and science within the Hellenistic world.

Roman General Mummius conquered the Greek city-states of Achaia in 146 BC. and placed the city of Achaia under the Macedonian provincial administration.¹⁰ Under Rome’s control of the province of Achaia, Athens was given the privilege of a free city, and consequently, its culture and schools attracted people from all over the world.

⁶ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 207.

⁷ Patrick Anderson, *Longman Illustrated Encyclopedia of World History* (London: Peerage Books, 1985), 58.

⁸ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 207.

⁹ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 329.

¹⁰ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 207.

Romans also adopted Greek gods and gave them new names. Zeus was named Jupiter, Artemis became Diana, Ares became Mars, and the Areopagus became Mars Hill.¹¹ It is evident that when Paul visited Athens, he encountered temples, idols, the statues of Augustus Tiberius, Germanicus, and Drusus, and numerous pillars in various places of the city displaying the head of Herm.¹² The emperor Claudius added the monumental flight of marble steps that led up to the main entrance to the Acropolis. Archeological evidence shows that throughout the city, inscriptions have been found that the city name Claudius means “Savior and benefactor.”¹³

Athens was multicultural, with many races and ethnic backgrounds. According to Polhill, “Acts 17:16–21 is viewed by scholars of the classics as the most cultured paragraph of the Bible.”¹⁴ Athenian artists, sculptors, architects, temples, and philosophical schools attracted many visitors, students, and writers who then would reside in Athens. The Athenians loved the arts and invested much to build thousands of temples, craft arts, develop architecture, and create writings. It is said, “In Athens it was easier to find a god than a man.”¹⁵ This includes monuments such as the Agora, an area developed for public engagements. Many statues represented those they held in high regard—not gods and goddesses, but their greatest philosophers and leaders. Their culture and prestige were unsurpassed and remained unchallenged in the ancient world.

¹¹ Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 19.

¹² Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 512.

¹³ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208.

¹⁴ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208.

¹⁵ Stuart H. Merriam, *Paul the Apostle: At the Edge by Faith* (Tucson, AZ: Fenestra Books, 2004), 96.

Athens had the reputation as the leading city of ancient Greece for its philosophy, politics, and culture from the sixth to the fourth century BC. In Paul's day, Athens was living on the memories of its magnificent past. It was the hometown of the most famous philosopher, Socrates (469–399 BC), who devoted his life to high-minded Athenians. His philosophy inspired the schools of Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics. However, Socrates was persecuted and put to death due to the accusation of “undermining the tradition and beliefs of Athenians society.”¹⁶ His philosophy was viewed as a way of life, and his character gave the ancient Greek world prestige and still profoundly influences Western philosophy.

Plato (427–347 BC), who also was born into a noble Athenian family, became an influential philosopher. He founded his school, the Academy, which still impacts contemporary Western philosophy.¹⁷ Another influential philosopher was Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), the son of the physician to the Macedonian ruler. Aristotle joined Plato's Academy in Athens at the age of eight.¹⁸ He is known for his teachings on politics, psychology, and ethics.

Further, the philosopher Epicurus (342–271 BC) developed the philosophy of atomism, suggesting that the universe is composed of only two things: bodies and the void.¹⁹ He embraced Athens as his hometown. In addition, Zeno of Citium (336–265 BC), the son of a merchant from Cyprus, was not born in Athens but made it his home.

¹⁶ J. V. Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 87.

¹⁷ Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 1.

¹⁸ Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 233.

¹⁹ Cahn explains Epicurus, who would argue “that body exist is a matter of observation. The existence of the void or empty space is necessary in order for bodies to move. Bodies of visible size are compounded out of bodies of invisible size, namely, atoms. Nothing can come into existence out of nothing, and it is impossible for anything to pass into nothingness. Therefore what exists always has existed and always will exist.” Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 325.

As a young man, he discovered philosophy by reading Xenophon's description of Socrates in his *Memorabilia*.²⁰ Around 300 BC, Zeno set up a school of philosophy on the painted porch, establishing the school of the Stoics. Zeno's simplicity of life, learning, and character attracted people widely. However, Zeno also believed in divine signs. As Walter Kaufmann and Forrest Baird assert, "He is said to have committed suicide after breaking his toe on a rock, believing the incident to be a sign of God's will."²¹ His philosophy was divided into three categories: logic, physics, and ethics.²² Zeno's philosophy went beyond the Hellenic border and flourished in Romans, influencing Seneca, Epictetus, and even Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Athenian Religions: Pantheism

When Paul reached Athens, his audiences differed from what he had previously experienced in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1–13). In Thessalonica and Berea, Paul proclaimed the good news to the Jewish community in the synagogues on the Sabbath day (Acts 17:2, 10–12). Paul's custom was to preach to the Jewish community if he found a synagogue in a city. He had done this in Damascus (Acts 9:20–22), in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41), and in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2–3).

In Acts 17:10 this is shown again, "The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue." Jewish people throughout the world knew the Hebrew Scriptures and where it was written that the Messiah is going to come to redeem them. In Thessalonica, Paul explained that it was necessary for this Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead (Ps 22;

²⁰ Walter Kaufmann and Forrest L. Baird, eds., *Philosophic Classics*, vol. 1, *Ancient Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Paramount, 1994), 399.

²¹ Kaufmann and Baird, *Ancient Philosophy*, 399.

²² F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 25.

Isa 53), which is good news for everyone—both Jews and Gentiles. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures to prove to the Thessalonians and Bereans that a man named Jesus, who suffered on the cross and rose from the dead, is the Jewish Messiah (Acts 17:3, 11).

In contrast, as Paul arrived in Athens, his audience changed. Jean Daniélou argues, “The Christian message to the Greek world differentiates it from the presentation of the same message to the Jews.”²³ As Paul encountered Epicureans and Stoics in Acts 17:18, he understood their belief and practices. Knowing his audiences—the Epicureans and the Stoics, Paul presented the gospel effectively to the Athenians.

Epicureans

Epicurus was born in Somas, an island in the Aegean Sea, a few years after Plato’s death when Aristotle would have been in his early forties (342 BC). Before moving to Athens, Epicurus lived in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He was a man of noble character. His followers treated him as an almost godlike being, a saintly figure. In many ways, his adherents were viewed as the least religious and the most secular. During Roman times, Epicurean philosophy developed and maintained popularity throughout the empire.²⁴

Epicurus became familiar with Platonism and Aristotelianism. Later, he converted to atomism. According to atomism, “the cosmos is the result of an accident, that the gods are atomic compounds like every other object, and that the gods live an

²³ Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 2, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (London: Westminster Press, 1973), 7.

²⁴ Evans, *A History of Western Philosophy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 95.

undisturbed life of happiness without interfering in the affair of the world through providence.”²⁵ According to Epicurus,

That bodies exist is a matter of observation. The existence of the void or empty space is necessary in order for bodies to move. Bodies of visible size are compounded out of bodies of invisible size, namely, atoms. Nothing can come into existence out of nothing, and nothing can pass into nothingness. Therefore, what exists always has existed and always will exist. Many visible bodies are not everlasting; they can be cut up and disintegrated. However, since nothing can come out of or pass into nothingness, it must be that at least the ultimate parts or atoms of a visible body are not subject to creation, decomposition, or disintegration; that is, the atoms are everlasting.²⁶

Epicurus’s fundamental moral theory also came from his atomic theory extending to their view on God and death. They argue that “everything is composed of an individual, undivided, unchanging, solid, eternal lump of matter.”²⁷ Whatever exists is made up of tiny atoms of matter and thus has always existed; this philosophy does away with death and God. Since gods are collections of atoms and have no concern for the affairs of man, they do not need to be feared. For the Epicureans, gods need nothing from human beings, and humans need nothing from the gods.²⁸ The Epicureans did not fear death because their gods were just atomic structures. Instead, they viewed death simply as the dissolution of the atomic structure, which makes up the soul. When that happens, one ceases to exist.²⁹ So for Epicurus and his followers, death has no meaning, and they reasoned that the ultimate goal of life is the pursuit of pleasure and happiness, which he viewed as man’s natural inclination. Since God does not exist, there are no immoral

²⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 724.

²⁶ Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 325.

²⁷ Jack Cottrell, *The Doctrine of God: What the Bible Says about God the Creator* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983), 74.

²⁸ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 525.

²⁹ Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 326.

issues and no fear after death. Therefore, man ought to always seek pleasure. The most pleasurable condition is when one is not hungry, thirsty, or apprehensive, yet confident that one will remain in that condition.

Stoics

The Stoics followed the teaching of Zeno. Compared to the Epicureans, the Stoics were pantheists who argued for the unity of humanity and kinship with the divine. “Stoic” originates from *stoa*, which means “painted porch.” Zeno, the founder, developed his philosophy as he began lecturing his students from his painted porch in Athens at the end of the fourth century B.C.³⁰ In his days, Zeno was admired and well-respected in Athens. His portrait was located in the great central square of Athens.³¹ Zeno attracted students, who formed themselves into the Stoic school, yet his school needed to be more organized than the Academy, which trained the followers of Plato.

The Cynics, followers of Socrates, influenced Zeno. Their doctrine is summarized in the saying, “To be good is all that matters; to be good brings happiness; to be wise, that is to know how to act, makes one good; one ought to live naturally, and freely.”³² Zeno, however, wanted more than the Cynics’ doctrine of isolation. He then became a follower of Polemo, a successor of Xenocrates as the head of the Academy. J. V. Luce argues that from the start, Stoicism was a dogmatic system that Zeno established.³³ His central doctrine is based on the three headings of logic, physics, and ethics.

³⁰ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 132.

³¹ Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 20.

³² Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 21.

³³ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 132.

Logic (theory of knowledge). The Stoics may have developed the term “logic” because Zeno’s followers were viewed as logicians. According to Luce, the Stoics

began by positing the existence of external objects, which operate on the senses to produce “appurtenances” in mind. The mind, they said, responds with “assent” to the impression produced through the sense when they signify the presence of an object that can be comprehended. What makes an object comprehensible is the presence of “clarity” or “vividness” in the impression it generates. This quality response, which they called “comprehension.” Comprehension is a knowing response to a truly existent object and is to be carefully distinguished from opinion, which is not so securely grounded in the external experience. Comprehension provides the “criterion of truth.”³⁴

For the Stoics, memory is built out of these traces, and the mind becomes equipped with general notions through the activity of reason. Zeno would argue that “it is night will only be true if it is true that it is night.”³⁵ He would illustrate various gestures to demonstrate irrefutable knowledge. He would hold out one arm with the fingers of the hand open and parted; this gesture symbolized the first tentative contact between the mind and the external world. Zeno would then begin to curl his fingers together to make a fist; this gesture signified the moment of compression. He would also bring over his other hand and clasp the fist in it, symbolizing the function of philosophic reasoning in strengthening and securing knowledge to the point where it cannot be expunged from the mind.³⁶

Physics. The Stoics viewed the world as technically a materialist one. Stoicism believed that anything that exists is corporeal. The idea is that soul obeys the laws of physics, and all mental states and acts are part of the corporeal soul. It is argued that “to

³⁴ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 132.

³⁵ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 132.

³⁶ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 134.

act, or be acted upon, any existent thing must be furnished with a body. This applied to the human soul, and also to God.”³⁷ However, they held God was an active force permeating the physical world. God consisted of the finest and most active form of matter, namely, fire and air, mixed to produce divine “spirit” or “fiery breath,” which nourished the world from within. Further, they believed God did his work like a skilled craftsman who ordered and designed reality. Therefore, God was not above or outside the world but was in the world and part of the world, just as indeed a soul was part of the human soul because a human person is also a material being with a fiery substance that permeates the body.³⁸ Luce asserts that Stoicism “proclaimed a pantheistic creed.”³⁹ Further, Rex Warner argues that the Stoics’ physical “doctrine was monastic.”⁴⁰ The Stoics often identified the name of God with reason. Everything that exists has a rational purpose, including the universe, “which came into being out of ‘divine fire.’”⁴¹ The adherents would stress that “after a cycle of enormous length, to be re-consumed in a cosmic conflagration, thereafter to repeat identical cycles forever.”⁴² This idea is very similar to the Hindu concept of karma.

Ethics. According to the Stoics’ ethics, people should aim to live per nature. The Stoics understood that nature was an ideally ordered world formed and guided by divine reason. For Zeno, following nature meant living up to one’s true nature as a rational being and living in conformity with natural law. Zeno’s understanding of

³⁷ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 134.

³⁸ Evans, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 103.

³⁹ Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, 134.

⁴⁰ Rex Warner, *The Greek Philosophers* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 166.

⁴¹ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 166.

⁴² Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 166.

humanity meant that one's "situation in a rationally ordered world imposes certain duties on him, and he is required to respond by choosing to do what is morally and objectively good. Choosing the right action constitutes virtue and will inevitably lead to happiness."⁴³ In contrast, if man fails to do good, his action is contrary to the natural law. For the Stoics, virtue is the only absolute good, and vice is the only absolute evil. Life, death, health, disease, poverty, pleasure, pain, beauty, or ugliness are neither good nor bad. They are morally neutral. These elements can hurt people and also promote interest. Good actions are always good, and wrong actions are always evil. However, there is no measure to evaluate one's character. No person is morally good until one has achieved moral perfection.

Pleasure is never to be made an objective of pursuit because it is not a natural end. The Stoics conflicted pleasure with emotion, pain, fear, and hope. The Stoics viewed emotions as suspicious as they tend to disturb the mind and cause one to lose the balance of reason. Sometimes, emotions lead to violence and a defect in one's soul that causes disease in the body. Stoicism encourages guarding morality and getting rid of anxiety through self-control, self-restraint, and self-reliance to free oneself from desires that lead to external influences.⁴⁴

The Stoics' ethical view regarded suicide as an individual freedom in which a man, who is a moral agent, could choose death instead of life. Doing this act is good and is the ultimate triumph of goodwill.⁴⁵ Stoicism has a concept of a wise man, which is the aim for perfection, but only some attain it. The idea of a wise man alone is beautiful

⁴³ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 134.

⁴⁴ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 167–68.

⁴⁵ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 168.

because only virtue is beautiful. The Stoics would say, “the wise man alone is rich because true riches consist in having no wants. The wise man is king because he is the master of himself. His freedom from emotion and desire secures the wise man in a state of unruffled contentment.”⁴⁶

The Stoics’ doctrine affirms an incompatibility between one’s perceptions. On the one hand, it is believed that everything is determined by nature. However, on the other hand, “Indignation, regret, fear, hope, anxiety, all these are foolish, unjustifiable feelings, for all rest on the false idea that the actual course of event could be, or could have been, other than it is, has been and will be.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, adherents also insist on absolute individual free will, which is exempt from the control of nature. Man alone has the power to reproach or exhort himself.

Key Theological Concepts Presented by Paul in Acts 17:22–34

Though much more could be said about each component of these complicated philosophies, the above survey sufficiently demonstrates the belief systems in place when the apostle Paul visited Athens. As we will see in the following section, Paul encounters some aspects of these philosophies and skillfully contextualizes his gospel message. It is Paul’s emic gospel approach to the Athenians that this seeks to explain.

Paul arrived in Athens during his second missionary journey around AD 50. Luke narrates that after being prohibited from preaching in Asia or going to Bithynia, the Holy Spirit led Paul to Macedonia, where he eventually arrived in Philippi (Acts 16:6–12). This was a turning point as the gospel advanced further and expanded into Europe to reach the Gentiles.

⁴⁶ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 168–69.

⁴⁷ Warner, *Greek Philosophers*, 168–69.

As Paul and his team arrived in Philippi, they met a pious woman named Lydia, whose heart God had opened to receive the good news (Acts 16:11–40). In Philippi, Paul encountered a demon-possessed slave girl who cried out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Luke goes on to narrate, “And this she kept doing for many days. Finally, having become greatly annoyed, Paul turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ Moreover, it came out that very hour” (Acts 16:18). When the owner of the slave girl saw that his means of gain was gone, he led fierce opposition against Paul and Silas, forcing them into imprisonment. At midnight, as they sang hymns and prayed, God did marvelous work that converted the jailer and his whole household. After their release from jail, Paul and his team were asked to leave the city.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Philippi. Paul proceeded approximately one hundred miles to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). As soon as he and his team arrived in Thessalonica, as was his custom, Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned from the Scriptures. Paul made the case that “it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you, is Christ’” (Acts 17:2–3). His preaching resulted in converts: some Jews, many devout Greeks, and a few prominent women (Acts 17:4). However, a zealous Jewish mob forced Paul to leave Thessalonica. He left Thessalonica and arrived in Berea. Paul went into the Jewish synagogue. Luke explains that the Jewish people in Berea were noble and warmly received Paul. The Jews in Berea “receive the word with eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see these things were so. Many of them, therefore, believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men” (Acts 17:11–12). Knowing Paul was preaching in Berea, agitators from Thessalonica came into Berea and stirred up the Jewish people to oppose Paul. Consequently, Paul was sent off to Athens, but Silas and

Timothy remained in Berea. As Paul preached in Athens and he commanded them to come to him as soon as possible (Acts 17:14–15).

Athens was not a prime location on Paul’s missionary agenda. Paul arrived in Athens without his companions. It was only a stopping place as he awaited Timothy and Silas to join him. His destination was fifty miles south of Corinth, a Roman colony and the administrative capital of Achaia.⁴⁸ Though Athens was only Paul’s stopping place, he took an opportunity to preach the gospel. Paul’s encounters with the Athenians led him to preach a famous sermon to a non-Jewish audience.

Scholars have outlined Luke’s description of Paul’s preaching to the Athenians in various ways. Darrell Bock insists that Acts 17:16–21 is Paul’s simple structure and introduction before his preaching from an “unknown god” to the Creator to the one whom God has appointed to judge the world.⁴⁹ Polhill divides the event into three sections: (1) witnessing in the Agora (vv. 16–21); (2) Paul’s address to the Areopagus (vv. 22–31); and (3) the result of Paul’s address (vv. 32–34).⁵⁰ Eckhard Schnabel divides this passage into five sections: (1) the proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue and market (vv. 16–17); (2) the discussion with the Athenian Philosophers (v. 18); (3) the invitation to appear before the Areopagus council (vv. 19–22c); (4) Paul’s speech before the council of the Areopagus (vv. 22d–31); and (5) the aftermath of the speech and conversions (vv. 32–34).⁵¹

Paul proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue and marketplace. Luke records, “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as

⁴⁸ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 206.

⁴⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 558.

⁵⁰ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208–12.

⁵¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 720–21.

he saw that the city was full of idols. So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:16–17). When Paul visited Athens, it is estimated the population size was thirty thousand in the first century.⁵² Moreover, the city was free and allied with the Roman Empire, which had as few as five to ten thousand voting citizens.⁵³ The city had both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish community had been living in Athens since the fourth century BC. Under Roman rule, as Augustus achieved victory over a civil war, he visited Athens often, aiding in constructing civil buildings and temples. In return, the Athenians honored the emperor by erecting his sculpture and describing him as a “Savior and Benefactor.” The Athenians had spent their time erecting statues and temples. They had built an idol of an unknown god, fearing they might miss blessings or otherwise receive punishment.⁵⁴ The idols and statues in Athens represented not the Creator God but deities whom Athenians had been worshiping.

Paul explored Athens. Luke reports that Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). That Paul’s “spirit was provoked” means that he became irritated or distressed due to the idolatry of the Athenians. Before arriving in Athens, Paul had visited many other Roman cities, but he had not seen such visualizations of deities as he did in Athens. In Paul’s mind, every single deity whom the Athenians worshiped in temples, altars, and displayed images were not living God and therefore they did not exist. They were offending the Creator God instead. Seeing this, Paul was “grieving concerning the people who did not know or

⁵² Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

⁵³ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 513.

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

worship the one true God, but at the same time—by a desire to convert them.”⁵⁵ Paul’s visit to Athens may be viewed as an accident, but it was God’s plan for Paul to proclaim the one true God there.

Luke summarizes Paul’s missionary engagement in Athens. Luke wrote, “so he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17). Paul, as a missionary, engaged Jews and devout persons in the synagogue. Luke uses the term “devout person,” which generally refers to a “worshiper of God.”⁵⁶ These Greeks had heard of Yahweh and feared him. Luke provides Paul’s gospel engagement locations: the Jewish synagogue and the marketplace. In synagogue, Paul would make a case for Jesus, arguing that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Savior. He proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. Thus, Christ is the hope for Israel. One day, he would come back to rule. Therefore, according to Paul, “Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39).

In the same way, during the week, Paul would go to the Agora and proclaim the good news. The Agora has often been translated as the “marketplace” of Greek towns that served as the civic center of the towns, and town meetings were often held there.⁵⁷ In addition, athletic events and cultural events such as drama regularly were held in the marketplace. In his ministry in Ephesus, Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus (19:9); in the city of Socrates, he engaged people in the marketplace (Acts 17:17).⁵⁸ The Athenians’

⁵⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

⁵⁶ Bocks, *Acts*, 561.

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 329–30.

marketplace was located north of the Acropolis, where the entire area was full of idols honoring Themis, Eueteria, Memeter, Apollo Agyieus, Hekate, Hermes, Zeus, and Athena.⁵⁹ Paul had been proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to every city he had the privilege of visiting, which included Gentiles in Lystra (Acts 14:15–17). Polhill claims, “Luke describes Paul as witnessing to two groups in Athens, the Jews and the Gentiles.”⁶⁰ As Paul preached to these audiences, they asked questions and made comments.

Second, Paul engaged in discussion with Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:18). Luke writes, “Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. Moreover, some said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” Paul’s preaching of the good news about Jesus and the resurrection came up against the belief systems of the Epicureans and Stoic philosophers that had occupied the Athenians’ belief system. Epicureans took no interest in the afterlife of men and women. They were practical atheists with the ultimate goal of pursuing pleasure as the chief end of life, free from pain, disturbing passions, and superstitious fear of death.⁶¹ The Stoics’ belief system was essentially pantheistic: “God [was to be] regarded as the world soul. Their belief in a *cosmopolis* or world state, in which all truly free souls had equal citizen rights, helped to break down national and class distinction.”⁶² Unlike Epicureans, Stoics were marked by moral earnestness and a strong work ethic.

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 561.

⁶⁰ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208.

⁶¹ Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 330–31.

⁶² Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 330.

As Paul engaged in an argument with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, they labeled him *σπερμολόγος* (“babbling”) because he preached to them about resurrection and judgment (Acts 17:18). Calling Paul a “babbling” had two meanings. First, the Athenians’ reaction is “based on the image of a bird which picks up and drops seeds, and therefore a gossip of a sort.”⁶³ The second meant a person who collects a bit of information and passes it off as if he knows what he is talking about without understanding.⁶⁴ The Athenians also complained that Paul was a “preacher of foreign divinities.” According to Epicureans and Stoics’ views of God, Paul introduced a new deity, Jesus; his crucifixion and his being the resurrected Savior confused them. For them, this new God whom Paul was preaching was not seen in their sculptures, altars, or temples in Athens. They used the plural term “divinities” to complain about Paul proclaiming the good news concerning Jesus and the resurrection.⁶⁵ Athenians neither had seen nor known the deity whom Paul was presenting. When Socrates (470–399 BC) was promoting new and strange gods, it was said he was guilty of promoting deity.⁶⁶ In Paul’s case, they did not react that way but viewed Paul as a herald or messenger of Jesus, whom they regarded as a deceased person and, thus, a spirit. In this respect, they likely consider the resurrection as the personification of the afterlife.⁶⁷ To the Greeks, a proclaimer refers to a herald or messenger sent by the gods rather than a teacher.⁶⁸ In their context, Paul was discussing and promoting other new gods and religious activities

⁶³ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 514–15.

⁶⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 562.

⁶⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 562.

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 562.

⁶⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, 726.

⁶⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 562.

that the Athenians did not recognize. During the Hellenistic period, while the Greek and Roman cities worshiped many gods and enjoyed religious tolerance in a multicultural setting, the introduction of foreign cults and rites required the official authorization of the state.⁶⁹ Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth and introducing foreign deities. On that basis, the Athenians knew that if one violated the law of the land, one would be severely punished. Therefore, the Athenians had religious freedom with restrictions.

Third, Luke records the Athenians' invitation for Paul to appear at the Areopagus council (Acts 17:19–21)

Moreover, they took him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." So now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Scholars have two views on this situation: Paul was either arrested ("they took him") or investigated ("brought him") concerning the foreign gods whom he was introducing to the population. The first verb can denote an arrest or "to take hold of" without the connotation of violence. The Areopagus means "the hill of Ares," the Greek God of war. "From ancient times court met there that decided on civil and criminal cases and seems to have had some jurisdiction in matters of religion."⁷⁰ The court was a place where the matters of religion and morality was decided upon. The Areopagus council might have had questions for Paul concerning his teaching of a new deity. If he were doing so, Paul would have to defend his new teaching. However, Polhill argues that Paul's famous gospel presentation concerning the "unknown God" to Athenian philosophers is not a

⁶⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 727.

⁷⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 343–44. ProQuest Ebook Central.

“defense speech.”⁷¹ F. F. Bruce comments, “Paul was brought, not to stand trial in a forensic sense, nor yet to be examined with a view to being licensed as a public lecturer, but simply to have an opportunity of expounding his teaching before experts.”⁷² The council members expressed their request gently: “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” (v. 19). Nevertheless, they pressed Paul forcefully for information and an explanation.⁷³

The Athenians wondered about thought, art, and culture, as Luke sums up: “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (v. 21). According to Polhill, this is “the most cultural paragraph of the Bible.”⁷⁴ The culturally diverse and religiously pantheistic Athenian audience’s quest for new teaching motivated the Areopagus council to request Paul to explain his new teaching. Here, Paul stands before the council and proclaims to them the one true Creator God who, far from being new, has existed from the beginning.

The One True God as Sovereign Creator

Paul accepted the council’s invitation to explain his new teaching about a foreign god. He stood “in the midst of the Areopagus” and offered an opening statement to the men of Athens. He began by recognizing their religiosity instead of condemning them. Luke narrates, “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious’” (Acts 17:22). Paul acknowledges the Athenians’ religiosity. Schnabel suggests, “the Greek term means

⁷¹ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 210.

⁷² Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 331–32.

⁷³ Schnabel, *Acts*, 728.

⁷⁴ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 208.

“fearing the gods;” it can be used positively in the sense of “pious, religious,” or in the negative sense of superstitious.”⁷⁵ Paul was pointing to the positive—rather than negative—sense of superstition. From there, Paul made a bridge between the Athenians’ religiosity and his new teaching: “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (v. 23). Paul had walked around the city and seen objects of worship, such as emperor statues, sculptures, altars, shrines, and temples—all of which were evidence of the Athenians’ devotions to the gods. Finally, Paul came to an altar dedicated to worshipping “an unknown god.” Paul’s speech before the historically and rhetorically trained Epicurean and Stoic philosophers exhibits points of connection and contradiction.⁷⁶ As he built up his case, making an argument by referring to “the unknown god,” he established a shared understanding and introduced the one true God as the sovereign Creator.

Paul continued, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (vv. 24–25). Knowing his multicultural and pantheistic audience, Paul made two arguments. First, he began with a description of God the Creator, who made everything that exists. Paul’s reference to the existence of “the unknown god” whom the Athenians have been worshipping at the altar provides an opening explanation of the God whom Paul was proclaiming in Athens. He pointed out that this God whom they have been worshipping is not new. He is already present, the one true God as sovereign Creator (“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”

⁷⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 729.

⁷⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 730.

[Gen 1:1]). God created all objects that included human beings, spirits, animals, trees, plants, rivers, seas, mountain, birds, stars, etc. Second, Paul argued that God needs nothing from humans. The one true God who created heaven and earth (i.e., everything) needs nothing from humanity. As the psalmist declares,

Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, or the world and its fullness are mine.” (Ps 50:8–12)

Paul argued that human hands could not serve God the Creator, nor does God accept offerings to the idols, sacrifices in the temples, or their works as satisfactory (or meritorious). God is sovereign; he is absolute, totally satisfied, and always stands above all of his creation.

As noted above, Paul had a mixed audience: devout persons, Epicureans, and Stoics. Athenians were suppressing the truth about the one true Creator God. Paul argued that God’s truth had been revealed through nature. Through nature, one can know the invisible attributes of God. Ignoring the Creator God, exchanging his glory for idols, and failing to honor him represents becoming fools (Rom 1:18–23). However, God created man as a moral being who has obligations and responsibilities because he has a creative relationship with his Creator.⁷⁷ Ignoring God and denying his existence is a morally false concept.⁷⁸ Contrary to the Epicurean view, a man was not created as a morally neutral being. Further, man’s morality was not stamped upon him *after* creation. Human beings were created in the very beginning, in the act of creation (Gen 1:1). Man is essentially a moral being with the power to distinguish between right and wrong (Rom 1:21). He

⁷⁷ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 15.

⁷⁸ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 15.

inherits a fundamental natural moral law. As the psalmist cries out, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good” (Ps 14:1).

On the other hand, the Stoics held a dual view of God (pantheistic and monotheistic), and they rejected the atomism of the Epicureans. Their philosophy did not see God as personal. Instead, God was as a fire: “Fire seems to be the finest and most active form of matter, and thus it is appropriate to see it as divine.”⁷⁹ The Stoics believed that fire created the world; the world was caused by fire’s purifying and giving birth to a new world in an endless cycle. They argued that a human is God and that the soul of the world is God’s body. A human person is a material being with a soul. The Stoics held that God is active and orderly. Reason (*logos*), in their view, is the cause of every reality. Whatever happens, is good because it brings about one’s best interest in life because it naturally displays what one sees as the result of the presence of God throughout the world.

Moreover, the soul is a substance. For the Stoics, the human soul is composed of a higher standard and purer form of matter, which they called “spirit” (Greek: *pneuma*, which also means “breath”). Most importantly, pain and unhappiness can be controlled.⁸⁰ The Stoics viewed virtue as the only absolute good, and vice as the only absolute evil. In life, health, disease, poverty, pain, beauty, ugliness, pleasure, or death are neither good nor bad but morally natural. Good actions are always good, and wrong actions are always evil. There is no measure to evaluate one’s character. No person is morally good until one has achieved moral perfection.

⁷⁹ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 103.

⁸⁰ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 104.

To present the gospel to the Athenian philosophers and devout persons, Paul made a case from natural theology, pointing out that God is the Creator of the universe. The Greek word *kosmos* signifies that the universe and all things in it are arranged orderly. In contrast, pantheistic teaching sees deities in every aspect of the world, but disorderly lacks a doctrine of creation.⁸¹ In addition, Paul argued that this Creator God is personal, the one true God, and the one who gives human beings everything they need to live. The Athenians served finite images of gods and goddesses in temples, burning incense, offering animal sacrifices, and hoping the gods would be pleased by their service. The one true sovereign infinite Creator God Paul is preaching does not live in temples built by humans. Instead, he is beyond human imagination and is the source of human existence that sustains human life and everything else.

God as the Source of Every Good Thing

Paul continued with his exposition of God as Creator (Acts 17:26–27): “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” According to the Greeks, human beings originated from the soil.⁸² Paul pointed out that God is the Creator of the *kosmos*. He made man in his image; the whole human race originated from one man. Paul insisted on the creation account that held that all human beings have a common ancestor (Rom 5:12). According to Simon Kistemaker, Paul clarified the Athenians’ view on creation, providence, and the search for and the presence of God.⁸³ First, the Athenians would divide humans into two classes: Greeks and barbarians. People born

⁸¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 633.

⁸² Kistemaker, *Acts*, 634.

⁸³ Kistemaker, *Acts*, 634–36.

outside Greece were barbarians. Paul responded that God made one man Adam and that through him, the entire earth became inhabited (Gen 1:26–28; 9:1; 11:8–9).

Second, God rules over all of his creation. Paul used the phrase “allotted period” (Acts 17:26), which may refer to all of the year’s seasons or historical ages. God appointed the times in the past, and in the present, he fulfilled them. God also sets boundaries. “Humankind shares the created universe with angels and powers, or invisible forces. However, humankind bears the image of God (Gen 26; 27). Therefore, they received dominion over creation.”⁸⁴ Since man is made in God’s image and has been given the power to subdue creation, God rules the world and controls every boundary, the development of the human race, and all nations. However, he has given humans partial authority over the creation so that humans may glorify the Creator.

Third, Paul discussed the Athenians’ search for God. Paul proclaimed, “They should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). God gave people two purposes. The first is for humans to inhabit the earth, and the second is to seek their Creator God. The one true God created humans so that they might dwell on the earth and worship their Creator. Believing God is equally serving him. The writer of Hebrews says, “And without faith, it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6).

Fourth, Paul addresses the general Athenians’ belief that the presence of God is everywhere. God is “not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). For the Epicureans, God is viewed as an atom or a composite of atoms. The Epicureans’ view may have led the Athenians to a moral life of corruption, to engage in prostitution, to pursue marriage only

⁸⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Living Paul: An Introduction to the Apostle’s Life and Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 67.

for the sake of having legitimate children and a household guardian, and to cohabit with concubines daily.⁸⁵ The Stoics viewed God as impersonal, and that human persons are material beings, just as the natural world is material.⁸⁶ According to devout Athenians, Greeks, and barbarians were not the same human race. Instead, they held to two creation stories of “two kinds of humans, the one, those who live by reason, the divine inbreathing, the other, those who live by blood and the pleasure of the flesh. The latter is a mounded clod of earth, the other is the faithful impress of the divine.”⁸⁷ Paul, however, argued that God is personal, determines the existence of human beings, fixes the times, controls history, and exists everywhere. Therefore, because the one true Creator God is not far from them, people should seek him to have fellowship with him.

The Work of Christ is Sufficient for Salvation

Paul continued his description of God, the Creator of all human races. Luke has recorded only a summary of Paul’s preaching in eleven verses (Acts 17:22–31). In eleven verses, Luke has not documented Paul’s full preaching; notably, Christ’s work on the cross is absent. Comparing Luke’s summary of Paul’s teaching to Paul’s writings (e.g., 1 Cor), it is evident that Paul preached about the crucified Christ to the Athenians as he did in Corinth (1 Cor 1:22–25). Without presenting the cross, the gospel is incomplete. Therefore, it is unlikely that Paul would present the gospel without preaching the cross of Christ. Paul Gardner argues that “in the cross of Christ, God’s declared intention to

⁸⁵ Merriam, *Paul the Apostle*, 96.

⁸⁶ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 103.

⁸⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 78.

destroy the wisdom of the wise finds its fulfillment.”⁸⁸ Greek philosophers would “consider σοφία in their search for the truth.”⁸⁹ However, God has different plans for the human race regarding salvation. His mystery has been revealed through the work of Christ on the cross that is sufficient for salvation. It is God’s declaration to overturn human-made philosophy, fulfill his promise to the human race, his final decisive defeat over sin, and offer salvation to everyone who believes in him. Paul writes to Corinthians, “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preached Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentile” (1 Cor 1:22–23). Gardner further argues that “Paul’s own encounter with the heart of this civilization at the Areopagus in Athens would probably have continued to influence his thinking (Acts 17:16–34).”⁹⁰ For Greek philosophers, “Paul’s message of the cross was to many of his listeners foolishness even madness.”⁹¹ Charles H. Spurgeon asserts, “It was there, we say, that Jesus Christ, by his glorious merits and his wondrous work achieved upon the cross, obtained the power to become the Redeemer of our souls, and the Captain of our salvation.”⁹² Timothy Keller asserts, “The heart of the gospel is the cross, and the cross is all about giving up power, pouring out resources, and serving.”⁹³ Further, E. C. Bragg argues that “Paul is the great

⁸⁸ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 96.

⁸⁹ Duane Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching: The Apostle’s Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 214.

⁹⁰ Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 100.

⁹¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 23.

⁹² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons of Jesus and the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 234.

⁹³ Timothy Keller, *Jesus The King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 135–36.

revelator of what God did at the cross,”⁹⁴ Paul writes to believers in Rome, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Paul appealed to the Athenians and said “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). The Athenians were very religious people (v. 22). They had created gods. They had been worshiping them: idols in temples, emperor statues in the marketplace, and inscriptions on stone “to the unknown god.” Paul believed that human philosophies lead them nowhere other than rebellion against the one true God. As a Jewish Christian, Paul knew that refusing to worship God and placing idols in God’s place was an “abomination” and human foolishness.⁹⁵ As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul saw that worshiping idols was a sin against God (Exod 20:2–5; Deut 5:6–9; Isa 44:9–20). Paul knew that the Athenians inherited Adam’s sin. Every wrongdoing has a consequence. Rebelling against God only invites eternal punishment, which is death. Paul wrote to his Roman audience that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 3:23; 6:23). The Athenians needed a remedy for their sin. Paul’s statement in Acts 17:27 allowed the Athenians to meet the one true Creator God.

⁹⁴ E. C. Bragg, *Pauline Theology* (Dunedin, FL: Trinity College, 1975), 50. Bragg goes on to show the work of the cross writing, “The gospel which Paul declares to be ‘the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth,’ in Romans 1:17, he explains, in I Corinthians 1:18, to be ‘the preaching of the cross’ (literally ‘word of the cross, the discourse of the cross’). Not the cross itself, but the message of the cross (logos of the cross). All heathenism has a cross. However, they know nothing of the message of the cross, i.e., what God did there. Paul goes on in verse 23: ‘but we preach Christ crucified,’ so that message of the cross, what God did there to bruise His son so that the gospel and the power wrought through the cross of Christ would be to give all of his epistles. However, note Ephesians 2:12–18; Colossians 1:20; 2; 13, 14. The message of the cross is what John calls ‘the record God gave his Son, which gives us eternal life’ (1 John 5:10,11). God, on the cross of Christ, ‘reconciled the world unto himself’ (II Corinthians 5:19) ‘broke down the middle wall of partition to admit we strangers to the covenants’ (Ephesians 2:16), ‘brought us nigh’ (Ephesians 2:13), ‘reconciled us while we were enemies’ (Romans 5:10), ‘brought us peace’ (Colossians 1:20), ‘took the guilt of a broken law which was against us, nailing it to his cross’ (Colossians 2:14). Look up all references to His blood which was shed on the cross. Even in heaven now, the most prominent characteristic about Him is ‘as a lamb as it had been slain’ (Revelation 5:6; 7:14; 13:8).”

⁹⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 561.

To meet him, the human race needs a mediator. Paul wrote to Timothy, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Tim 2:5–6).

However, the question remains: How can the Athenians seek and find God if he is not far from them? Paul, in Acts 17:31, argued that God has come down to earth as he promised. John 3:16 reads, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John writes about God’s love for the world and that God loves the human race.

God’s plan for the human race is that God himself would become a man. As John 1:14 reads, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This is the fulfillment of God’s promise that someone out of the human race would destroy the power of Satan and reconcile the human race to God (Gen 3:15). To accomplish this task, “God himself will take the initiative and accomplish our salvation.”⁹⁶ Further, as Stott insisted, “From Jesus’s youth, indeed even from his birth, the cross cast its shadow ahead of him. His death was central to his mission. Moreover, the church has always recognized this.”⁹⁷ God has sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for sin, and he offers the gift of salvation to everyone who believes in him. So, Paul writes to his Roman audience, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). The good news is that the Athenians did not have to go so far to reach the one true God. He is here; the one true God who created the universe has revealed himself

⁹⁶ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 122.

⁹⁷ Stott, *The Cross of the Christ*, 17–18.

in human flesh through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Athenians did not have to go to Mars Hill, temples, philosophers, or emperor statues to find the one true God. He is here. As Paul writes to the Romans, “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)” (Rom 10:8).

Even the Athenians were confused about where to find God. For them, God lives in temples or statues. Knowing Athenian worldviews, Paul communicated in the gospel that now was the time for their desire to find God so that they may have a relationship with him. If they diligently seek him, their search will be rewarded with fellowship with him because he has been revealing himself through his marvelous creation throughout history (Ps 19:1). As the psalmist declares, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy” (Ps 145:18–20). Therefore, the Athenians should seek God and find God’s gift of salvation through the work of Christ.

Fallen Men Have No Hope Without Christ

Paul proclaimed that the universe’s Creator needs neither temple nor sacrificial offerings (Act 17:24–25). The one true God created the human race for the purpose that they should have fellowship with him (vv. 26–27). To have reconciliation with the Creator God and fellowship with him, someone from the human race must destroy the natural barrier between God and man. The divine Son, the Creator God, became like us in everything except sin to pay the penalty of sin for all. Through Christ’s work on the cross, all human races should seek the true God because he is near through his Son Jesus Christ (sum. of 17:26–27). Then Paul went on to argue that all human life depends on God. Since the human race has fallen, they have no hope without the one true God’s

taking the initiative by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ. As Acts 17:28 reads, “‘For in him we live and move and have our being;’ as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

There are a few observations to be made. First, the human race and the existence of life are both rooted in God. Humans are not God, but God created them in his image (Gen 1:26). Humans are just creatures. They are the handiwork of God (Ps 8), but Genesis 6:5 says that they are depraved: “The Lord saw that wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil.” Man’s sin brought condemnation (Rom 1:18; 6:23). God’s judgment over fallen humans’ sin is inescapable. Third, humans’ freedom to destroy God’s design may lead to their selfish ends. Joe Kapolyo argues that “the power of an effect of sin is shown not just in rebellion but especially in physical death, which is an analogy of the spiritual death that is the final destiny of human beings in this state of sinful existence outside the will of God.”⁹⁸ The Athenians’ act of worshiping idols and believing philosophers’ ideas could never bring them closer to the one true God. To be reconciled with God, they have to come to him through faith in the atoning work of the one whom God has appointed. Christ, God in human flesh, paid every penalty for sin that God required for humanity to be reconciled to him. Carrying humankind’s sin on the cross, Christ experienced the divine wrath against sin poured out upon him. In his final words, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). His work on the cross is sufficient to bring people to hope through their faith in him—a hope that can never be obtained through human ideas or worshiping idols in temples.

⁹⁸ Joe M. Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspective through African Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 25.

In Acts 17:28c, Paul makes a point of an agreement by quoting from Aratus of Soli in Cilicia (ca. 300 BC) his astronomical poem *Phaenomena* “to emphasize that human beings are not only close to God but related to him as his kin.”⁹⁹ Paul asserts, “as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (v.28c). Schnabel suggests that, Stoics would have agreed with Paul’s assentation, understanding the statement in the pantheistic sense that God and human beings are in the creative power of nature. However, in the context of an address in which Paul explains the God whom he proclaims, the quotation from Aratus must be interpreted as Adam (v). 26.¹⁰⁰

Through this quotation, Paul relates them to biblical reference to one true God, the Creator of human beings, and people are his offspring. God made Adam “in his own image” (Gen 1:26, 27); therefore, they should depend on their existence in him.

Further, Acts 17:29 states, “Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.” With this statement, Paul explained that people are God’s offspring because he created them in his image (Gen 1:27–27). Since God created them in his image, the Athenians should not be confused about who they were or how to worship the Creator God. They should avoid using their imagination to worship idols in bronze, wood, sculptures, or emperor statues. Their imagination may produce artistic works, but they cannot create God. When God’s covenant people committed idol worship, the prophet Jeremiah compares the one true God to manufactured idols showing the difference between the incomparability and aseity of God (Jer 10:3–16).

In believing the God of the Bible, Paul critically pointed out that the one true God he was proclaiming is not like a craftsman’s skills productions. The God Paul

⁹⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 737.

¹⁰⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, 737.

proclaimed is incompatible with man-made idols, cults, and the religious pluralism throughout Athens, particularly the Epicurean and Stoic belief systems. This God alone created the entire universe and is master over it all. Therefore, humans are obligated to worship God as Creator, for he is worthy of worship (Ps 19).

The Good News of Jesus Christ: Repentance or Judgment

Paul began his preaching with “Men of Athens” and said he “perceive[d] that in every way they were very religious” (Acts 17:22). Then he established common ground with his audience by observing the objects of their worship, an altar with an inscription that read, “To the unknown god.” Next, he said, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (v. 23). Further, in verses 30–31, Paul concluded his preaching with an invitation, saying, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

The Greeks had a dualistic view of human souls: the person was an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body. The soul is an actual existence and eternal. Plato would say that “from the fact that people possess knowledge of these concepts or form without being taught that they must have come to know them by acquaintance before birth. Thus, the rational part of the soul pre-existence the body, dwelling in the transcendent realm of the Forms, and returns there at death.”¹⁰¹ For Aristotle, the soul is not seen as an entity, but more as a life principle—an aspect of the person there provide the powers of attributes characteristic of the human being. Plants and animals have a soul as well.

¹⁰¹ Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

Paul's audiences Epicureans provided an atomic-materialist account of the soul.¹⁰² They believe that "God is an atomic compound like every object."¹⁰³ Therefore, "Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death; Good (pleasure) can be attained, and Evil can be endured."¹⁰⁴

Paul's listeners Stoic logic viewed the human soul as but an aspect of an all-pervading cosmic logos. They believed that "God is present in the material world as the active principle acting on the matter and is thus physically present in all matter as 'designing fire.' Therefore, nothing has an existence outside the material world."¹⁰⁵ For them, a spiritual realm does not exist. Everything happens for the good of the world. Human beings are free in their action but morally responsible. For Stoic, virtue is sufficient for human happiness.¹⁰⁶

As a Jewish Christian, Paul had a holistic view of human nature. Paul had already presented the existence of God (Acts 17:22–23). He knew that the human soul would continue to exist beyond the death of the body.¹⁰⁷ God created the entire human person—body and soul—in his image; therefore, man is "self-conscious, and responsible relationship to God."¹⁰⁸ Paul concludes with three points.

First, "The times of ignorance God overlooked" (v.30a). In the past, Athens had a glorious history. Paul's saying of "the time of ignorance" is a description of the

¹⁰² Murphy, "Human Nature," 3.

¹⁰³ Schnabel, *Acts*, 724.

¹⁰⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 561.

¹⁰⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 725.

¹⁰⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 725.

¹⁰⁷ Hank Hanegraaff, *Resurrection* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 108.

¹⁰⁸ C. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 114.

proud history of Athens, which is a bold move that might be acceptable before the Areopagus council.¹⁰⁹ However, despite their past, Athenians had worshiped God in their own imagination in temples, streets, plazas, etc. (v. 23). Now Paul has proclaimed the one true God who is the Creator of all things. He is also a merciful God because “he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 25). In Lystra, Paul preached, “In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 17:16). But now, God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for human disobedience. Christ’s death on the cross is the entire payment for human sin, which is good news for the world.

Second, Paul continues, “now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (30b). The one true God, the Creator Paul proclaimed, is also merciful. This is good news for Athenians and everyone. However, this good news demands a response. Thus, Athenian should not violate God’s sovereignty and creation order. Doing so may be considered foolishness that leads to disobedience. The Athenians’ first response should be “repent.” For Athenians, repenting meant acknowledging their past errors. They had production of cults. They worshiped created things, such as idols, emperor statues, trees, and rivers; they looked into the sky and thanked sun gods and moon gods; and they took holy baths in rivers, worship mountains, and the like. Instead, they should look to the Creator God and see how majestic he is and how much he loves his creation (Ps 8:3). Daniel Vestal insists, “Praise and worship of the Creator are the Christian’s response to God’s great initiative in creation.”¹¹⁰ Now, Athenians’ time has come to turn to the one

¹⁰⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 739.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Vestal, *The Doctrine of Creation* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1989), 111.

true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and they should commit to worship him only one whose offspring they are.¹¹¹

Third, Paul preached that “because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed” (v.31a). Paul proclaimed the one true God who is the Creator of the Universe, merciful, but demands all to repentance. God is sovereign, and he has absolute authority to determine his creation. Therefore God “has set fixed” dates for judgment over all human beings. Schnabel asserts that “the verb will/pass judgment” is a legal term that denotes “engage in a judicial process” and can be translated as “judge, decides, hale before a court.”¹¹² When the one true God judges, he will judge with righteousness because his justice will be fair. He has appointed a righteous man who is our propitiation for human beings’ ignorance and judgment. God appointed his son, Jesus Christ, to come down from heaven to pay human beings’ penalty. Christ died on the cross to redeem all human beings from judgment. Paul writes to Romans,

However, now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness because, in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at present so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21–26)

Fourth, “and of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ’s resurrection from the dead qualified him to be the Judge. Paul writes to the Thessalonians about judgment. The

¹¹¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

¹¹² Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

human conscience that convicts oneself of one's action is the voice of God. The affirmation that man possesses a conscience is universally validated and evidence that he is a moral being. By one's conscience, every person knows he will one day be confronted with God's judgment.¹¹³ Therefore, confessing sin and accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior is the only way that God determines to escape from his judgment.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated Paul's background and Athenians' culture, context, and religion. Completing an exegesis of Acts 17:16–32 from appropriate commentaries proves that Paul explicitly presented five theological concepts to the pantheistic Athenians. In his presentation of the gospel, he argued that (1) there is one true God as the sovereign Creator; (2) he is the source of every good thing; (3) the work of Christ is sufficient for salvation; (4) without Christ, there is no hope; and (5) the response to good news requires repentance of sin and asking God for forgiveness.

Paul preached to the Areopagus council, consisting of civic and intellectual groups. Paul demonstrated the gospel in the following manner: He began his preaching with a point of contact with his audience's views about divine beings, the world, and human beings. He established a basic worldview to bridge the gap between the Jewish Scriptures and his Greek philosophical listeners. Evangelistic preaching by drawing on points of contact to particularly civic and sensitive audiences where the legal system prohibits conversation about or preaching the gospel is vital to avoid arrest or riots in the targeted community.

Paul contrasted his teaching with the pantheistic philosophers and their worldviews. Paul knew where Epicureans and Stoics stood with their beliefs. He knew

¹¹³ McDonald, *Foundation for Faith*, 17.

that the Athenians—who were devout people who erected an idol “to the unknown god” and had been worshiping idols in the temples, streets, and plaza—were not worshiping the one true God whom Paul was preaching. Therefore, Paul rejected the Athenians’ plurality of deities, cults, and emperor statues in the square, altars, and temples. Paul’s reference to “the unknown god” in Acts 17:23 is understood as his stance on Isaiah 45:15–25.¹¹⁴ Paul’s statement in Acts 17:26, “having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,” referring to Deuteronomy 32:8, meant that the Athenians should not cross the divine boundaries God has determined. Paul acknowledged that though the Athenians sought God (Acts 17:27), the one faithful God Paul presented could not be found by such a search. He has revealed himself through Jesus Christ. Paul’s statement in the second part of verse 27, “Yet he is not far from each one of us,” was either a careful reference to the Stoics’ notion of the presence of the divine in everything that exists or a critical comment on the Athenians’ unsuccessful attempt to find the one true God. Paul’s statement in verse 29, “we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image from by the art and imagination of man” was a critique against the Athenians’ who produced idols and worship in the streets, temples, and plaza. Paul’s statement in verse 30, “The times of ignorance,” reflected Paul’s conviction that the Athenians’ worldview, beliefs, and practices made them guilty before the one true God. Therefore, they should respond to the good news by repentance, or they would face judgment because God has already fixed the day of the judgment and the Judge. Paul boldly announced Jesus to his listeners without explicitly saying his name “by raising him from death;” v. 31; however, some of Paul’s hearers

¹¹⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 747–48.

“mocked” him (v. 32) because Romans and Greeks did not believe in life after death (i.e., the resurrection). For them, death is “eternal sleep.”¹¹⁵

In the aftermath of Paul’s preaching, Luke does not say that the council was disturbed—like Paul’s audiences in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Instead, Luke writes, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this’” (v. 32). Paul’s preaching “of the resurrection of the dead” was mocked because Greeks did not believe in the bodily resurrection of dead. It was a foreign term to them. The future hopes for the Greeks were “expressed in terms of the immortality of the soul, which lives in the heavens or is identified with stars.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, others said that they would hear Paul again about what he was describing, indicating that Paul’s preaching to the Athenians was successful and completed: “So Paul went out from their midst” (v. 33).

Lastly, the question remains whether Paul’s gospel approach to the Athenians enabled him to establish a church in Athens. Luke reports, “But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (v. 34). Schnabel suggests four points from the conversions in the city.¹¹⁷ First, “some men” were converted, most likely both Jews and Gentiles from his two audiences, from his preaching in both the synagogue and the Areopagus. Second, Luke names a specific member of the Areopagus council, Dionysius, who put his faith in Jesus and joined Paul. This man had one of the highest offices in Athens. Third, Luke lists a woman named Damaris, but does not provide her social status

¹¹⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 742.

¹¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 742.

¹¹⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, 743.

or ethnic background. Fourth, “others” also believed in Jesus. These results prove that Paul’s gospel approach to the Athenians was successful.

Paul’s gospel approach to the Athenians (Acts 17:16–34) will establish a biblical foundation for the next chapter that will comparatively examine the teachings and worldviews of Christianity and Hinduism. In the next chapter, I will give attention to Christian teaching on the sovereignty of God, creation, men, and women as created in the image of God, sin, the work of Christ, grace, the priesthood of believers, and eternal life through Jesus Christ. While presenting the gospel to Hindus, it is attempted to establish common ground. However, it is also not guaranteed that gospel proclamation to Hindus will result in conversation and establishment of church planting. I leave this in God’s hands.

CHAPTER 3

COMPARATIVE BASIC TEACHING: HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY

There have been attempts to relate the biblical God to the Hindu doctrine of Brahman to reach Hindu adherents. Presenting the good news of Jesus Christ to Hindu adherents is difficult. There are considerable differences between Christian and Hindu teaching. In Christian teaching, “God is related to the world as the Logos, who is also the agent of Creation.”¹ In Hinduism, Brahman is viewed as the absolute; yet, he is not related to the cosmic world. Christianity believes that Jesus the Logos took on human flesh and died for sinners. In Hinduism, Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, saves the righteous and punishes sinners.

The gospel is a mystery. In Ephesians 3, Paul wrote that the gospel is a mystery, so how does one present this mystery to other religious people like Hindu adherents? To answer this, the gospel presenter must know his belief and his hearers’ beliefs as well. An evangelist who does not understand their own beliefs and the beliefs of the other leads to confusion and conflict. Acts 19 provides the perfect example of this confusion when the sons of Sceva encountered Paul’s ministry and tried to imitate it, with disastrous results. Paul had a clear understanding of God and the gospel. As a Roman citizen, living in Greek cities, he knew the Greek worldview as well. This knowledge and experience gave him the confidence to present the gospel to the Athenians. Acts 19:11–12 shows that Paul ministered successfully in Ephesus, preaching, teaching, and

¹ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 53.

performing miraculous healings. Acts 19:13–16 shows us the sons of Sceva, who saw the success of Paul and tried to imitate him. They used Jesus’s name to exorcise a demon but it did not work. The demon-possessed man “assaulted the exorcists so violently that they ran for their lives from the building in which they were, their clothes torn off and their bodies battered.”² The sons of Sceva thought all they needed was to invoke the name of Jesus, but they had none of the understanding of that Paul had of Jesus and his power.

In this chapter, I will highlight the basic teachings of Hinduism and compare them with Christian teachings. To accomplish this task, I will describe each religion’s concept of God, creation, the priesthood, sin and its consequences, and eternal life. The goal of this chapter is to equip the gospel presenter with a firm foundation for his beliefs in the one true God, the loving Creator of heaven and earth, and the work of his son Jesus on the cross.

Hinduism’s Teaching on God

“Hinduism” is a noun of convenience used for the religious and cultural traditions of those who identify themselves as “Hindu in South Asia.”³ The word “Hindu” is derived from Persian, Greek, and Muslim rendering of the Sanskrit term for the river Sindhu (subsequently known as the Indus), designating the population to the east of that river.”⁴ The term “Hinduism” or “Hindu” is now applied universally to identify the adherents and practitioners of a religious system to differentiate themselves from other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Muslim.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 368.

³ W. J. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 141.

⁴ Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, 141.

Belief in God

One of the issues within Hinduism is that there is different construals, one can construe Hinduism as monotheistic, pantheistic, and polytheistic. Adherents may choose to identify belief in one supreme Brahman (monotheistic), Brahman manifesting in creation (pantheism), or Brahman in many deities (polytheistic). In the Upanishads, a conversation between a wise sage and his students that show this dynamic.

Then Vidagdha Sakalya began to question him. “Tell me, Yajnavalkya—how many gods are there?” Saying, ‘As many as are mentioned in the ritual invocation within the laud to the All gods,’ he answered in accordance with this very ritual invocation: “Three and three hundred, and three and three thousand.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘but really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“Thirty-three.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“Six.”

“Yes, course,’ he said, ‘but really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“Three.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, but really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“Two.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘but really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“One and half.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘but really, Yajnavalkya, how many gods are there?’

“One.”

“Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘but then who are those three and three hundred, and those three and three thousand?’”

“They are only the powers of the gods,’ Yajnavalkya replied. ‘They are only thirty-three gods.’”

“Who are those thirty-three?”

“The eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, and the twelve Adityas—that makes thirty-one. Then there are Indra and Prajapati, making a total of thirty-three.”

“Who are the Vasus?”

“The Vasus are fire, earth, wind, the intermediate region, sun, sky, moon, and stars. They are called Vasus because this whole treasure (varus) is entrusted to them.”⁵

This conversation is key understanding the conception of the gods in Hinduism. God in Hinduism can be construed as one, one and a half, two, three, six, thirty-three, three hundred, and even three thousand. All of these are true conceptions of God in Hinduism.

⁵ Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 46–47.

Hinduism as Monotheism

The section above gives a view of one god, which is Brahman. Mundaka Upanishad 2:2:11 states that “Brahman alone here extends to the east; Brahman, to the west; it alone to the south, to the north; it alone extended above and below; it is Brahman alone that extends over this whole universe, up to its widest extent.”⁶ The texts suggests that Brahman is the supreme being and omnipotent. He is “the sole and ultimate cause of the world.”⁷ He is the source of knowledge, bliss, and truth. In Brahman all things have come into existence. He maintains the entire cosmos, and all will return to him. Jeaneane Fowler put this way, “This Absolute is called Brahman and everything in life, whether, originated in Brahman. Every creature, every plant, every individual, every stone, every tree—everything in existence—has its source as Brahman.”⁸ Brahman here is seen as the highest being immortal (Atman), the creator of every existence, omnipotent, and unperishable.

Hinduism as Pantheism

Hinduism also sees Brahman with created elements. Adherence believing in one supreme Absolute Brahman. Yet, the Upanishad contradicts this claim. *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 3:9:3 as stated above identifies God with eight elements: fire, earth, wind, the intermediate region, sun, sky, moon, and stars. Believing in Brahman is in all things and each entity is a part of Brahman is Pantheism.⁹ Hindu sacred texts also shows Absolute Brahman is associated with food, the life-breath, the mind, perception,

⁶ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 274.

⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 108.

⁸ Jeaneane Fowler, *Hinduism Belief & Practices: Major Deities and Social Structure*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 7.

⁹ Jeaneane Fowler, *Hinduism Belief & Practices: Major Deities and Social Structure*, 7.

and bliss, as *Taittiriya Upanishad* claims.¹⁰ The supreme being identifies with the created elements such as the universe, or regard[s] the universe as a manifestation of God, it is pantheistic faith.¹¹ Brahman is viewed as the creator of being of all materials. These materials will exist for a while, and at some point in time ultimately will be dissolved in all things that he created.¹² This belief that Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman is the essence of Hindu pantheism.¹³

Hinduism as Polytheism

In Hinduism, Brahman is One yet many.¹⁴ As noted above in *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 3:9:1–3 that there are many deities in Hinduism. These deities are believed to be a manifestation of the Absolute Brahman in many forms.¹⁵ These deities are the manifestation of Brahman in different times and they play important roles in the life of Hindu devotees. In the Vedic period, Indra was viewed as god of rain and king of heaven and Agni presided over the sacrificial flame and received veneration. Every god has their roles that involve exercising their power over the entire creation.

¹⁰ Olivelle, *Upanishads*, 191.

¹¹ Frank R. Abate et. al., eds., *The Oxford American College Dictionary* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002), 987.

¹² Rasamandala Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Cambridgeshire, UK: Anness, 2019), 120.

¹³ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Upanishads, Gita and Bible: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Christian Scripture* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1962), 22.

¹⁴ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 49.

¹⁵ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 121. Saraswati is goddess of learning is Brahma's wife. Vishnu, the preserver's wife Lakshmi, goddess of fortune. Shiva, the destroyer's wife is Shakti (Parvati, Durga, Kali), mother nature. Important deities related to the Trimurti: Ram, avatar or form of Vishnu and his wife Sita. Hanuman, servant of Ram and Sita. Krishna, avatar or form of Vishnu and his wife Radha. Ganesh, son of Shiva and Shakti, remover of obstacle. Skanda (Murugan), son of Shiva and Shakti, god of war. Surya, sun god, a form of Narayana (another name of Vishnu). The gods who play special roles in the universe during the Vedic period are follow—Indra, rain god, Chandra, moon god, Agni, fire god, Vayu, wind god, Varuna, god of water, and Yama god of death and justice.

Trimurti (Trinity)

Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are called the Trimurti.¹⁶ The manifestations of supreme Brahman, and although they are of the supreme Brahman, they are in conflict with each other in the hierarchy of the gods. Brahma as creator, Vishnu as sustainer, and Shiva as the destroyer.¹⁷ These deities are viewed as the creators of the universe, the sustainer of the cosmos, the destroyer and recreator. Brahma is the first born of Brahman. He plays a significant role in creation. Yet, he is denied worship due to a curse. Vishnu and Shiva are rival with tension between them, but receive worship.¹⁸ Each of these males also have wives and are respected as divine couples. Their consorts are important in modern Hinduism. Adherents recognize these deities and their spouses, roles and fear and venerate them. Due to adherents' veneration to these popular divine couples in contemporary Hinduism, it is essential to understand more in depth about these deities, their love, and relationship.

Brahma. *Taittiriya Upanisad* claims that this deity is the “first-born of truth, born before gods, in the navel of the immortal.”¹⁹ According to this description, Brahma emerges from the navel of Vishnu, the preserver. “He is shown with four heads facing all four-direction symbolizing that he has created the entire world.”²⁰ In Hindu mythology, creator Brahma was himself created. It is said that “during the night of Brahma, Vishnu lies, unconscious and recumbent, on the cosmic serpent Sesha, and as dawn approaches a lotus blooms miraculously from his navel, and from this lotus springs the creator god

¹⁶ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 9.

¹⁷ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 119.

¹⁸ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 84.

¹⁹ Olivelle, *Upanisads*, 193.

²⁰ Shakunthala Jagannathan, *Hinduism: An Introduction* (Bombay: Vakil & Sons Ltd. Vakils House, 1984), 37.

Brahma.”²¹ The Law Code of Manu pictures Brahma as the manifestation of self-existent. It states, “As he focused his thought with the desire of bringing forth diverse creatures from his own body, it was the waters that he first brought forth; and into them he poured forth his semen. That became a golden egg, as bright as the sun; and in it himself took birth as Brahma, the grandfather of all the worlds.”²²

Brahma as first-born creator of the universe is also referred to by other names, Vishvakarma, Pitamah, and Prajapati. Yet, he is rarely worshiped because he is under curse due to his sexual relationship with Saraswati who is both his daughter and his consort.²³ According to legend, because of Brahma’s sexual immorality, Shiva cut off one of his five heads.²⁴ In Hinduism, Brahma is depicted as sitting on a picked lotus flower and riding a swan. In each hand he holds the Vedas, prayer beads, a water pot and a spoon to tend the sacrifice fire.

Vishnu. Vishnu a famous Hindu deity’s wife is Lakshmi.²⁵ Vishnu, who is also called Narayan, is worshiped by devotees. Vishnu is viewed as the soul of the entire universe and from his naval came Brahma. During the Vedic period, Vishnu was a minor deity. But he is popular in contemporary Hinduism because he is known as the

²¹ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 104.

²² Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Law Code of Manu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13.

²³ Brahma’s consort (and daughter) Saraswati is viewed as self-born from Brahma. It is believed that all creatures came from their union. Saraswati’s union with Brahma gave birth to Manu, who is the father of mankind and writer of the Law Code of Manu. Adherents believe that the Vedas are Saraswati’s children. Therefore, she is called Vedamata or mother of Vedas. Saraswati is a well-known female deity associated with learning who is worshipped as the mother of learning and remembered once per year during winter.

²⁴ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 122.

²⁵ Vishnu’s wife Lakshmi is the eternal soul mate of Vishnu. Krishna is one of avatar of Vishnu. Lakshmi with Krishna, she is seen as Queen Rukmini and with Rama she appeared as Sita. She resides on her husband’s chest, though is often depicted massaging her husband’s feet. Lakshmi is a goddess of fortune and is worshipped during the festival of Deepawali (in fall) in Nepal and India.

incarnation of Rama (central figure of Ramayana) and Krishna, the Charioteer of Arjuna in the Mahabharata story. Vishnu is viewed as sustainer of creation who descends to earth through his various avatars. When he descends, he protects his devotees, destroys the wrongdoer, and reestablishes dharma (righteousness).²⁶ Vishnu's image is often depicted on a lotus, though he is also seen reclining on the coils of the thousand-headed serpent, Shesha (serpent).

Shiva. Shiva is one of the three gods who is viewed as a degrader, destroyer, and maintainer of creation, in addition to making new cycles of creation. His wife is Shakti.²⁷ He is a fierce and feared deity in Hinduism. He is known by several other names, such as Mahadeva (great god), Maheswor (great controller), Mahesh, Shambhu (giver of prosperity), and Shankara (bestower of happiness). In Upanishad, he is portrayed as one of the Supreme Beings. During the Vedic period, Shiva was worshiped in the form of Rudra. The *Bhagavad Gita* 10:23 states “Of the Rudras, I am Shiva, of Yakshas and Rakshasas the Lord of Wealth, of Vasus I am Fire, of mountain I am Meru.”²⁸ Shiva is portrayed with his wife, Parvati, and presented as a yogi seated in meditation in the Himalayas. In his later form, Shiva is depicted wearing a tiger's skin, carrying a trident and small drum, bearing a third eye, and with snakes coiled round his neck and arm. His other two popular forms are as king of dancers and the symbolic “lingam.”

²⁶ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 125.

²⁷ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 135. Shiva's wife Shakti means energy. She also goes with numerous names such as Parvati, Gurga, Kali, and Devi. Parvati is the mother of two other Hindu deities—Ganesh and Skanda. Durga is considered a female deity and is regarded as the fierce and cruel nature deity in Hinduism. Her images can be seen fatally spearing the demon Mahisha, as he emerges riding on buffalo. Shakti, in the form of Kali, is associated with death and destruction. In contemporary feminist and New Age movement Kali is adopted as a symbol of their ideology. She is worshiped in fall (September/October).

²⁸ W. J. Johnson, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46–47.

Christian Teaching on God

When Christians encounter Hindu adherents, Hindus claim that they, too, believe in the supreme one Brahma (monotheism). There is one Brahman who manifests in many forms, but this shows his lack of sovereignty. He does not rule the cosmos, but is ruled by other deities. Like humans and animals, Hindu deities, who are supposed to be manifestations of Brahman, engage in human activities like sex, tension, rivalry, lying, and begetting children. The gods also become creatures, such as Shiva who became *Pasupathi* (Animal's husband) instead of creatures imitating the divine Brahman.

In contrast to many gods in Hindu scriptures, the Bible affirms that Christianity is a monotheistic religion.²⁹ In Deuteronomy 6:4, Moses speaks to the people of Israel, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Isaiah declared, "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'" (Isa 44:6). Jesus then reaffirms this: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" (Mark 12:29). Paul writes, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). In John's vision Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8). The Bible is clear that God is one, that he alone is the living and powerful God. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

God is Sovereign

In Hinduism, the gods are identified with creation, taking on the form of an animal or man. By contrast, the God revealed in the Bible is different from creation. He is of a different category than the created order. Jesus is the true vine that the vinedresser is

²⁹ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 428.

pruning. Jesus declared, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2). God as a vinedresser has total control over his creatures, and as a vine dresser does as he wills over it. Paul preaches that “because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Paul is clear in showing that God is sovereign, that he alone is able to judge because he stands outside of creation. John M. Frame writes,

God is not a physical being; it is obvious that he is not made up of physical parts. Nor can he be divided into form and matter, or actuality and potentiality, since he has no matter or (passive) potentiality. Nor is he made up of genus and differentia, since he is not in a genus, nor is he a genus (godhood) differentiated by species (various gods). Nor is he made up of substance and accidents, because there are no accidents in him. Since God has no accidents, everything in him is essential to his being; so he is, in a sense, his essence.³⁰

Frame here shows that the God of the Bible is unlike the gods of Hinduism; he unlike Brahman does not need to take on a physical form. He occupies a category that no created being occupies. As Creator of all things, God exercises his power over the universe and rules over it without consulting anyone (Eph 1:11). R. A. Finlayson states:

God is sovereign. That means that he makes his own plans and carries them out in his own time and way. That is simply and expression of his supreme intelligence, power and wisdom. It means that God’s will is not arbitrary, but acts in complete harmony with his character. It is the forthputting of his power and goodness, and is thus the final goal of his existence.³¹

Frame asserts, “Practically every page of Scripture displays God’s sovereign evaluation of human attitude, thought, words, and deeds.”³² Humans are responsible for their

³⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 429.

³¹ R. A. Finlayson, “God,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas et al., 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 428.

³² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 120.

actions.

God is Holy

Millard J. Erickson argues two basic aspects to God's holiness.³³ First is his uniqueness; God is totally separate from all creation (Exod 15:11). Isaiah saw a vision and said, "And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isa 6:3). God is totally separate from his creation, yet people worship him freely because of his covenant. God's holiness also shows his absolute purity and goodness and God is untouched by the evil in the world.³⁴ God of the Bible does not participate in any sin because it is against his holiness. Habakkuk 1:13 states, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" By contrast, Brahma in Hinduism committed sexual sin with his daughter Saraswathi. He is under a curse by Vishnu, which morally disqualifies veneration from his devotees.³⁵

The God of the Bible is holy. God in his holiness means he is set apart unmatched to the true loving God.³⁶ God is uniquely holy and almighty who governs over all creation. Revelation 4:8 records the creatures singing praises to God continually saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty." He demands his devotees to also be holy as he is (Lev 19:1–2).

³³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 311.

³⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 311

³⁵ Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 120.

³⁶ Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 204.

Trinity in Christianity

The doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity is opposite to the Hindu concept of Trimurti. In Hinduism, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are the Trimurti, but their roles and functions are hierarchal. They work separately, and even have conflict with each other. They are like humans, who take wives, have children, engage in pleasures of the world, and even represent the worst tendencies of humanity.

The Christian God has eternally existed as three persons yet one God. “The word trinity means ‘tri-unity’ or ‘three-in-oneness.’”³⁷ Biblical references for Trinity are found in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Genesis 1:26, states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” This plural verb and pronoun imply that more than one person is involved in making man in God’s image and likeness.

In the New Testament, there are several passages where all three persons of the Trinity are seen together.³⁸ Matthew 3:16–17 states that at the moment of Jesus’s baptism, all three members of the Trinity were performing distinct roles. God the Father spoke from heaven, God the Son was baptized, and God the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Similarly, in Ephesians 4:4–6, all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned separately: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The Bible is clear in showing that the Trinity is seen in the totality of Scripture, that God is one, and also Father, Son and Spirit. Within this triune God, there

³⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2020), 228.

³⁸ Grudem, *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 230.

is no conflict or disagreement but total union and love.

Grudem summarizes: (1) God is three persons, (2) Each person is fully God, (3) There is one God.³⁹ This unity is not found in Hinduism. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva cannot be compared with the Trinity of the Bible. Trimurti in Hinduism, each divinity has conflicting purposes, and they fight each other for supremacy.⁴⁰ As the Bible shows, the triune God is totally different from the Trimurti in Hinduism and must not be viewed through a Hindu worldview.

Hindu Teaching on Creation

Hinduism has differing accounts of the creation but is full of confusion. In Shiva Purana, Shiva creates, destroys, and recreates. Vishnu Puranas credits Vishnu as the creator and sustainer of the universe. The creation is Vishnu *lila* a sacred enjoyment of Vishnu formed the matter. He identified with Brahman formed all the ephemerals of the cosmos form and his power encompass the universe. Irving Hexham alleges, “All the elements of creation come together to form one vast cosmic egg that floats on an immense sea of primordial water. The creator god Vishnu enters into the egg, from which evolves the earth, sky, and the heaven, all populated by gods and other sending beings.”⁴¹ During the creation, Shiva, who comes from Vishnu's head, does comic dances, and continues until exhausted. He then takes the form of Rudra, the god of destruction, and destroys the world in a burning, but through rain, he dissolves into the great ocean. Now, Vishnu sleeps on the ocean, floating in the coils of a great serpent-like sea monster, and reviews his creation and destruction. The creation and destruction of the universe of

³⁹ Grudem, *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 231.

⁴⁰ Lata Seth, ed., *Ved Vyasa's The Shiva Purana* (New Delhi: Dreamland Publications, 2017), chap. 47, Kindle.

⁴¹ Hexham, *Understanding World Religions*, 135.

Brahma.⁴² Here, Brahma is recognized as the creator. R. C. Zaehner writes,

In the night of Brahma, lies in dreamless sleep, there was no activities, and all is fathomless rest and boundless peace. The “day of Brahma” downs, and God awakes. In the mythology of the Vaishnavas during the night of Brahma Vishnu lies, unconscious and recumbent, on the cosmic serpent Sesha, and as dawn approaches a lotus blooms miraculously from his naval, and from this lotus springs the creator-god Brahma, while Shiva, the destroyer . . . springs from his head. From this beginning the universe evolves.⁴³

While Vishnu was taking a rest and reviewing his creation, from his naval, a lotus blooms miraculously, and from the lotus, the god Brahma emerges and begins creation. According to this claim, gods in Hinduism Shiva and Brahma were created. The Law Code of Manu has a different account that creation began with the golden egg that brought the sun and Brahma himself into being. The Law Code of Manu 1:5–9 states:

There was this world—pitch-dark, indiscernible, without distinguishing marks, unthinkable, incomprehensible, in a kind of deep sleep all over. Then the Self-existent Lord appeared—the Unmanifest manifesting this world beginning with the elements, projecting his might, and dispelling the darkness. That one—who is beyond the range of senses; who cannot be grasped; who is subtle, unmanifest, and eternal; who contains all being; and who transcends thought—it is he who shone form on his own.

As he focused his thought with the desire of bringing forth a diverse creature from his own body, it was the waters that he first brought forth; and into them he poured his semen. That become a golden egg, as bright as the sun; and in it he himself took birth as Brahma, the grandfather of all the world.⁴⁴

The Law Code of Manu, the Self-existent one, formed water, then his semen and a golden egg created the sun, and he became Bahama. Here, Vishnu Puranas and The Law Code of Many claims that the Self-existent manifests as Vishnu, Rudra, Brahma and creates. Upanishads have a different account of creation. According to the Upanishads, the creation story begins with death: “In the beginning there was nothing here at all.

⁴² Hexham, *Understanding World Religions*, 135.

⁴³ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 104.

⁴⁴ Olivelle, *The Law of Manu*, 13.

Death alone covered this completely, as did hunger; for what is hunger but death? Then death made up his mind: 'let me equip myself with body' (*atman*)."⁴⁵ In Upanishad, Brahma, out of loneliness, splits himself into two to become male and female. Through this, all things were created.⁴⁶

It is even more complex as many other divinities are associated in the act of creation, including: Viswakarma the All Maker, Prajapati the Lord of creation, and out of Purusha's sacrificed body (which plays a large part in the creation of the caste system).

Humans Were Created in Castes

In Hinduism, humans are not created equally. The deities created a caste system by which people are divided.⁴⁷ According to the Rig-Veda, the gods sacrificed Purusa; from him all things created and the four casts were established from his body. The Brahmin caste came from his mouth, the Kshatriyas caste from his arms, the Vaisya caste from his thigh, and Sudra caste from his feet.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Olivelle, *Upanishads*, 7.

⁴⁶ Upanishads describes creation as follow: "In the beginning this world was just a single body (*atman*) shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was, 'Here I am!' and from that the name 'I' come into being. Therefore, even today when you call someone, he first says, 'It's I,' and then states whatever other name he may have. That first being received the name 'man' (*purusa*), because ahead (*purusa*) of all this he burnt up (us) all evils. When someone knows this, he burns up anyone who may try to get ahead of him. 2 That first being become afraid; therefore, one becomes afraid when one is alone. Then he thought to himself: 'Of what should I be afraid, when there is no one but me?' So his fear left him for what was he going to be afraid of? One is, after all, afraid of another. 3 He found no pleasure at all; so one finds no pleasure when one is alone. He wanted to have a companion. Now he was as large as a man and a woman in close embrace. So he split (*pat*) his body into two, giving rise to husband (*pati*) and wife (*patni*). Surely this is why Yajnavalkya to say: 'The two of us are like two halves of a block.' The space here is completely filled by the woman. He copulated with her, and from their union human beings were born. 4 She then thought to herself: After begetting me from his own body, (*atman*), how could he copulate with me? I know—I'll hide myself.' So she became a cow. But he became a bull and again copulated with her. From their union cattle were born. Then she became a mare, and he a stallion; she became a female donkey, and he, a male donkey. And again he copulated with her, and from their union one-hoofed animals were born. Then she became a female goat, and he, a male goat; she became a ewe, and he, a ram. And again he copulated with her, and from their union goats and sheep were born. In this way he created everything male and female pair that exists, down to the very ants." Olivelle, *Upanishads*, 13–14.

⁴⁷ Jagannatham, *Hinduism*, 57.

⁴⁸ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 43–44.

The Upanishads state that Brahman created the Brahmin as the superior anointing class. They are considered twice born in the Hindu Varna system.⁴⁹ Ksatriya is ruling class. Vaisya class is a merchant class, and Sudra class is the lowest caste, which is regarded as untouchable (Dalit) by other Hindus. The Upanishad says that this Varna system is needed in order to become a fully developed Brahman, which means reunion with him.⁵⁰

The Law Code of Manu is one of the most controversial texts in Hinduism because it defines and guards the caste system. Manu 1:93 states that “the Brahmin is by Law the lord of this whole creation.”⁵¹ Manu 1:98 says, “A Brahmin’s birth alone, represents the everlasting physical frame of the Law; for, on account of the Law, he is fit for becoming Brahmin.” Further, “this whole world—whatever there is on earth—is the property of Brahmin. Because of his eminence and high birth, the Brahmin has a clear right to this whole world” (1:100). The Kshatriya, who were created from the thigh of Purusa, “allotted projecting the subjects, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, and avoiding attachment to sensory objects; and to the Vaisya, looking after animals, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, trade, moneylending, and agriculture” (1:90). To the Sudra, his responsibility is to undergird the service of the those of every other social class” (1:91). Manu 10:121 says, “if a Sudra desires to earn a living, he may serve a Kshatriya or he may seek to earn a living by serving even a wealthy Vaisya.” Further, Sudra cannot change his caste, nor does he require any consecration. He is not qualified to study the Law, (10:126). In 10:130, he concludes that “I have described above the Laws for the four classes during a time of adversary; when

⁴⁹ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 34.

⁵⁰ Olivelle, *Upanishads*, 15.

⁵¹ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 19.

they are properly followed, people attain the highest state.” That motivates the adherent to follow the caste system strictly to attain Brahman.

In the Bhagavad Gita, 3:35, Krishna, as Vishnu’s avatar, teaches his Kshatriya to follow the caste warrior, Arjuna, who was afraid to battle his relative, “It is better to practice your own inherent duty deficiently than another’s duty well. It is better to die conforming to your own duty; the duty of others invite danger.” So, within the Hindu doctrine of creation is the caste system for the sake of dharma, or the way to attain Brahman.

Christian Teaching on Creation

In the Bible, God is the Creator of everything. In the Bible, the first verse declares, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The Creator God of the universe is sovereign, and he holds authority over all things. The love of God the Creator defines the purpose of all creatures including human beings and the purpose of their lives. The Creator’s character also defines human morality and values.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 introduces the origin of all God’s creations, including man as his creature. His power, wisdom, and majesty are imprinted on his creation.⁵² God speaks in Job 38:4 and says, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.” God is the builder who laid the foundation of the earth and made it like the builder set on and built according to plans and specifications with the measuring with its pillars.⁵³ Psalm 33:6 states, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” Nehemiah confessed and prayed

⁵² Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 142.

⁵³ Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Note* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 292.

in this way, “You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you” (Neh 9:6). The Old Testament tells us that God is solely the author and master of the creation. He loves his creation, rules over it, and preserves the creation.

The New Testament affirms God’s foundational role as Creator. There is a clear indication that the instrument of God’s creation is “the Word,” which is Jesus. John 1:1–3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” Similarly, Paul affirms that God not only created all things in the beginning, but through that creation displayed his personal attributes (Rom 1:20). God demonstrates, through his creation of all things, that he is exalted above all his creation and displays particular attributes of himself in that creation so that people are given sufficient evidence from creation alone of who God is. God has given humans clear evidence of his existence so that they have no excuse for idolatry and for hindering the truth by their iniquity.⁵⁴

Michael F. Bird offers four confessions of God as Creator.⁵⁵ First, God is uniquely identified as “Lord” without equal (cf. Deut 4:23). King Solomon affirms this in his prayer, when he says to the “God of Israel” that “there is no God like you” (2 Chr 6:14). Since there is no other God besides him, the covenant people were forbidden from worshiping other gods (Exod 20:3).

Second, God is the Creator whose authority is absolute over all things because

⁵⁴ Albert Barnes, *Note on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972).

⁵⁵ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 142–44.

he alone made heaven and earth (Gen 1:1). King Hezekiah confessed and prayed, “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth” (2 Kgs 19:15). King David declares that, “the Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103:19). God as the Creator owns and rules on everything he created. The apostle Paul argues, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). God created everything and rules.

Third, God remains distinct from his creation, but is also intimately and constantly at work within creation.⁵⁶ Genesis 1:26–27 tells that humans were created in his image and likeness; therefore he loves them. God loves his creation. Psalms 33:5 declares that, “he loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.” Further, “The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes” (Ps 119:64).

Fourth, man is different from other creatures. Anthony A. Hoekema argues, “The biblical understanding of man is the teaching that man has been created in the image of God.”⁵⁷ The creation of man is the exact representation of creation on the sixth day.

God Created Everything Good

God, in his act of creation, saw that, “it was very good.” God created everything orderly. He created “the light, vegetation, the sun, the moon, the stars, living creatures in the seas, birds, ground animals, and finally man. After each major creation,

⁵⁶ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 143.

⁵⁷ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 11.

“God saw it was good,” but at the end of the entire creation, “behold, it was very good.”⁵⁸

The creation narrative does not say that God is good and matter is evil. He created nothing evil. Nevertheless, one may ask the question: “if God is good and God created a universe which was good then, where does evil come in God’s universe?”⁵⁹ Millard J. Erickson asserts,

The doctrinal of creation also means that nothing made is intrinsically evil. Everything has come from God, and the creation narrative says five times that he saw that it was good (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then, when he completed his creation of the human, we are told that God saw everything he had made, and it was very good (v.31). There was nothing evil within God’s original creation.⁶⁰

The biblical creation account is evidence of creation as good, but Genesis 3 shows where sin enters by the deception of the serpent. Erickson argues, “God, who created everything, cannot be blamed for evil and sin in the world. The reason he cannot be blamed is not that he did not create the world, but that he created it good, and even very good.”⁶¹ Therefore, since God is so good, and all-powerful, he created everything good. This displays the greatness of God in his creation and that sin is introduced by the serpent (Satan) in Genesis 3.

God Made Everything for His Glory

God created the universe with the primary purpose of his glory. As J. J. Stewart Perowne writes that, “God would not have purposed an ultimate end other than

⁵⁸ Harold R. Booher, *Origin, Icons and Illusions: Exploring the Science and Psychology of Creation and Evolution* (St. Louis, MO: Warren H. Green Inc. 1998), 305.

⁵⁹ Tony Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine: A Guide to What Christians Believe* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 98.

⁶⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 401.

⁶¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 402.

himself since he is superior to everything outside himself.”⁶² The Creator God reveals himself in nature, in his Word, and his glory as seen in the heaven and as manifested in his law.⁶³ The Psalmist declares, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). “God created them, and they show his glory. His fingers fashioned them. He clothed them with light as with a garment, and put the sun in the midst of them to show forth his praise.”⁶⁴ All creation glorifies him (Isa 6:3–4). In John’s revelation, he testifies, “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Rev 5:13). His creations glorify him as the Creator and his presence before creation magnifies who he is.

As God created everything for his glory, his glory also has been revealed to his creation. Some examples of God’s glory include: (1) God’s glory seen in Exodus 16, (2) God’s glory presents his convent among his people (1 Chr 29:11), and (3) God’s presence glorifies creation because he has made the world to be his temple.⁶⁵ The holy invisible Creator God created everything for his glory and his glorious presence is also glorified by (1 Cor 3:16).

⁶² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 215.

⁶³ J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 1989), 220.

⁶⁴ Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 222–23.

⁶⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 592–94.

God Made Men and Women

In the teaching of Hinduism, the creator splits his body—half into a man and another half into a woman and creates a husband and wife. Brhadaranyaka Upanishads states,

He found no pleasure at all; so no one finds pleasure when one is alone. He wanted to have a companion. Now he was as large as a man and a woman in close embrace. So, he split (*pati*) his body into two giving rise to a husband (*pati*) and a wife (*patni*). Sure, this is why Yajnavalkya says: “The two of us are like two halves of a block.” The space here, therefore, is completely filled by woman. He copulated with her, and from their union, human beings were born.⁶⁶

The creator in Hinduism created human beings into four divisions of classes. These four classes are: the Brahmins were created from the mouth of Brahma; the warrior class Kshatriya were created from Brahma’s arms; the Vaishyas farmers and merchants were created from Brahma’s thighs; and the Sudras as a servant to every above class were created from Brahma feet.⁶⁷

Christian teachings on the creation of man and woman is opposite to Hindu teachings. The Bible teaches that God made both man and women together in his image (Gen 1:27). God commissioned them to rule the earth and lead into a commission to be fruitful (Gen 1:28).⁶⁸ Genesis 1:26 gives an account of the creation of man and woman, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” Genesis 2:7 goes in closer and says, “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

⁶⁶ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 13–14.

⁶⁷ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 44.

⁶⁸ John Goldingay, *Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 46–47.

According to the biblical creation narrative, Genesis 1:26 tells that God created man in his image, that man is unique in comparison to other creations that God made. Man is “unique because among created things only man bears God’s image.”⁶⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue stress, “Adam was created first ‘of dust from the ground,’ and then Eve was formed by God from one of his ribs.”⁷⁰ They are one body and one flesh with unique roles (Gen 2:24).

Men and women as equally created. God created woman from one of the man’s ribs (Gen 2:21). Adam calls the woman, Eve, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23; cf. Gen 5:1–2). God created man and woman in his image but gave them distinct, complementary responsibilities. Gerald Gray points, “at a time when there is tendency for each sex to affirm its own identity, this complementarity needs to be remembered. God did not intend men to live independently of women or vice versa.”⁷¹ Their identity as an image of God never changed or was lost even when their physical disability. Man is the crown and climax of creation and woman holds the same high position in divine order.⁷² Therefore, since humans had their origin from one man, Adam, and one-woman Eve, their offspring have brotherhood and those who are in Christ are spiritual siblings.⁷³

⁶⁹ Edger Andrews, *What Is Man? Adam, Alien or Ape?* (Nashville: Elm Hill, 2018), 252.

⁷⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 214.

⁷¹ Gerald Bray, “God,” in *Zondervan Handbook of Christian Beliefs*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and James I. Packer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 68.

⁷² Scripture Union, *The Daily Commentary: Genesis–Job* (London: Scripture Union, 1974), 10.

⁷³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 512.

Man as image bearer of God. As we have seen, God created humanity in his image. This entails several factors for consideration: ⁷⁴ First, this implies that man was rational; through language and speech he has the ability to reason. Second, man has free will and moral responsibility. Free will has been seen as part of the image of God. Humanity is the only creation being endowed with free will and moral responsibility. Third, man was created as spiritual, with the capacity to worship God. Fourth, only man was given authority over other aspects of God's creation (Gen 1:28; Ps 8:6–8). Fifth, God created man with a degree of creativity. Though man cannot create things out of nothing like God can, he does have the ability to create things out of pre-existing material. Sixth, man is the image of God, both individual and with his wife. God made them as man and woman that bearing image of trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Only God is to be worshiped and obeyed. Worship to the Creator is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings.⁷⁵ Worship to the Creator is commanded (Exod 20:5) and grounded in the very character and attribute of God as he is the Creator. Humans are to fulfill God's expectations. Humans worship the Creator because God is worthy.⁷⁶

The obedience to and worship of Israel's God, and him alone, is codified in the Ten Commandments, where Israel is commanded to have no other god but the Lord (Exod 20). Even creation itself acknowledges the supremacy of God, declaring his glory and proclaiming his handiwork (Ps 19:1–2). God made man for a love relationship that

⁷⁴ Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, 61–62.

⁷⁵ D. A. Carson, *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 26.

⁷⁶ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 26–31.

lasts for eternity.⁷⁷

In the New Testament, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that God is to be worshiped “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The church at Ephesus is exhorted to sing and make melody to the Lord, “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19–21). John’s vision of the living creatures and twenty-four elders worshiping God illustrates the same idea (Rev 4:11). As man worships God, it is his responsibility to acknowledge that God is the Creator and so respond to him in both adoration and personal actions to glorify God.⁷⁸ Failure to do so violates the command to love God with all one’s heart, soul and mind (Deut 6:5).⁷⁹

God gave man authority and responsibilities. In Genesis 1:28, God instructs humanity to “[b]e fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” As God’s image-bearers, humans are agents of God’s rule on the earth. Jesus holds all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:20). God extends this authority to humanity, and so has “entrusted [us] with authority over creation as God’s stewards.”⁸⁰ The psalmist concurs, stating that God has given humanity “dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Ps 8:6–8).

As rulers, humanity is responsible to God for executing every action in accordance with God’s will. Man has to remember that his God-given authority is “God-

⁷⁷ Ron Owens and Jan McMurray, *Return to Worship: A God-Centered Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 61.

⁷⁸ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 43.

⁷⁹ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 39.

⁸⁰ Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, 62.

derived, God-dependent, and Godward” in every action he takes.⁸¹ As the authority giver, God has the right to take back that authority.

Hindu Teaching on Priesthood: Only the Priestly Class Brahmin is Eligible

In Hinduism, the Brahmin caste is entrusted to do all rituals.⁸² They are twice born, directly from the mouth of the creator himself. They are solely devoted to studying the Vedas and their priestly tasks. The four-caste system was created by divinity himself. Each group is assigned obligations and prohibitions. The Law Code of Manu declares that “an offering made in the mouth of a Brahmin is far superior to ablutions” which never spills, never falls, and never perishes at all.⁸³ “A Sudra has nothing to do with sacrifice.”⁸⁴

The Law Code of Manu 4:99 instructs that the twice born Brahmin “must never recite indistinctly or in the presence of Sudra.” Further, the Law Code of Manu says, “When he keeps himself pure, he obediently serves the highest class, is soft-spoken and humble and always takes refuge in Brahmin; he obtains a higher birth.”⁸⁵ The other two upper classes, Vaisya, and Kshatriya, also are not eligible to do priestly duty.

Christian Teaching on the Priesthood of Believers

Brahmin is solely responsible for doing priestly duty in Hindu teaching, as

⁸¹ Owen Strachan, *Reflecting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Rose-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publication Ltd., 2019), 22.

⁸² John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, “A Dalit Poet-Saint Ravidas,” *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 200.

⁸³ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 112.

⁸⁴ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 190.

⁸⁵ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 179.

argued previously. However, Christian teaching affirms that God made man and woman equally so that they may serve the Lord. Therefore, every believer is a part of the priesthood of believers in the New Testament. This privilege is opposite to the teaching of Hinduism.

God created Adam and blessed him and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). Adam did not deserve to be a ruler of the earth. God gave Adam unmerited privilege to worship and serve him as a priest. As God’s image-bearer, Adam was to fulfill God’s purpose to the world by subduing and having dominion over the earth and glorifying him through his works. As responsibility was given to Adam, he had “to pray and worship God in every place, consecrating his labor and seeking God’s continued blessings.”⁸⁶ As a priest, Adam was assigned to lead others to worship God, bringing God’s blessings upon creation as he serves.⁸⁷ However, Adam’s priestly service was hindered by his disobedience (Gen 3).

Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam, who is the “second man from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47) took human form (John 1:14) and is God’s high priest, taking human nature upon himself living our life, dying the death we deserve.⁸⁸ Christ’s priesthood is the foundation for Christian endurance (Heb 4:14). In addition to being our high priest, he is also a sacrifice for our sins (Isa 53:6).

In Christ, there is no hierarchy or class of people. No one has to be born into a particular family to be a priest. Every believer has direct access to God. All believers can go before God in prayer and worship him through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁶ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 790.

⁸⁷ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 791.

⁸⁸ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 791.

The Scripture teaches believers that, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb 13:15). Believers are encouraged to read the scripture, interpret it and apply it in daily life. Paul writes to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). They also have the privilege to serve God as priest (Eph 4:11). A believer’s position in Christ is much broader in the area of Christian service, as Paul writes, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:6–8).

Here, with Christ as the high priest, believers also have the privilege to be a part of the priesthood of believers not because of human merit, but because of what Christ has done on the cross. Peter claims that believers, too, are a “royal priesthood,” established for a purpose, “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9–10).

Hindu Teaching on Sin, Karma, and Moksha

Sin in Hinduism is viewed as ignorance. According to Rig-Veda, lord Varuna is lord of the universe. He is the creator of heaven, air, and sea. Varuna holds two attributes: omniscient and omnipotence. He is the supreme divinity that oversees and controls the universe. He is creator of the law and its guardian. Therefore, if anyone breaches the law, makes a mistake in the ritual, or defiles moral orders, they are in sin.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 30.

If anyone sins in the dark, they sin against Varuna, and Varuna can bind men such that they lose his loving-kindness.⁹⁰ Varuna, however, lost his supreme power to Indra. In Kausitaki Upanishads 3:1, Indra says: “When a man perceives me, nothing that does—whether it is stealing, or performing an abortion, or killing his own father or mother—will ever make him lose a single hair of his body. And when he has committed sin, his face does not lose its color.”⁹¹

Krishna says to Arjuna in Gita 3:16, “My dear Arjuna, a man who does not follow this prescribed Vedic system of sacrifice certainly leads a life of sin, for a person delighting only in the senses lives in vain.”⁹² In order to please the gods in the Vedas, sacrifice is necessary. According to Gita, 3:16, if devotees fail to follow Veda’s instruction, they commit sin and will be condemned. Gita also condemns failing to perform duty as sinful in Gita 2:47. In chapter 11, the Law Code of Manu mentions two kinds of sins, public and private sins and their penalties and penances.⁹³ Public sins are “grievous sins”: killing a Brahmin, drinking liquor, stealing gold, having sex with an elder’s wife, abandoning the Veda, reviling the Vedas, and sexual intercourse with the lowest cast. These are all considered public and grievous sins. This class of sins can result in (a) expulsion from one’s cast; (b) becoming mixed-cast; (c) becoming unworthy to receive a gift; (d) and becoming impure. Private sins are secondary: killing a cow, officiating the sacrifice of an individual whose sacrifice is forbidden, making a Brahmin cry, smelling liquor, sexual intercourse with a man, serving Sudra and many more. The twice born man who commits, these sins lose their caste status. If a Brahmin sins like

⁹⁰ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 31.

⁹¹ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 216.

⁹² A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* (New York: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972), 51.

⁹³ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 194–210.

this, they will lose their caste status.

Karma: Men's Initiative to Reach God

It is argued that the doctrine of karma was in place by the sixth century BC.⁹⁴ In the notion of karma, “life does not end with death.”⁹⁵ Adherents believe that everyone has a chance of being born again to undo the mistakes committed in the past life and do good for the future life that one is going to receive. The doctrine of karma is a controversial notion that is fused with the doctrine of rebirth.⁹⁶ In Hinduism, it is man's responsibility to work out his karma and remove bad karma from himself.⁹⁷ Jeaneane Fowler describes, “*Karma (karman)* means ‘act,’ ‘action,’ or ‘activity’ and refers not only to actions undertaken by the body, but also to those undertaken by the mind.”⁹⁸ Karma determines samsara, which means cycles of death, life, and rebirth. In Hinduism, the concept of reincarnation is the belief that at the end of each life, the individual is born again in another life to carry on their evolutionary path.⁹⁹ For the adherents, all life is cyclical, not linear. Once a Hindu believer dies, he or she might become a plant or an animal if their karma is bad. However, if their karma is good, they have a chance of being born into a higher caste. In order to better reincarnate in the next life cycle, karma has the ability to determine one's position in the next life cycle. In Hinduism, no deity initiates forgiveness for bad karma.

⁹⁴ Fowler, *Hinduism Beliefs and Practice: Major Deities and Social Structures*, vol., 9.

⁹⁵ Sitansu S. Chakravarti, “A Diasporic Hindu Creed: Some Basic Features of Hinduism,” in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 250.

⁹⁶ Ray W. Perret, *Hindu Ethics: A Philosophy Study* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 65.

⁹⁷ Parrinder, *Upanishads, Gita and Bible*, 111.

⁹⁸ Fowler, *Hinduism Beliefs and Practice: Major Deities and Social Structures*, vol. 1, 9.

⁹⁹ Fowler, *Hinduism Beliefs and Practice: Major Deities and Social Structures*, vol. 8.

For adherents, an individual is made with two components: the soul and atman. The soul is a living and finite being. It is changeable. Atman is an unchangeable aspect of the individual that is part of Brahman. Atman does not reincarnate at all. But the soul does, because it is infinite and therefore will reincarnate. In Bhagavad Gita chapter 2:22, it states, “Just as a man casting off worn-out clothes takes up others that are new, so that embodied self, casting off its worn-out bodies goes to other, new ones.”¹⁰⁰

Upanishad compares reincarnation with a caterpillar. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says, “It is like this. As a caterpillar, when it comes to the tip of a blade of grass, reaches out to a new foothold and draws itself onto it, so the self (atman) after it has knocked down this body and rendered it unconscious, reaches out to a new foothold and draws itself onto it.”¹⁰¹ Katha Upanishads states, “Look ahead! See how they have gone, those who have gone before us! Look back! So will they go, those who will come after us. A mortal man ripens like grain, and like grain, he is born again.”¹⁰²

Hinduism practices sacrifices and specific actions to gods for specific results. A good action or sacrifice leads to good results. In contrast, bad actions result in bad results. Actions of the mind might not have immediate results, but over time it will. These actions can be physical or mental in the present life as well as future rebirth.

Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 4:4:5 states,

Clearly, this self is Brahman—this self that is made of perception, made of mind, made of sight, made of breath, made of hearing, made of earth, made of water, made of wind, made of space, made of light and the lightness, made of desire and the desireless, made of anger and the angerless, made of the righteous and the unrighteous; this self that is made of everything. Hence, there is a saying: “He is made of this. He’s made of that.” What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 64.

¹⁰² Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 232.

something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. And so people say: “A person here consists simply of desire.” A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action.¹⁰³

Man’s karma determines the present circumstance and also future rebirth. In rebirth, karma effects gender, class, caste, family type, and the society into which one is born. In order to be released from the endless cycle of rebirth, man has to do good works to obtain good karma, which is necessary for moksha (liberation).

Moksha

In Hinduism, the ultimate goal of life is to acquire moksha, liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth, and reunion with Brahman. In moksha, the cycle of endless rebirth will end and reincarnation will stop. Once the goal of moksha is achieved, all karma is gone. Zaehner asserts, “In Rig-Veda the soul of the dead is carried aloft by the fire-god, Agni, who consumes the material body at cremation, to the heavenly world where it disports itself with the gods in perfect, carefree bliss.”¹⁰⁴ All suffering, ignorance, and the cycle of rebirth that was caused by karma is gone. The ultimate spiritual goal is “characterized as an anonymous, impersonal, blissful state.”¹⁰⁵ In this process, all of the desire of man or egos are lost and moksha is realized. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says,

A man who’s attached goes with his action, to that very place to which his mind and character cling. Reaching the end of his action, of whatever he has done in this world—from that world he returns back to this world, back to the action. That is the course of a man who desires. Now, a man who does not desire—who is without desires, who is freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is

¹⁰³ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 64–65.

¹⁰⁴ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 91.

himself—his vital functions do not depart. Brahman he is, and to Brahman he goes.¹⁰⁶

Hinduism teaches that there are many paths that lead a Hindu from karma to moksha. There are four ways from karma to moksha. They are sacrifice, dharma, knowledge, and devotion (*bhakti*). Hinduism practices various sacrifices that please the divinity and wish fulfillment of devotees and liberate them from bad karma to moksha. Dharma means “what is right.”¹⁰⁷ Dharma can extend by doing duty in the everyday life of an individual that includes law, class (caste), social norms, ritual, etc. For instance, Brahmin’s dharma is basically acquiring Vedic knowledge and guarding its teaching. The Law Code of Manu instructs, “Twice born should study the entire Veda together with the secret text. . . . When a Brahmin expends great effort in other matters without studying the Veda, while still alive he is quickly reduced to the status of a Sudras, together with his children.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Kshatriya duty is ruling, Vaishya merchant, and Sudra serving all upper casts. However, Sudras cannot attain knowledge of the Veda; the fact is that Sudra is prohibited from reading Vedas. The Law Code of Manu instructs Brahmin that “he must never recite indistinctly or the presence of Sudra.”¹⁰⁹ The path for moksha also obtain through devotion (*bhakti*). Adherents who choose moksha through “devotion emphasizes that bhakti to God and the grace that the devoted may expect from it.”¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that all paths for moksha are available in Hinduism, everyone cannot choose all paths. The vulnerable of all is Sudra.

¹⁰⁶ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ Jeaneane Fowler, *Hinduism Belief & Practices: Religious History and Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Brighton, MA: Sussex Academic Press, 2016), 198.

¹⁰⁸ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 72.

¹¹⁰ Madeleine Biarreau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, French Studies in South Asian Culture and Society 3 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 28.

Christian Teaching on Sin and Grace

The creation account affirms that everything God created, including man, “was very good” (Gen 1:31). God instructs man, whom he places in the garden, that he may eat of every tree in that garden, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:15–17). John Goldingay states that “the snake does deceive the woman, by implicitly questioning God’s motives for his prohibition and by contradicting what he had said about the further consequences of eating from the fruit.”¹¹¹ Satan entices the woman to eat of the forbidden tree, and her husband to do the same (Gen 3:6). The man and woman were deceived and chose not to obey their Creator’s command. Here, “God is ‘provoked’ to jealous anger over his people by their sin. Once kindled, his anger ‘burns’ and is not easily quenched.”¹¹² God expelled them from his garden because of their disobedience. Not just Adam and Eve, but all humanity is plunged into the condition of sin (cf. Rom 3:23).

The creation account in Genesis 1–11 presents story after story demonstrating the origins of sin as rebellion against God.¹¹³ In each case, God executes his righteous judgment. The nature of sin is demonstrated to be, “failure or missing the mark; going astray, trespass, transgression; rebellion against God, ungodliness; breaking God’s laws, disobedience; perversity, wickedness, iniquity; unrighteousness, injustice; lust, and evil desire.”¹¹⁴ Because of sin, all people live with bondage, blindness, guilt, waiting for God’s wrath, his punishment, alienation, and eternal death.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 75.

¹¹² John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of the Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 126.

¹¹³ Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Billard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 57.

¹¹⁴ Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, 69.

¹¹⁵ Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, 76.

In the New Testament, Revelation 12:9 describes Satan as the snake with the characteristics mentioned in Genesis 3. It provides clear evidence that the snake represents Satan. This reference also fits in Isaiah 27:1 “snake” and Job 26:13 “Leviathan” that is equivalent to Satan.¹¹⁶ The main aim of Satan is to motivate man to sin against the Creator, God. Paul writes, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom 1:18). Paul writes, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).

Both Testaments reveal that as sin increases in the world, God is patiently waiting for repentance, and judging if they fail to accept his compassion. God has been revealing himself throughout human history to show his compassion to his creation, yet the punishment of sin also increases.

Grace: God’s Initiative

God’s initiative to save humanity is not random. God’s plan to save the human race demonstrates how much he loves his creation. Genesis 3:14–16 narrates how God himself takes action against sin. Through his action, God introduces the “curse” to the world, which is the terrible opposite of blessing.¹¹⁷

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:14–16).

¹¹⁶ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 84.

¹¹⁷ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 79.

God announced the curse on man because of sin. However, he also states that the woman's offspring shall bruise the serpent's head, a promise of God's future action to save sinners (Gen 3:15). Here, "Yahweh God starts with the woman herself; then moves to her offspring—in other words, to all humanity."¹¹⁸ Isaiah prophesizes, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14). Isaiah envisioned the greater picture of God's promise of salvation that is going to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is Immanuel.

In the gospel of Matthew, the evangelist writes that Mary will bear a son, who is to be named "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). The Greek name Ἰησοῦς and in Hebrew *Yehushua/Yeshua* means "Yahweh saves."¹¹⁹ Whatever humans do, they are utterly unable to satisfy God's standards of righteousness (Rom 3:11–12). As a result, mankind falls under God's righteous judgment, and is unable to save themselves. Man needs the gracious initiative and sovereign action of God. Those who were the objects of God's wrath, have in Christ received God's love and mercy of forgiveness.¹²⁰ This is accomplished by God sending his own son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sins (cf. John 3:16). He sent his only son to die for the world so that humanity can reclaim what was lost in the garden of Eden. On the cross, Jesus experienced one of the cruelest forms of execution and the most shame-filled punishment of antiquity.¹²¹ Paul writes that "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Adam introduced sin that led the

¹¹⁸ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 79.

¹¹⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 77.

¹²⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 80.

¹²¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Introduction and Survey: Jesus and the Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 346.

human race to death, but Jesus the Son of God, his obedience unto death gives eternal life. The work that Christ has done is through his death on the cross, he has rescued us, revealing himself and overcoming Satan.¹²² That act leads humans to reconciliation with the Creator God (Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 5:18).

The Bible also reveals that Satan, who caused Adam and Eve to fall, will be defeated. The book of Revelation teaches that there will be a final battle between God's son, Christ, and Satanic forces. In this war, Christ will defeat Satan and punish him. Revelation 12:7–9, 21:8, and 20:10 declare that Satan is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire, everlasting death. After these events, God's beautiful creation will be restored as God had designed at the beginning (Gen 1–2; Rev 22).

Grace Is Available to Everyone

Since its revelation, God's grace has not been hidden from particular people or groups. God created everything perfectly and beautifully; that proves that he is not partial to any creation. However, sin caused humanity to fall from God. The fallen man has a desperate condition as he cannot save himself. Sin separated the creatures from the Creator, they need God's grace, his initiative and sovereign action. God's grace is an unmerited gift for humans (Eph 2:8–10). God, out of his holy love, sent his son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for sinners which "is heart of the Cross of Christ."¹²³

Jesus invited people and said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30). Through this invitation, Jesus reveals the truth that weary

¹²² Stott, *The Cross of the Christ*, 167.

¹²³ Stott, *The Cross of the Christ*, 167.

people who seek him will come and rest in him. Jesus invites those who are fighting, struggling and filled with the anxiety of daily life. People are waiting for God's deliverance and suffering from humans made religious demand to rest upon him. Here, Jesus's promise of rest includes both present and future relations with God and the eternal rest in heaven will be guaranteed.¹²⁴ All man has to do is to believe in Jesus and enter that eternal rest (Heb 4:3). Stott affirms "faith is the humble trust with which we receive it for ourselves."¹²⁵ As God invites man, they should accept God's free gift of salvation, which comes after believing the gospel. Believing the gospel has a future gift of deliverance from judgment and the wrath of God.¹²⁶ Confessing Jesus publicly saves sinners because the gospel has the power to save sinners (Rom 1:16).

Once sinners accept Christ, they will be free from the bondage of sin, and be anew believers in Christ, free from the eternal death (Eph 2:1–3). In Christ, they are made alive, exalted and seated in the heavenly realm.¹²⁷ Paul then asserts that "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). Once a man receives this undeserved grace, he should walk "in good works, which God has eternally planned for them to do."¹²⁸

Hindu Teaching on Eternal Life: Union with Brahman

Moksha in Hinduism is the liberation from recycles of rebirth leading one's soul to eternal union with Brahman. The ultimate aim of life in Hinduism is the full

¹²⁴ Osborne, *Matthew*, 442.

¹²⁵ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 73.

¹²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 64.

¹²⁷ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 83.

¹²⁸ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 85.

realization of Brahman-consciousness. This realization and unity with Brahman are the foundational goals in Hinduism. This realization, or moksha, is a form of eternal life. However, “before this can be fully attained, the soul must be liberated from the mass of particular interests and petty wishes and self-born illusions which weigh it down and hide from it the beatific vision.”¹²⁹ Hinduism does not believe there is only one way to get moksha, or union with Brahman. Within the Hindu tradition, some sects emphasize three paths. (1) Bhakti Yoga (devotion), (2) Karma Yoga (action), and (3) Jnana Yoga (wisdom).¹³⁰

The one who chooses Bhakti Yoga, to be in union with Brahman, chooses one of the gods that is a manifestation or avatar of Brahman, namely Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna or other gods. In Rig-Veda, two gods—Agni and Soma, are significantly close to mankind. They are mediators between men and other gods. Agni is more specifically the god of sacrificial fire who receives offerings to the gods and conveys them heavenward through the smoke. Adherents believe that “Soma is the divinized plant of ‘nondeath’ (amarta), or immortality, whose juices are ritually extracted in the *soma* sacrifice, a central feature of many Vedic and Brahmanic rituals.”¹³¹ By pleasing and meditating on these gods, one may reach to Brahman.

The one who chooses the path of Karma Yoga (action) has to live a selfless life. The devotee may opt for rigid self-discipline, self-restraint, justice, or service to oneself that considers his/her form of worship.¹³² Doing these actions, without expecting reward, the devotees may attain Brahman.

¹²⁹ Pratt, *India and Its Faiths*, 92.

¹³⁰ Jagannathan, *Hinduism*, 69.

¹³¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 5:338.

¹³² Jagannathan, *Hinduism*, 78.

Jnana Yoga path is the most difficult one to practice because it requires devotees to acquire spiritual enlightenment that achieves intuitive intellect. This wisdom comes from the Vedas, the Bathgate Gita, and other sacred texts. Only the Brahmin are able to acquire wisdom and knowledge because by birth they are the ones who are responsible to study and interpret these sacred Hindu texts. To obtain wisdom and knowledge, the devotee submits to a Guru for help. For this purpose, such a Guru has to establish himself as a Brahman who would guide them through all his doubts. Then, devotees practice undivided meditation on the Absolute Brahman.

Christian Teaching on Eternal Life Through Jesus Christ

God's people experience eternal life through Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 22), which John Frame defines as "life without end, in fellowship with the eternal God."¹³³ This is acquired through Christ's sacrificial death for sins (Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 5:17; cf. John 5:13). Accepting Christ and fellowshiping with him leads to the becoming body of Christ [Church] and as well eternal life.¹³⁴ This action needs obedience, which leads man to eternal life (John 3:16). God's expression of love is seen through the giving of his only Son Jesus Christ. The purpose of giving his son is that "all who believe in him might not be destroyed but have eternal life." Jesus Christ, God's only son, obediently fulfills the Father's mission. Here, the mission of Son also is the mission of God, and the mission field is the world that has darkness. Yet, Christ's mission made possible for human relationships with the father to be restored and reconciled. Edward W. Klink III asserts this way:

¹³³ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 553.

¹³⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 685.

For it is in the deepest depth of sin that God’s love in the form of the cross of Jesus Christ makes the most sense. It is in darkness that light is most necessary and most magnificent. Ultimately, then, it was love that made God engage and counter humanity’s sinful, self-righteous challenge. God did not leave us to ourselves but came to us, extended himself to us in the form of his Son, and gave newness of life.¹³⁵

Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:28–29). Jesus promised that only he can give his followers eternal life. Paul writes, “for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). This gift of eternal life can neither be destroyed nor can anyone take them.¹³⁶ This gift of eternal life belongs to Christ alone. Paul calls that eternal life, which Jesus gives to saints, is glorious hope they inherit (Eph 1:18). God, the Holy Spirit seals this hope for protection. It is guaranteed inheritance until we possess it on the day of glory (Eph 1:13–14). He gives to those who belong to him. As a good shepherd, he always watches over his loved ones.

Above is a summary of essential Christian beliefs as held by evangelical Christianity. This basic worldview is designed to equip the gospel presenters to encounter Nepali Hindu adherence. The next section will highlight Hindu teachings with which the gospel presenters should be aware of.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted Christian and Hinduism teachings. The concept of God in Hinduism is complex because adherents have a different perception and understanding of God. One can be a Hindu and claim to be monotheistic, polytheistic,

¹³⁵ Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 208.

¹³⁶ Klink, *John*, 478.

and even pantheistic. As a monotheistic religion, Hinduism, views Absolute Brahman as sole God, yet he is not transcendent or immanent. He is actionless. He is the first one and the creator, yet does not control the universe, but becomes like a creature. Brahman sees nothing, wishes nothing, needs nothing, does nothing, and there is no need to worship him.¹³⁷ Rather, Brahman is seen as imitating the created order, with him described as an animal or as a man. Brahman's manifestation with created materials in the universe shows that the faith is Pantheistic. Therefore, Hinduism is pantheism that treats "the divine in material terms, making God merely the sum of all things that are."¹³⁸ Brahman's association with created elements that include food, air, wind, and matters are strong evidence of pantheism. Hinduism can also be construed as polytheism. Believing in one Brahman and his manifestation in various gods and goddesses leads Hinduism to be a polytheistic faith. Adherents view that in the existence the Absolute, which is Braham, manifestants in many gods, goddess, and human forms. The contemporary Hindu's gods, which sometimes are called Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) are rivals and battle each other. Hindu deities are like humans who enjoy pleasure, romance and emotional changes. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva have their own wives and beget children. Within these gods, none "succeeded in rising to the supreme position of creator and sustainer of the universe. There is none within the pantheon of Hinduism that can be called supreme. None became identified with One Being who was felt to emanate to sustain the manifold."¹³⁹

Hinduism believes and practices self-born Brahman as the cause of creation.

¹³⁷ James Bissett Pratt, *India and Its Faiths: A Traveler's Record* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), 80.

¹³⁸ Pratt, *India and Its Faiths*, 75.

¹³⁹ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, 40.

His manifestation through deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva plays a role in creation. However, they cheat and fight to elevate themselves to rule. Brahma, who is supposed to be a creator, is abandoned by devotees for his immoral relationship with Saraswati, his daughter. In Hinduism, humans are created in the caste system, by the gods. Only the Brahmin, a priestly class, have a duty solely to do all ritual ceremonies. Sin in Hinduism is ignorance of Vedas, defying caste systems as Manu instructed. Karma is action and result in moksha. Those who fail to do karma will be recycled by rebirth. Therefore, one has to do all actions that include devotion, karma, and acquiring wisdom that lead to eternal life which is the reunion with Brahman.

Christian teaching affirms that God is the sole author of creation. He created the universe and rules over it. Everything that God created is good and glorifies him. God spoke the word, and everything existed (John 1:1-3). He created man and woman in his image with the unique purpose of representing God to the creation. God blessed them and told them to be fruitful, multiply, and rule over God's creation. Christianity claims that God is holy. Unlike Hindu deities, the God of the Bible does not need any companions or spouses to enjoy pleasure like humans or animals. He is delighted and God lacks nothing. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and full of compassion. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, he promised that one day he would redeem fallen humans by sending his son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to live like other humans but never sinned. Instead, Jesus died on the cross to break every bondage of sin. Those who accept the work of Christ become sons, daughters, and priests. In the present, when they need it, believers can approach God without any other mediator. Further, accepting Christ leads to eternal life in heaven, which is never-ending life with God.

CHAPTER 4
MISSIONAL APPROACH APPLIED TO CONTEMPORARY
NEPALI HINDU CONTEXTS

Philosophers argue that Hinduism is not for intellectual curiosity or vain speculation, but is a guide to the path of life and spiritualizes human existence.¹ The last chapter demonstrated that Hinduism is hard to define; it has no sole divinity, no single scripture, and no one founding guru. Brahman, the “main god,” is viewed as the absolute consciousness and supreme being, yet is not accessible to human thought. He has manifested in various forms and is personified with creation—the sun, moon, heaven, waters, and other Hindu deities. Their manifestation and imitation of creation illustrate Hinduism as a pantheistic faith.² Lacking a sole religious text, adherents may choose one text as sacred Scripture and ignore another, leading them to choose and follow many different paths for moksha while rejecting others.³

Investigating creation, the creator, Brahma, who is a manifestation of Brahman, does not provide a meaningful way of life in the present and future hope. At creation, he divides humans into four casts; this prejudiced division by the creator leads to adherents living with fear and confusion. The ancient *varnashrama-dharma* divides Hindu society into four classes and four life stages. This class division is as noted: the priestly class, *Brahmin*; the warrior class, *Kshatriya*; the farmer and merchant class,

¹ A. Shah, *Glimpse of World Religion* (Bangalore: Jaico Publishing House, 1957), 11–12.

² Herbert Ellinger, *Hinduism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 10.

³ Madeleine Biarreau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, French Studies in South Asian Culture and Society 3 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 25–30.

Vaishyas; and the servant class, subservient to every class, *Sudra*. The four stages of life in Hindus are the student life, *Brama Chari*; marriage, *Grihastha*; withdrawal from society, *Vanaprastha*; and the hermit sage or the homeless renouncer, *Sannyasi*.⁴ The *varna*, the class division in the Hindu social life system, is controversial. To be a *sudra* is to acknowledge and blame the karma accrued in past lives. They are obligated to serve members of the castes that are above them.⁵ Their duty is inescapable. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna instructs Arjuna that “a man achieves perfection by containing himself with his own works; hear how much a man, intent upon his own work, finds that perfection.”⁶ Those living with an identity of being a lower caste live with inequality and unjustly impact communities. Horst Georg Pöhlmann suggested that the caste system in Hinduism has done much injustice, even among the adherents.⁷ They live in anger and feel insulted by their community’s rejection of basic humanity. There have been movements from various levels to remove the caste system in order to bring equality and justice in marriage, worship, and workplaces. Nonetheless, it has been unsuccessful because the division is “fixed as an all-time” by its creator.⁸

In Hinduism, the idea of reincarnation is to save saints. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna, as a chariot driver for Arjuna, where Krishna is viewed as a reincarnation of Vishnu, said,

⁴ Rsamandala Das, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism: A Comparative Guide to Hindu History and Philosophy, Its Traditions and Practices, Rituals and Beliefs, with More Than 470 Magnificent Photographs* (Cambridgeshire, UK: Anness, 2019), 177.

⁵ Shah, *Glimpse of World Religion*, 55.

⁶ W. J. Johnson, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79.

⁷ Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Encounters with Hinduism: A Contribution to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1995), 78.

⁸ Bal Krishna Sharma, *The Origin of Caste System in Hinduism and Its Relevance in the Present Context* (Kathmandu: Samdan Publishers, 1999), 6.

I have passed through many births, and so have you, Arjuna. I know them all; you do not, Incinerator of the foe. Although I am unborn and have an eternal self, I am the lord of beings; by controlling my material nature, I come into being by means of my own incomprehensible power. Whenever there is a falling away from the true law and an upsurge of unlawfulness, then, Bharata, I emit myself. I come into being age after age to protect the virtues and to destroy evil-doers, to establish a firm basis for true law.⁹

Vishnu is viewed as a liberator. His manifestation in different forms and at different times is to save only saints.

In Hinduism, the time after death is uncertain and filled with fear of an endless chain of rebirth. Therefore, ancient Hinduism's text recognizes that "works, wisdom, and devotion" is how to overcome the fear of the endless chain of karma that leads to union with Brahman.¹⁰ The challenge is which god one must believe in and worship: Is it Brahma? Shiva? Vishnu? Or their consorts? Or one of the many or all deities?

When encountering Hindus, the gospel presenters see both receptivity and reservation. Hinduism is an all-encompassing religion, and everyone is "religious." The Hindu deities' icons and images are plastered everywhere: cars, rickshaws, motorbikes, shops, supermarkets, offices, and the doorpost of homes. Hinduism as a faith is astonishing, with more than three thousand years of history. It survived the invasion of Buddhism and Islam; later British foreign rule, and industrialization.¹¹ Brahmin priests serve in ancient temples, open daily from dawn, to perform rites for the community. Adherents visit holy temples and walk around, touching shrines of deities, putting a spot of red powder (Tikka) on their forehead, touching holy cows, or celebrating the festival naturally. Faith is a daily compulsion. When an unfortunate thing happens in their daily life, family, or community, adherents call upon one of their deities, go to a temple to

⁹ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 19.

¹⁰ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 240.

¹¹ Pöhlmann, *Encounters with Hinduism*, 2–3.

perform a rite, offer sacrifice or other offerings, or pray and vow to deities. Prayer is a familiar ground for reaching Hindus. The gospel presenter can offer prayer, and usually, Hindus accept.

There is resistance, however. Trusting only a single deity, Christ, the savior, and eternal life troubles Hindus' thoughts. They ask, "What happens if I accept one God and reject all other gods?" Neglecting Shiva (destroyer) or Vishnu (sustainer) or their consorts Shakti (power), Durga, Laxmi (female deity for wealth), or Sarasati (source of knowledge) may harm them. Hindus also pledge many religious vows to other deities; if they fail to fulfill their vows, they believe they will have misfortune.

In Acts 17:17–18, Paul encountered the Athenian religious groups of Stoics and Epicureans, similar to Hinduism. They first conversed with Paul and later resisted, mocking him in Acts 17:29. As Paul reasoned with Stoics and Epicureans in the marketplace, Paul experienced mixed reactions. Luke writes, "Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. Moreover, some said, 'What does this babbling wish to say? Others said he seemed to be a preacher of foreign divinities. Because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection' (Acts 17:18). Knowing the Athenians' cultural context, religious beliefs, and history, Paul effectively communicated the good news to religious groups in Athens. Paul's witness to Athenians shows that he began to build bridges between two separate religious worldviews: a pantheistic Athenian and his one true creator god.

This chapter aims to apply Paul's gospel approach to Athenians, delineated in chapter 2 and briefly discussed. Next, as investigated in chapter 3, a common bridge will be made between Hinduism and Christianity. From there, the good news of Jesus Christ will be presented in the modern Nepalese Hindu context.

Paul's Approach to the Athenians

Paul's preaching in Thessalonica forced him to leave the city, fearing for his safety. He arrived in Berea, where the same jealous Jews from Thessalonica arrived, agitated by Paul's preaching in Berea, and forced him to leave the city. Paul left his two coworkers—Silas and Timothy, in Berea to complete unfinished mission work there. Paul was taken to the sea and then to Athens. Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak write that when Paul arrived in Athens, he “did not originally have Athens on his list of places to go to and proclaim the gospel.”¹² Paul probably wanted to go further south to Corinth. In Athens, as Paul was waiting for his companions Silas and Timothy, he visited the city. As he toured the city, “his spirit was provoked within him as he was in a city that was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Paul was faithful to his calling. He reasoned with the Athenian Jews, cross-cultural Stoics, and Epicureans. Paul knew his calling, his worldview, and the worldview of Stoicism and Epicurean philosophers. When the Athenians were “challenged to explain the new foreign gods that the Athenians thought he was proclaiming, he brought together his knowledge of Scripture and Jewish traditions and theology with his practices of Gentile idolators philosophers.”¹³

Paul's audiences in Athens were—Jews, god-fearers, Epicureans, and Stoics. Paul approached them carefully, building common bridges between their belief and his Judaism grounded faith in Christ, centered around cultural context and basic religious systems.

Athenian Culture and Religion

In his book *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, Craig Storti argues, “because of

¹² Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 27.

¹³ Copan and Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 13.

cultural differences—different, deeply held beliefs and instincts about what is natural, normal, right, and good—cross—cultural interactions are subject to all manner of confusion, misunderstanding, and misinterpreting.”¹⁴ Reaching a cross-cultural audience only knowing their basic worldview often leads to success. In Paul’s case, he understood that the Athenians were culturally diverse and religiously pantheistic. Therefore, Paul approached the Athenians with their cultural and basic religious view.

Athenians as culturally diverse. Culture is not private. It has to be shared and adopted. God is part of the culture in his wonderful creation. He has given each people group a unique culture. It is defined “as a group’s whole way of life that is learned, adopted, shared, and integrated. It could also be called the pattern of this world, the way of life we learn to be conformed to through enculturation.”¹⁵

When Paul visited Athens, he encountered people from a multicultural ethnic background—Athenians and foreigners. Acts 17:21 states, “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” The Athenians welcomed Paul because Athenians would accept any cultural background from around the world. Athens was full of multicultural people, artists, and architectural and philosophical schools that attracted many visitors, writers, and philosophers. Athens’s past fame of memory and current reputation in Paul’s days were significant.

Paul was also a Roman citizen, born and raised in Tarsus in Cilicia and educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul used his multicultural background approach as he preached the one true God. His use of cultural approaches to diverse

¹⁴ Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2007), 25.

¹⁵ Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 43.

Athenians respected and raised curiosity that allowed Paul to explain more about his one true God. They said, “You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean” (Acts 17:20). Paul caused curiosity in Athenians’ minds.

Athenians as Religious Pluralists. Paul knew that Athens had the reputation of the leading city of ancient Greece for its philosophy from the sixth to the fourth century BC. They were pantheistic and would not believe that “the world was created and directed by a personal supreme (absolute) being.”¹⁶ Being the home of Socrates (470–399 BC), his philosophy inspired the schools of Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics. Socrates’s philosophy was viewed as a way of life, and his character gave the ancient Greek world prestige and still profoundly influenced Western philosophy. Plato (427–347 BC) also was born into a noble Athenian family. He founded his school, the Academy, which still impacts contemporary Western philosophy.¹⁷ Another influential philosopher was Aristotle (384–322 BC), the son of the physician to the Macedonian ruler. Epicurus (342–271 BC) developed the philosophy of atomism, suggesting that the universe comprises only two things: bodies and the void.¹⁸ He embraced Athens as his hometown. In addition, Zeno of Citium (336–265 BC), the son of a merchant from Cyprus, was not born in Athens but made it his home. He discovered philosophy by reading Xenophon’s description of Socrates in his *Memorabilia*.¹⁹ His

¹⁶ John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2015), 48.

¹⁷ Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 1.

¹⁸ Cahn explains that Epicurus would argue “that body exist is a matter of observation. The existence of the void or empty space is necessary in order for bodies to move. Bodies of visible size are compounded out of bodies of invisible size, namely, atoms. Nothing can come into existence out of nothing, and nothing can pass into nothingness. Therefore what exists always has existed and always will exist.” Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 325.

¹⁹ Walter Kaufmann and Forrest L. Baird, eds., *Philosophic Classics*, vol. 1, *Ancient Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Paramount, 1994), 399.

school of philosophy in the painted porch established the school of the Stoics. Zeno believed in divine signs. As Walter Kaufmann and Forrest Baird assert, “He is said to have committed suicide after breaking his toe on a rock, believing the incident to be a sign of God’s will.”²⁰ His philosophy was divided into logic, physics, and ethics.²¹ Zeno’s philosophy went beyond the Hellenic border and flourished in Rome, influencing Seneca, Epictetus, and even Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Athenians, however, were theistic, believing in divinity; none of the philosophers believed in the God of the Bible, nor were they associated with a theistic worldview.²² Paul knew that without believing in one true God, no one has life because the God of the Bible is absolute and personal. The one true God is the source of everything good and sovereign.

Monotheism as a Worldview

Paul understood that Athenians were theistic. Nonetheless, they did not have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, whom he was preaching. So, Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews still looking for the Messiah. The Jews had failed to accept Christ as the promised Messiah. In Athens, some devout persons were worshipers of gods, not one true God. Paul saw that the city was full of idols, which provoked his heart (Acts 17:16).

Religious Epicureans regularly used to meet in the marketplace. They held that “the goal of life is detachment, a life lived as free from pain and stress as possible.

²⁰ Kaufmann and Baird, *Ancient Philosophy*, 399.

²¹ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 25.

²² Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 48.

Epicureans were materialists, believing in no life after this life.”²³ They viewed God and death as an atom. Whatever existed is always there, made up of tiny atoms. Therefore, there is no need to fear God; God needs nothing from a human. So, the goal of humans is to enjoy pleasure and happiness. Since God is like an atom, there is no need to be fearful, even after death.

Stoics also meet regularly in the marketplace. Stoics were pantheistic and “believed that divine principle in life (the logos) is to be found in all nature, including humans.”²⁴ They were opposite to the Epicurean view of pleasure. They encourage safeguarding morality and freeing oneself from a desire for pleasure. Instead, action was essential. If a man fails to do a good action, his action contradicts the natural law. Moreover, good action was always good.

After bridging between Athenian religions and his Judaism-rooted Christian faith, Paul presented the good news. He argued that the one true God is both Creator and sovereign. God is the source of every good thing, and he is a life-giver. God does not overlook the ignorance of the past. The work of Christ is sufficient for salvation. Fallen men have no hope without Christ. Christ’s work at the cross is the good news, but requires repentance. Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak write on the themes they see: God as Creator (Acts 17:24), God as life-giver to humans (Acts 17:25–26), the witness of God in creation (Acts 17:25, 27), their previous ignorance (Acts 17:30), and a call to repentance (Acts 17:30).²⁵ Luke ends Paul’s preaching narration: “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. However, others said, “We will hear you

²³ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 209.

²⁴ Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 209.

²⁵ Copan and Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 24.

again about this.” So, Paul went out from their midst. Nevertheless, “some men joined him and believed, among whom were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17:32–34).

Christian Approaches to Nepali Hinduism

Protestant Christianity in Nepal is a recent development, introduced in the last seventy years. However, the earliest missionaries to Nepal were from the Capuchin Order of the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholics were looking to preach to the Tibetan people. They tried various routes through the Himalayas to get into the mysterious Tibetan land.²⁶ They discovered that Nepal’s route to Tibet was better. However, the missionaries had to receive entry permits from the local rulers of Kathmandu Valley to walk through their territory. After stopping in the Kathmandu valley for permission to pass by, Capuchin missionaries explored the missional opportunity in Nepal. Jonathan Lindell writes, “The Europeans wrote in their journals that they arrived according to their Gregorian calendar on the 21st of February, AD 1707.”²⁷ So, “the first missionaries came to Kathmandu, stayed a few weeks, and departed for Lhasa (1707).” Then some eight years later, three came and received permission to reside in Kathmandu. Their numbers continued until they were expelled in 1769 because they were suspected of being spies, causing plagues, and being religiously inauspicious.²⁸ The local Christians were given two options: (1) give up their new Catholic faith and revert to their old religion, stay in the country, or (2) leave the country. Naturally, they chose the second option. As a result, a group of fifty-four Nepalese Christians, fourteenth families, left Nepal for Bettiah,

²⁶ Cindy L. Perry, *Nepal Around the World: Emphasizing Nepali Christians of the Himalayas* (Kathmandu: Ekta Books Distributors, 1997), 30.

²⁷ Jonathan Lindell, *Nepal and the Gospel of God* (New Delhi: United Mission to Nepal, 1979), 16.

²⁸ Lindell, *Nepal and the Gospel of God*, 16.

North Bihar, India.²⁹

Since then, the Nepalese had to wait to hear the gospel of Jesus for almost two hundred years. In God’s timing, Perry writes, “it was not until the revolution of 1950 that a new regime was brought to power. New policies concerning national development opened the door for both the Nepalese Christians to return home and foreign agencies to enter the country.”³⁰ Catholic Christians had an opportunity to enter Nepal, not to proselytize Hindus but to educate the bureaucrats’ children. At the same time, in 1952, Protestant Christianity found an opportunity to enter Nepal.³¹ Unlike Roman Catholicism, protestant Christianity had two objectives in mind. First, since Nepal was a closed country and proselyting was prohibited, protestant Christians developed infrastructure strategies to enter Nepal. The missional strategies were based on medical missions, educational missions, social work, and development. Secondly, through this infrastructure strategy, Protestant Christians came to assist and train indigenous Nepali Christians to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, to support them in planting churches, and to raise indigenous national leaders. Since then, protestant Christianity in Nepal has been well-established and growing. Nevertheless, Perry writes, “the fast-growing churches in Nepal were largely unaware of one another’s history and current situation.”³² Jonathan Lindell, an early missionary to Nepal, asserts, “composed of a wide variety of nationalities, denominations, mission, and church traditions, it has for a dozen years

²⁹ Rajendra K. Rongong, *Early Churches in Nepal: An Indigenous Christian Movement Till 1990* (Kathmandu: Ekta Books Distributors, 2012), 26.

³⁰ Roger E. Hedlund, ed., *World Christianity*, vol 3: *South Asia* (Monrovia, CA: A Ministry of World Vision International, 1980), 270.

³¹ Rongong, *Early Churches in Nepal*, 46.

³² Perry, *Nepal Around the World*, ix.

grown steadily in strength, health, work, and fruit.”³³ Today, it is claimed that “two of the most rapidly growing Christian populations in the world are in Asia: Nepal and China.”³⁴

Reflecting on the discussion above, the early mission’s approach to Nepalese Hindus did not involve an intellectual panel discussion in the marketplace. The primary challenge missionaries faced was that conversion from Hinduism to any other religion was legally prohibited in Nepal. Moreover, the government of Nepal still criminalizes conversion, especially targeting Christian minorities. Nevertheless, there is an unseen movement of conversion from the Hindu faith. People are finding hope in Jesus Christ. This section investigates the common concepts that both faiths—Hinduism and Christianity, understand so that the gospel is preached and accepted without confusion.

Hinduism and Christianity: Key Bridges

Hinduism and Christianity have coexisted for nearly two thousand years in South Asia.³⁵ However, the Hindu majority has persistently suppressed the Christian minorities. For example, the U.S. Department of State reported that 761 violent incidents against Christians occurred in India in 2021, including neighborhood skirmishes, targeted killings, and armed assaults.³⁶ Nepalese Hindus are tolerant unlike the radical Hindu movement in India, who find support from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Recently, the U.S. State Department reported that India’s ruling party (BJP) and

³³ Jonathan Lindell, “Nepal: Mission United,” in *Nairobi to Berkley*, ed. Paul Reel (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967), 93.

³⁴ Scott W. Sunquist, *Explorations in Asian Christianity: History, Theology, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2017), 25.

³⁵ Plamthodathil S. Jacob, “Hinduism,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*, ed. Roger E. Hedlund et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:308.

³⁶ Office of International Religious Freedom, “2022 Report on International Religion Freedom: India,” US Department of State, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/>.

other Hindu groups in India continued to pressure politicians in Nepal, particularly the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), to support Nepal's reversion to a Hindu state. The BJP also continues providing money to influential politicians of all parties to advocate Hindu statehood.³⁷ Nevertheless, Christians and Hindus have had no major national religious conflict in Nepal. The main reason is that both faith communities accept Nepalese culture and speak a common language. In addition, both traditions understand the concept of one God, though Hinduism holds both a pantheistic and polytheistic worldview. Further, the terms *sin*, *salvation*, *sacrifice*, *scripture reading*, *devotion*, *works*, and *eternal life* are not foreign to them.

Concept of Monotheism

In Hinduism, the "Truth (Sat) refers to God, the supreme reality. Therefore, God reveals truth and, in essence, God is the founder of religious truth."³⁸ Sitansu S. Chakravarti claims that "Hinduism is a monotheistic religion in which God is believed to have manifested himself or herself in several forms."³⁹ In the Vedic period, Varuna was viewed as "primitive monotheism" because of his supreme nature.⁴⁰ Upanishad credits Brahman as the source of everything and is the ultimate reality of monotheistic views. Taittiriya Upanishad says, "I am the first-born of truth, born before gods, in the navel of the immortal."⁴¹ The Bhagavad Gita, a song of the lord, Brahman, is viewed as the

³⁷ Office of International Religious Freedom, "2022 Report on International Religion Freedom: Nepal," US Department of State, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/>.

³⁸ Jacob, "Hinduism," 1:308.

³⁹ Sitansu S. Chakravarti, "A Diasporic Hindu Creed: Some Basic Features of Hinduism," in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkeley: the University of California Press, 2006), 249.

⁴⁰ Jeaneane Fowler, *Hinduism Belief and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Brighton, MA: Sussex Academic Press, 2016), 72.

⁴¹ Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 193.

ultimate reality where the lord here is Krishna, God on earth. Therefore, “He is Brahman in its ultimate manifest form.”⁴² When Hindus recite the word, *Om*, they are, in short, vocalizing the truth of Absolute Brahma.⁴³

When encountering Hindus, Christians can build a monotheistic bridge⁴⁴ like Paul in Athens. Paul said, “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What, therefore, you worship as unknown; this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). Darrel L. Bock argues that “even in their use of idols, Paul recognizes an attempt to grope after God. He hopes to help the Athenians by what he says. Their idol to the ‘unknown god’ allows Paul to open the door for discussion about the one true God of creation.”⁴⁵ Paul did not pass judgment on the Athenian audience. Instead, he built a bridge from the Athenians’ “unknown god” in Acts 17:23 to the one true God. However, in verse 29, he attaches idolatry to “ignorance.” It is no longer excusable, making it necessary for everyone everywhere to repent.⁴⁶ Christians can wisely bridge both faiths by understanding the concept of God and presenting the one true God, the Creator.

Concept of God Fearers

Hindus are fearers of gods and venerate every deity in their daily lives. However, Hindus’ fear of the gods differs from the Biblical view of the one true

⁴² Fowler, *Hinduism Belief and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 184.

⁴³ Fowler, *Hinduism Belief and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 185.

⁴⁴ When I use the term “bridge” I am not referring to accommodation, however it is a point of contact. Key to all bridges is that the gospel presenter cannot stay on the bridge but must move quickly off the bridge to the clear gospel presentation. Paul mentions the idol to an unknown god, makes connection, and then immediately moves to the God of the bible.

⁴⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 564.

⁴⁶ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 481.

God. Hindus fear that if any deities get angry, they may be punished with wrong karma or an unfavorable future. Knowing this, the Christian approach to Hindus can see how Paul encountered the Athenians as he conversed with God-fearing Greeks in Athens (Acts 17:17). In his Mars Hill speech, he stood up and began saying, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). Paul positively compliments Athenian culture and their religious piety to connect one true God.⁴⁷ Christians’ approach to God-fearing Hindus should be taught that fearing God acknowledges the one true God, the Creator, and how to worship through his son Jesus Christ.

Concept of Sin

The concept of sin in Hinduism is oppositional to the Christian view. In Vedic Hinduism, sinning is either a mistake in the ritual or the moral order.⁴⁸ A man may sin in the dark, but his action may lead Varuna to punish him because such a sin is against the Supreme Varuna. In relation to the caste system, though untouchability is viewed as an immorally and evil practice, adherents cannot change their caste status because it violates Brahman’s order of castes.

The Bhagavad Gita 4:13 says, “‘Brahman,’ the four estates were created by me, divided according to constituents and actions. Although I alone am the one who did this, know that I am an eternal non-actor.”⁴⁹ In Nepal, the law has wiped out the caste system discrimination. However, lower caste people (Dalit) were still prohibited from entering the “twice-born” Hindu homes and does not tolerate marrying into the upper

⁴⁷ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 494.

⁴⁸ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 30.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 20.

caste. This causes them to be filled with anger, frustration, and fear against Brahmin (upper caste) and the Brahmin majority-led government.

Paul approached Athens, and he saw the city was full of idols. Luke narrates, “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Paul knew the second command, “You shall not make for yourself a 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” (Exod 20:4). Paul, however, did not accuse Athenians right away but in later, he proclaimed that God has fixed a day of judgment by a man whom he appointed (Acts 17:31). Later Paul declared that “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24). Chalmer E. Faw asserts that “thus he skillfully summarizes the best in Jewish and Christian thought in language acceptable to the Epicureans: God is self-sufficient.”⁵⁰

Hindus are not looking to hear words such as sin or punishment for their bad karma but loving God and his peace. Many gospel presenters have blamed Hindus for making idols and made judgments immediately without understanding the common view of how Hindus view sin and punishment. When a prostitute woman was brought to Jesus, he did not condemn her (John 8:1–11). Hindus are looking to escape from the bondage of bad karma and many other bondages to find eternal peace. As Christians see them, they are not to condemn Hindus of ignorance toward the true one God but lovingly share God's love and show them through words and living testimony who God is and how they can know Him.

⁵⁰ Chalmer E. Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 195.

Concept of Salvation

The goal of life in Hinduism is moksha, that is, salvation. After the death of a man, “the endless cycle of samsara will be over, and there will be no need to be reincarnated. This can only happen when there is no karma to cause an individual to be reincarnated because there is no egoistic self, no ‘I’ to reap any result.”⁵¹ According to the sacred texts, achieving moksha is complicated and lengthy. Bhagavad Gita 4:8 states, “I come into being age after age, to protect the virtues and to destroy evil-doers, to establish a firm basis for the true law.” In Hinduism, the savior chooses to save the righteous saints only. Gita 5:28 also states, “The wise man, whose senses, mind, and intelligence are controlled, who is wholly intent upon release, whose desire, fear, and anger have vanished, is liberated forever.”⁵² According to the teaching of Hinduism, the wise are twice-born with the privilege to read sacred texts, understand them, follow the scriptures, and enforce them to others. The Bhagavad Gita further says, “Serenity, self-restraint, asceticism, purity, patience, honesty, knowledge, insight, and religious faith are the action of a Brahmin, deriving from his nature” (Gita 18:42).

Karma plays a vital role in achieving moksha. Brhadaranyka Upanishad 4:4–5 states, “If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad.” Further, “A man who is attached goes with his action, to that very place to which his mind and character cling. Reaching the end of his action, of whatever he has done in this world from that world, he returns to this world, back to action . . . Brahman he is, and Brahman he goes.”⁵³ That leads one to union with Brahman, which is moksha or liberation, and the ultimate is achieved. Fowler puts it this way, “But when a person realizes moksha, the atman—the

⁵¹ Fowler, *Hinduism Belief and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 12.

⁵² Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 25.

⁵³ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 165.

part of the individual that is Brahman—merges with Brahman like the river merges into the sea.”⁵⁴

Hindus may receive Christ if one follows Paul’s approach in Athens. Paul concluded his message to the Athenians with four key concepts: forgiveness of sin, repentance for wrongdoing, the judgment of God, and raising the dead. He said, “the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).

Paths to Moksha (Salvation)

Moksha is the goal of Hinduism that is union with Brahman. Bad karma must be avoided to realize a union with Brahman. Hinduism has given four paths that remove the cycle of karma. They are sacrifice, wisdom, devotion, and work. The Christian worldviews of sacrifice, wisdom, devotion, and work make bridges, but Hindu adherents need clarification.

Sacrifice. It is important to note that animal sacrifice is part of Vedic rituals. Sacrifice in Hinduism existed from the Vedic period when the divine Purusha god and man performed the sacrifice.⁵⁵ Hindu deities, which manifested in many forms, accept the sacrifices. In Hindu mythology Shiva Purana mentions that Shiva’s wife, Sati, burnt herself in the sacred fire. When Shiva looked at it, he created the demon Virbhadrā, who

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Hinduism Belief and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 12.

⁵⁵ Trilok Chandra Majupuria and Rohit Kumar Majupuria, *Religions in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Rajni Book Service, 2017), 107.

killed Shiva's father-in-law and destroyed the sacrifice.⁵⁶ Adherents offer sacrifices to deities as acts of worship or ritualistic custom to please divinities. Offering sacrifices means that divinities grant devotees fertility of the soil, prosperity, good life with energy, protection, and redeem them for moksha, etc. Usually, deities accept an offering of goat, buffalo, wheat, ghee, seed, wine, eggs, and so forth. In some cases, it is believed that human sacrifices were offered in Nepal.⁵⁷

There are four essential things in a sacrifice: "(1) offering, (2) fire, (3) utterance and (4) gestures. According to Bhagavat Gita, if a sacrifice is performed without ritual, without food, without offering of wealth to the priest and without piety, it is black sacrifice. The Brihadannyaka Upanishad mentions that one should not offer sacrifice simply to fulfill a wish."⁵⁸ In Vishnu Purana, sacrifices nourished gods and goddesses. Further, Majupuria, "the Taitreya Brahmins mentions, 'O thou limb of the victim now consigned to the fire, thou art the expiation of our sin.'⁵⁹

Connecting to the Christian view, Abel offered a better sacrifice than his brother Cain in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. John H. Walton argues that "blood is usually used in the sacrificial system to accomplish 'atonement.'"⁶⁰ God accepted Noah's sacrifice and blessed him. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience. God instructed Moses to write down rules for sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifice included bull, lamb, goat, pigeon, or dove.

⁵⁶ Lata Seth, ed., *Ved Vayasa's The Shiva Purana* (New Delhi: Dreamland Publications, 2017), 44–50, Kindle.

⁵⁷ Majupuria and Majupuria, *Religions in Nepal*, 110.

⁵⁸ Majupuria and Majupuria, *Religions in Nepal*, 104.

⁵⁹ Majupuria and Majupuria, *Religions in Nepal*, 106.

⁶⁰ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 262.

The book of Leviticus provides five types of sacrifice—the burnt offering, grain offering, fellowship offering, peace offering, and voluntary.⁶¹ The burnt offering is an act of worship and unintentional sin (Lev 1). People are to offer a bull, a bird, or an unblemished ram. The grain offering is offered, which is voluntary (Lev 2). The grain offering is an act of thanksgiving for God’s provision and unmerited blessing. The first fruit of the harvest, cake or bread from grain oil, sat, or refined flour, is to be offered. The fellowship offering, also called the peace offering, was offered for thanksgiving and fellowship (Lev 3). The peace offering is also called the vow offering or the freewill offering. The voluntary offering describes Leviticus 1—3 as a “soothing aroma to Yahweh.”⁶²

The sin offering and guilt offering are mandatory in the Old Testament.⁶³ The sin offering is an act of atoning for sin and cleansing (Lev 4)—the sin offering, whose purpose was to expiate specific sin—the purification and the reparation offering.⁶⁴ The guilt offering is offered for unintentional atonement of sin (Lev 5). Joe M. Sprinkle explains, “the guilt offering is a means to address against holy things, whether done by directly desecrating a holy thing or by swearing a false exculpatory oath, thus desecrating God’s holy name.”⁶⁵

Old Testament sacrifices were aimed to foreshadow what God would do through his son Jesus Christ. The purpose of Jesus’s mission was a “redemptive

⁶¹ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Leviticus, and Numbers*, Teach the Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 24.

⁶² John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1992), 3.

⁶³ Sprinkle, *Leviticus, and Numbers*, 24.

⁶⁴ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 4.

⁶⁵ Sprinkle, *Leviticus, and Numbers*, 38.

mission.”⁶⁶ God gave up his only son to die as a sacrifice to pay for sin. Paul writes, “and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:24–25).

Redemption means deliverance, primarily freedom from the penalty of sin, forgiveness, and empowering at present. It extends redemption to the believer’s body; this redemption fully realized includes resurrection to immortality.⁶⁷ “For the death he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives to God” (Rom 6:10). “Christ’s resurrection broke forever the tyranny of death . . . The cross was sin’s final move; the resurrection was God’s checkmate. The game is over. Sin is forever defeated.”⁶⁸ Therefore, the author of Hebrew writes, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb 13:15). Christ, the mediator, has made believers come before God in worship. Believers come to offer spiritual sacrifice and a sacrifice of good deeds. In Christian belief, God took the initiative; humans are no longer required to sacrifice to God. Christ's sacrifice has paid all penalties of sin once and for all. That is the good news.

Wisdom. Hinduism holds that through knowledge, sin can be removed.

Bhagavad Gita 4:36 states, “Through knowledge, even the sin of the most evil of all people can be obliterated.” Gita says, 4:39 “Restraining his sense, a man of faith who is devoted to knowledge attains it. Moreover, having attained knowledge, he rapidly achieves supreme peace.” In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna, as the reincarnation of Vishnu,

⁶⁶ Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 202.

⁶⁷ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 184–85.

⁶⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 152.

explains to the warrior Arjuna, “The wise man, whose sense, mind, and intelligence are controlled, whose wholly intent is upon release, whose desire, fear, and anger have vanished, is liberated forever.”⁶⁹ However, obtaining wisdom in Hinduism is limited to the Brahmin caste. The Law Code of Manu states that a Brahmin “must never recite indistinctly or in the presence of Sudras.”⁷⁰ The path to moksha through wisdom is only available to very few and privileged. Due to these restrictions against Sudras, “mass movements of Dalit in India have occurred, in part of defiance of the oppressive nature of Hinduism for those not in a schedule caste. As a result, Christian Dalits can break out of the cycle of poverty, attend school, and become a teacher, pastor, or doctor.”⁷¹

Christian teaching says, “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rom 10:13). Peter writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Every follower of Christ is part of the royal priesthood, “that they are a priesthood and that they belong to the king.”⁷² They are separated for God’s work. Their priestly duty is to offer spiritual sacrifice and to announce God’s works. James 1:5 also talks about wisdom. F. F. Bruce argues that this wisdom means Law or Torah.⁷³ This wisdom or law was needed to defeat the wiles of the evil spirit in man. Wisdom is a gift from on high, which man cannot buy; its sole source is God. God is the giver who grants “wisdom to men not just for the asking

⁶⁹ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 25.

⁷⁰ Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Law Code of Manu* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 72.

⁷¹ Sunquist, *Explorations in Asian Christianity*, 22.

⁷² Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 92.

⁷³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Hebrews*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 48.

but also without chiding a man for his previous sins, many of which the man may not even know he has committed.”⁷⁴ Christ himself is God’s wisdom and relation. Bruce asserts, “For him the language is descriptive of a man who had lived and died in Palestine a few decades previously, but who nonetheless was the eternal Son and supreme revelation of God.”⁷⁵ The Bible allows everyone to have access to God’s wisdom which is the Bible. The Bible encourages God’s wisdom to be meditated daily, making his followers prosperous and successful (Josh 1:8). In the Bible, God, through Christ, has revealed his full wisdom.

Devotion or *Bhakti*. In Hinduism, the divine is present everywhere in the universe or is the inhabitant of the universe, from the stars to the trees. This means, divinity is easily approached. Fowler defines, “*Bhakti* is derived from the Sanskrit root *bhaj* which has wide connotations of, for example, to share, divide, apportion, receive, participate in, experience, be part of it. *Bhaj* can also mean to love, be devoted to, choose, serve, adore, honor, worship, and the like.”⁷⁶ Unlike wisdom, *Bhakti* is an inclusive path available for anyone regardless of gender and caste and is seen as the quickest way to *moksha*. Through *Bhakti*, one can offer love to God and experience the love of God in return. *Bhakti* is total surrender to Brahman. Svetasvatara Upanishad 6:23 states, “only in a man who has the deepest love for God, and who shows the same love toward his teacher as toward God, do these points declared by Noble One shine forth.” Other Hindu mythology, such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, portrayed the love of *bhakta* (devotee) for God. In the Bhagavad Gita 9:29, Krishna, in human form, states to Arjuna

⁷⁴ James B Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 56.

⁷⁵ Bruce, *The Epistle of Hebrews*, 48.

⁷⁶ Fowler, *Hinduism Beliefs & Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 216.

as warrior *bhakta*, “I am the same with regard to all creatures; I feel neither aversion nor affection. But whoever shares in me with devotion, they are in me, and I am in them.”⁷⁷

Gita offered devotees their final goal, union with Brahman, through the way of bhakti.

The gospel presenter should be able to make a connection to Hindus that Christian tradition emphasizes daily devotion to one true Creator, God. The devotion includes daily walking with God, praying, reading and meditating on the Scripture, living Christ-like, and helping others. In Genesis, Enoch walked with God (Gen 5:22). Andrew E. Steinmann argues that “the form of the Hebrew verb signifies that Enoch walked back and forth—that is, he continually and habitually walked with God.”⁷⁸ Christian devotion also includes prayer. Abraham prayed to God. The Bible teaches that “Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife, and his female slaves so they could have children again” (Gen 22:17). The book of Psalms is full of prayer and devotion to the one true God.

Jesus taught his disciple how to pray to God (Matt 6:9–13). Jesus’s life of devotion to the Father is the model for Christians, and then, furthermore, the New Testament focuses us on Jesus.⁷⁹ The apostle Paul urged that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people who are good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior (1 Tim 2:1–3). Paul urges the church to be devoted to praying so the gospel moves forward without hindrances. That also implies that the world sees the Christian character of believers; not only will the gospel go forward in an orderly but

⁷⁷ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 43.

⁷⁸ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 81.

⁷⁹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earlier Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 4.

peaceful society, but also it will be recognized as genuine.⁸⁰ God in heaven is praised and worshiped in heaven (Rev 5:1–14; 19:1–8).

Work or *Dharma*. The word *Dharma* is commonly used in the daily life of Hindus. The term *Dharma* is used both ways—religion and duty. For example, *Hindu Dharma* is understood as Hindu religion. The term *Dharma* also is used as good work that leads to union with Brahma. *Dharma* in Hinduism is defined as “caste duties and obligation.”⁸¹ Primarily, *Dharma* means “what is right.”⁸² The opposite of *Dharma* is *adharma*, or not doing right. The Hindu scriptures (Vedas, Gita, etc.) provide the source of right or wrong. The Bhagavad Gita 18:24 instructs, “Scripture must therefore be your authority for determining what is to be done and what is not to be done. Having understood the prescribed teachings, you should perform actions here and now.”⁸³ *Dharma* is an eternal way because if each caste correctly performs their assigned duties, they will attain good karma. This means devotees from the lower caste will be born into higher existence or near final union with Brahman. In the Gita:

dharma is used to refer both to the borderline of human society and to each person’s duty to uphold that order through every action. . . . Each person, no matter how low born or how menial a social task he or she may inherit according to caste birth, has a fundamental obligation to perform his or her scribed social function for the welfare of society as a whole.⁸⁴

In Bhagavat Gita 18:48, Krishna, as a manifestation of Vishnu, says, “Son of

⁸⁰ Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 85–86.

⁸¹ Richard Kennedy, *The Dictionary of Beliefs: Illustrated Guide to World Religions and Beliefs* (Sussex, England: Word Lock Educational, 1984), 59.

⁸² Fowler, *Hinduism Beliefs and Practices: Religious History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 198.

⁸³ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 69.

⁸⁴ David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 87.

Kunti, a man should not abandon the work he was born into, even if it is faulty, for just as fire wreathed in smoke all undertaking is attended by faults.”⁸⁵ Since the caste system is assigned by divinity to work accordingly, a man is incapable of changing it. Further, the Bhagavad Gita states in 18:41, “The action of Brahmins, warriors and princes, farmers and merchants, and of servant are all distributed according to the constituents that spring from their own natures, Incinerator of the Foe.”⁸⁶

Doing Dharma is “one of the most important ‘actions or concepts’ in the history of religious Hinduism.”⁸⁷ It is rooted in Vedic literature.⁸⁸ By action, it points to the everyday normative ideas codified in Manu. It is the primary means of ritual, nourishing gods in power that are sustaining the world. Ethically, Dharma is the natural law in Hinduism that is embedded in living souls that function as a guideline to ethical behavior.⁸⁹ In other words, Dharma is the fundamental essence that sustains the duty of every caste and provides social norms and ritual obligations that lead to higher karma to the next life, moksha.

Christian faith does not deny dharma or doing good work in daily life.⁹⁰ In fact, the scripture encourages the believer to engage actively in doing more good works (Gal 6:9; Jas 1:27). Christians are commanded to help the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners. In Hindu context, it is dharma. In Acts 6, seven deacons were chosen to help

⁸⁵ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 79.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 78.

⁸⁷ Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Belief and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1998), 83.

⁸⁸ Kinsley, *Hinduism*, 86.

⁸⁹ George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and Religions and the Occult*, ed. Alvin J. Schmidt (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 90.

⁹⁰ Nepalese Christians and Hindus understand Dharma in both contexts: Dharma as religion and good work or an obligatory duty that pleases divinity. Basanta Kumar Sharma, *Nepali Sabdasagar* (Kathmandu: Mama Pustak Bhandar, 2001), 699.

widows in the church of Jerusalem. In Acts 10:4 God said to Cornelius, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” Ben Witherington III comments that “Cornelius’s actions a ‘memorial offering to God.’”⁹¹ God accepts believers’ sincere prayer and sacrificial giving which is faith in action. However, doing dharma without trusting Christ “refers to the essence or failure of a Christian as well as the corresponding behavior that reveals one to be a Christian. One becomes a Christian ontologically by participating in the divine life in Christ through the spirit. Becoming a Christian is a trinitarian reality, the truth of which manifested in the personal life of Christians.”⁹²

When God made man, he put him to work in the Garden of Eden. Scripture says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). In Eden, Adam’s responsibility to “work it” means “work preceded the fall.” Even if Adam and Eve did not sin, humans would still have to work. The verb takes care is translated as “guard.”⁹³ Even before the fall, man’s duty was to work, which was inherent to human life.⁹⁴ The Bible teaches that humans’ attempt to reach the Creator God through their work is rebellious and flawed. Therefore, man can have salvation not through good works but “a right relationship with God.”⁹⁵ The Bible teaches that no one can do good works to reach God. Paul writes, “All have turned away; they have together

⁹¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 348.

⁹² Mathew Jayanath, “Dharma,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*, ed. Roger E. Hedlund, Jesudas M. Athyal, Joshua Kalapati, and Jessica Richard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:223.

⁹³ Tremper Longman III, *Genesis, The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 49.

⁹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Word Biblical Commentary 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.), 67.

⁹⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 59.

become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Rom 3:12).

Dharma for Christians is love for God and love for neighbor. First, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30–31). Man’s love for God is a “duty to God,” and man’s love to a neighbor is a “duty to the neighbor.”⁹⁶ Man’s love for God is acknowledging “he is one, love for him must be undivided.”⁹⁷ One cannot love God without loving fellow humans. In this way, loving God demonstrates love for others. They are inseparable. It is Christian Dharma to commit to loving God, loving fellow humans for their freedom, and showing justice for the deprived.

Presenting the One True God to Hindus

Nepalese Hindus are very serious about their religion and are disciplined. They work hard to support their family and are always looking for a better opportunity to care for their family members. They try to find the answer to their bad karma when they struggle. When innocent people suffer in the present life, they blame the evil karma from past deeds, so they work hard in the present life, believing that it may lead them to moksha in the future. When there is death in a Hindu family, there are deep cries of mourning as they do not see a way of salvation in this life.⁹⁸ Life for the Nepali Hindu is one of profound religious observation; from their family to friends, all aspects of life are religious.

⁹⁶ M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 344.

⁹⁷ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 197.

⁹⁸ Thom S. Rainer, *The Unexpected Journey: Conversations with People Who Turned from Other Faith Beliefs to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 56.

The gospel presenter must build a strong foundation of friendship with the Hindu audience before presenting the gospel.⁹⁹ The foundation of friendship must be about showing them Christ's love and living a life "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2). "Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives."¹⁰⁰ As the time comes to present the good news of Jesus Christ, they need a simple gospel. The presenter should avoid comparing the Christian God against the Hindu gods unless needed. They are, instead, aiming to answer difficult questions about their worldviews. The Hindu's ultimate goal is to attain moksha, salvation in Christian terms.¹⁰¹

The biblical God is one, holy, the Creator of the entire universe, and sovereign. This God has been revealed through his magnificent creation, yet is distinct from all his creation. God made man and woman in his image, but man disobeyed his Creator. Nevertheless, God's love has been revealed through his only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the offspring of man and all creation. Through Jesus Christ, it is revealed how to worship the Creator God and have eternal life.

God is One

Presenting the one true God in Hinduism is challenging because Hinduism is both pantheistic and polytheistic. The gospel presenter must carefully differentiate between the Biblical God and Brahman or other deities. To make the gospel understandable for Hindus, the book of Genesis is applicable. The first three chapters of Genesis provide monotheistic views of God, creation, humanity, sin, the need for

⁹⁹ Rainer, *The Unexpected Journey*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 19.

¹⁰¹ Nepalese Christianity is less than a hundred years old, and most believers have converted from the Hindu faith. The closest Nepali equivalents for the English word *salvation* are *Moksha* or *Mukti* in Nepali. Therefore, Nepalese Christians and Hindus commonly use the term *Moksha* or *Mukti* for their varying concepts of salvation. Sreedhar Prasad Lohani and Ramesh Prasad Adhikari, *EKTA: Comprehensive English-Nepali Dictionary*, 1st ed. (Thapathali; Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 2010), 1432.

reconciliation, and the nature of salvation. Bill T. Arnold argues that “Genesis is above all a theological book.”¹⁰² Gerald Bray asserts, “at the heart of Christianity lies the belief that there is only one God, who is the creator and redeemer of all things.”¹⁰³ God in the Old Testament reveals himself by different names. His names *El* or, in the plural, *Elohim* and YHWH, are common in the Hebrew Bible. *El* is a general name also used to describe other ‘gods,’ but YHWH is the unique name of the Hebrew’s God.¹⁰⁴

In Exodus, Moses declared, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Exod 6:4). Gerald E. Gerbrand points out that “when the name Yahweh is revealed to Moses, the narrative stresses that this is the same God as the one the ancestors worshiped, even though they know him by a different name. . . . God can be counted on to act in the future in a manner consistent with his redemption of Israel as his people in the past.”¹⁰⁵ Here, the God of the Bible is one, and he can be trusted in the present and future. Isaiah declared, “I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me” (Isa 45:5). Again, the Lord is singularly One; he does all activities, which include creating, forming, making, and controlling history.¹⁰⁶

Christians have always believed that God, who revealed himself to Adam, Noah, the patriarchs, Moses, David, and all ancient prophets of Israel, manifested in human flesh. Paul writes, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all

¹⁰² Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

¹⁰³ Gerald Bray, “God,” in *Zondervan Handbook of Christian Beliefs*, eds., Alister E. McGrath and James I. Packer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 56.

¹⁰⁴ Bray, “God,” 57.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald E. Gerbrandt, *Deuteronomy*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015), 161.

¹⁰⁶ Ivan D. Friesen, *Isaiah*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 277.

things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). The Christian position is that there are evil spiritual powers and false gods exist (Eph 6:11-12). This world is corrupted by evil. However, followers of Christ must abstain from association with any form of idolatry, but stand in allegiance to the one God and one Lord.¹⁰⁷

God created the world for his glory. In the Hebrew Bible, God as Creator calls people to honor and glorify him because “only God himself is truly worthy of all possible honor.”¹⁰⁸ The primary response of humans to the one true and Holy God is acknowledging that he is worthy of all praises and glory. Psalms 19:1–5 declares,

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day-to-day pours out speech, and night-to-night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words go to the end of the world. In them, he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy to live such a life as to become salt and light and holy living.

Jesus taught us how to pray to the Creator God. He taught like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matt 6:9). Humans calling God, “Abba brings in the centrality of the relationship, the intimacy between the father and his children; as we share Jesus’s sonship in his special filial relationship “Father.”¹⁰⁹ The Father of Heaven means that God is Almighty, the omnipresent One, who dwells in heavenly spender and power and cares deeply for our needs.¹¹⁰ God’s name should be magnified in every area of his followers by living a holy life and doing everything that glorifies him

¹⁰⁷ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary 28 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 205–6.

¹⁰⁸ D. A. Carson, *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 18.

¹⁰⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical on the New Testament 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 227.

¹¹⁰ Osborne, *Matthew*, 228.

alone.

God is the Creator, and Creation is Subdued

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator. God himself exists outside time and space. “The fundamental statement about God in the Old Testament is that God is the Creator.”¹¹¹ The Bible’s first verses, Genesis 1:1–5, introduces God’s work of creation on the first day. God created, but he had no origin from the beginning. The first verse begins, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Andrew E. Steinmann states, “In the beginning is a statement that locates the creation of space, matter and time when God, including the person of the Son of God, already was (John 1:1–3; 17:5, 25).”¹¹² God’s creative activity occurs six times in the opening account of creation (Gen 1). While creating, God spoke using his Word to bring things into existence. Isaiah declared, “It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts” (Isa 45:12). Like a potter, God designed everything.

John 1:1–3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Christ the Logos is asserted to be the mediator of creation who exists from the beginning.¹¹³ Everything God created was good; even darkness was good in the beginning (Gen 1:4, 31). The apostle Paul writes, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and

¹¹¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15.

¹¹² Steinmann, *Genesis*, 50.

¹¹³ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 11.

invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). Christ is the fulfillment of everything, including wisdom, power in creation, sustaining of the earth, and redemption. “On Christ depended the act of creation so that it was not done independently of him.”¹¹⁴ David E. Garland affirms, “in Christ we see who God is—Creator and Redeemer; what God is like—a God of mercy and love; and what God does—one who sends his Son to rescue people from the dominion of darkness and brings about the reconciliation of all creation through his death on a cross.”¹¹⁵

The human response is to bring glory to the Creator God, humans are commanded to love God first, subdued his creation, and cherish it. Jesus taught, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). The Creator God’s will is that his name be honored and his kingdom arrives in fullness in the present and future.¹¹⁶ Paul preached to the Athenians, “the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24–25). People are created in God’s image and are invited to offer prayers to him that his will be done on the earth as in heaven.

Humanity and the Fall

God himself is the sole author, designer, and Creator of the universe and all

¹¹⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1982), 45.

¹¹⁵ David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 87.

¹¹⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 228.

that is in it. Genesis 1–3 gives a beautiful picture of the creation of the universe, the formation of humanity, the purpose of creation, human transgression, and the need for reconciliation with the Creator. Genesis 1:26–27 tells that God created man and woman in his image. Victor P. Hamilton argues that “Genesis 1 may be using royal to describe simply ‘man.’ In God’s eyes, all of mankind is royal. All of humanity is related to God, not just the king.”¹¹⁷ The concept exclusively surrounds the nation of Israel. Man in God’s image shows his relationship with God. In the New Testament, the image of God signifies Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4), man as the image of God (1 Cor 11:7), and man as the image of Christ (Jas 3:9).¹¹⁸

Genesis 2 gives God’s purpose for the creation of man. The Bible says, “then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen 2:7). The Hebrew verb *yasar*, which means formed, is used.¹¹⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E Köstenberger stress, “God’s purpose and manner of creating the man and woman and the divine design expressed in distinct male-female roles: the man is to serve as the leader while the woman has been created to come alongside as his partner and his suitable helper.”¹²⁰ God used clay in forming Adam, humanity coming from the very earth. God then put them in the garden to serve and preserve it.¹²¹ Man, working as God commanded, would continue in their relationship with their Creator. Genesis 2:18, 20 specifies that as a partner to each

¹¹⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Willian B. Eerdmans, 1990), 135.

¹¹⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 145–46.

¹¹⁹ Rex Mason, *Old Testament Picture of God* (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 1993), 34.

¹²⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 26–27.

¹²¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 192.

other, man and woman are in a relationship with each other, as image bearers of God, representative of the Creator God to other creations. However, as God's handiwork, man depends on his Creator for his existence and to continue the present life and future.

Man's disobedience to his Creator brought corruption, violence, and death. When God created the world, there was no sin in it. His creation was magnificent (Gen 1:31). In Genesis 2:16–17, God commanded Adam to obey and gave him a warning. If Adam disobeyed God's commandment, God said, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). James M. Hamilton asserts, "there is a warning that transgression of God's command will introduce death into God's very good creation."¹²² However, Genesis chapter 3 reveals that the serpent approaches the woman. Man, through his wife, violated the Creator's command.¹²³ Man's sin separated him from his Creator. In the New Testament, Paul writes, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Adam's disobedience introduced sin and death—physical and spiritual, and the world was also affected.¹²⁴ Spiritual death is separation from the Creator God to be punished for eternity. In spiritual death, there is no hope, no peace, but punishment forever.

God did not create man and woman to be punished for eternity. He created them in his image to have fellowship with him and to lead other creations. God wants everyone to turn to him and be part of his original blessing. Paul spoke to the Athenians, "That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he

¹²² James M. Hamilton Jr., "Original Sin in Biblical Theology," in *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 191.

¹²³ Köstenberger and Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman*, 27–28.

¹²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Original Sin and Original Death," *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 271.

is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). He created them in his image to be blessed, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue (Gen 1:28). Jesus taught us to ask for forgiveness of sin. He said, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12). Human sin against the Creator God is paramount. Every man-made image from created elements and a man called a god is a rebellion and sin against God. It is a debt; humans must pay the price. If a man willingly changes his heart and turns to his Creator, God will pardon him and renew his intimate fellowship. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

God’s love—Christ’s work and His saving Grace

In Hinduism, there are restrictions to entering a house of worship. This restriction applies especially to the Sudra community. The Bible reveals that the one true God is full of compassion and love and is gracious to all his creation. God did not create division of humanity, the world, and leave it corrupted. Instead, God acted immediately when man and woman sinned against him. God planned for salvation at the time when man and woman violated God’s command. God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). The traditional view of understanding this verse is that Christ defeats Satan.¹²⁵ God planned to defeat Satan through the Creator God coming in human flesh (John 1:14).

John 1:1–3 reveals that Jesus was the Creator God. The Word refers to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who was the Word as in the beginning, was with God, and he was

¹²⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 226.

God.¹²⁶ As God, Jesus receives God’s holy proper name as “Kyrios,” the name above all names (Phil 2:9–11).¹²⁷ Jesus, the Creator God, is incarnated in human flesh. The flesh may interpret human weakness and mortality as contrasted with divine power. As the Word of God becomes flesh, the Creator God enters this sphere of mortality and frailty, making it possible for those born of the flesh to become those born of God.¹²⁸ Paul wrote to Christians in Galatians, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4). Unlike Vishnu incarnated in Hinduism, Krishna encourages warrior Arjuna to kill his relative and reclaim the throne. Christ “was vulnerable to all the conditions of human life which constantly threaten and unsettle—fear, loneliness, suffering, temptation, doubt, and ultimately godforsaken.”¹²⁹ Incarnated Christ died for the sins of the world.

Jesus says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s love and compassion for the corrupted world show that his son’s death on the cross demonstrates God has offered the free gift of salvation to whoever believes in him. This gift of salvation must be accepted with repentance of sin and believing him as the only Lord and Savior of life (Rom 1:17; 10:8–13).

The human response responding to God’s love seen in the work of Jesus Christ affirms: (1) that he/she will have peace with the Creator God (Rom 5:1), (2) the person becomes God’s child (John 1:12–13), (3) the person can approach God without any

¹²⁶ Marianne Maye Thomson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 28.

¹²⁷ Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco: TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 96.

¹²⁸ Thomson, *John*, 32.

¹²⁹ Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 94.

mediator (Rom 5:2; 1 Pet 2:9–10), and (4) the person inherits eternal never-ending life with God. Once accepted Christ, Jesus taught his followers to ask God for their physical and spiritual needs. They can depend on God totally: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 9:11).

Eternal Life in Heaven

The Bible teaches the reality of heaven and hell. Heaven is the place for an eternal dwelling place for believers. In contrast, hell is the lake of the fire where unbelievers spend eternity. Luke 16:19–31 teaches that the person’s belief determines his/her destiny. Hell is a place of conscious eternal torment for Satan, demons, and those who reject Christ. Therefore, everyone will exist eternally in heaven or eternal punishment in hell (Dan 12:2, 3; Matt 25:46; John 5:28; Rev 20:14, 15).

In heaven, Christ’s followers live and enjoy eternity in the presence of God. Therefore, Christianity has a meaningful purpose in the present life and the future in eternity. When a person trusts Jesus Christ, it means being born again (John 3:3). A born-again person has a new identity. In that new identity, God has promised to protect and to fulfill (John 10:28).

Believing in Christ leads to becoming a part of the local and universal church family. In the universal family, God is the father of all. Jesus taught his disciples that they should call God “Our Father in heaven” (Matt 6:9). When a person trusts Christ, he/she may go through a tough time, such as suffering, persecution, or even martyrdom. Paul writes, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Praise the Lord for his promise that he is faithful to fulfill. The writer of Hebrews writes, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised” (Heb 10:36). Jesus promised, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my

name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life" (Matt 19:29). Christians can call each other brothers and sisters regardless of their personality, height, ethnicity, race, or nationality. This identity is not possible to abstain from Hinduism. Jesus promised that a person would receive from God a hundredfold blessing in the "incredible family and home in heaven."¹³⁰ The writer of Hebrews encourages, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23). Believing in him shows a promise that the never-ending intimacy and enjoyment on earth continues in heaven.

The future of believers is also promised in heaven. In heaven, followers of Christ dwell and are promised never-ending life. Eternal life begins at the moment when a person accepts Christ. Jesus promised that the one who believes him inherits eternal life in heaven (Matt 19:19b). When the children of God's temporal residence on this earth ends, they will go where their Abba lives. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms" (John 14:2). God's house in heaven is not like an earthly house or a church. It refers to the heavenly dwelling where God lives.¹³¹ God's house means that Christ's followers have "the privilege of abiding in God's presence."¹³² The heavenly house is a symbolic representation of the transcendent dwelling of God, heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), and the city of God (Rev 21:9–22:5).¹³³ In addition, "dwellings stresses the large number of such dwelling places and thus the abundant space for all those who are

¹³⁰ Osborne, *Matthew*, 722.

¹³¹ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 391.

¹³² Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 344.

¹³³ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 249.

prepared to follow Jesus.”¹³⁴ Revelation 21:9–22:5 describes the magnificent eternal dwelling place that is heaven.

Jesus promised he would come again and take the believer to his Father’s home in heaven. He said, “If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also” (John 14:2–3; cf. John 14:28; 21:22–23). Therefore, Jesus said that he was going to the Father’s presence in heaven; it is to heaven he will take his disciples when he returns at the second coming.¹³⁵ When the disciples watched Jesus’s ascension into heaven, Angels announced, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). So, believers need to be prepared because Christ is coming at any time (Matt 24:30; John 14:2; 1 Thess 5:2; Rev 16:15; 22:12).

In heaven, the promise of eternal life is fulfilled. Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:26). In heaven, never ending provision in the presence of God will banish all pain and worry. In heaven, with the river and tree of life, God’s people will never hunger or thirst. All diseases will be eliminated from the new creation. Healing includes removing the original curse that resulted from human sin. The curse’s reverse is incomplete, sin is overcome, and the believer may eat freely from the Tree of Life.¹³⁶ David E. Aune writes in Revelation

¹³⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 426.

¹³⁵ Kruse, *John*, 344.

¹³⁶ J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 300.

22:3–5, “The final goal of salvation is now realized. The servants of God can finally see his face (according to Jewish tradition, no one could see God and live [Exod 33:17–20; John 1:18]), which means that they share his holiness and righteousness. His name is on their foreheads because they belong to him forever.”¹³⁷

The man responds to eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from the Creator God. It is available to everyone. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13). As one becomes a follower of Christ, he/she should petition God for strength and relief from the temptation of Satan. Jesus taught, “and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:13). In heaven, there is no temptation or suffering. Evil has no place in heaven. In heaven, believers will enjoy worshiping God and his presence in eternity (Rev 4:4; 21:9–22:5).

Conclusion

Hinduism is hard to define and understand because the faith has no sole divinity. Adherents believe that Brahman, the highest divinity in Hinduism, has been manifested in various forms. His manifestation includes nature and various gods, goddesses, and animals. However, divinities help is partially limited to humans in hierarchy order. Man’s ultimate goal is to realize moksha or reunion with Brahman. However, karma stands as an obstacle in Hinduism.

Applying Paul’s gospel approach to the Athenians in Acts 17 helps the gospel presenter to understand the Hindu worldview and many unknown gods. The gospel presenter should be equipped with cultural and religious concepts in the Nepali Hindu context. This chapter has provided five theological concepts. These five concepts are (1) understanding the Hindu view of monotheism, (2) Hindu as fearers of the gods, (3) the

¹³⁷ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1188.

concept of sin, (4) the concept of salvation, and (5) the paths to moksha in Hinduism.

After providing Hinduism's cultural and religious concepts, five theological concepts are presented, which lead man to the ultimate hope, which is eternal life. These theological concepts are: (1) Christians believe in one true God who is holy, (2) God is the source and sole master of creation, and creation is to be subdued, (3) man is made in God's image, which is highest in God's creation, but he rebelled against his Creator and fall, (4) God's love has been demonstrated through Christ's work on the cross, and man can receive salvation which is the free gift by God's grace, and (5) eternal life for Christians means never-ending life in the presence of God.

Finally, Jesus's work on the cross is victory over sin, death, and ultimately triumph over all the power of Satan. The cross of Christ makes his follower eligible to inherit eternal life. Thus, it demands faithful living on earth for him above all things. "Vigilance, self-control, and perseverance in faith, love, and hope should characterize their lives (1 Thess 5:10).¹³⁸ For Christians, the Tree of Life is a reward. In heaven, the faithful believer will receive the eternal reward intended at creation, permission to eat of the tree of life, which Adam and Eve never realized. "In final Eden, the curse of the first Eden is reversed, and eternal life is now given to God's people."¹³⁹ In Revelation 22:1–5, John sees the vision of heaven and describes,

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. Moreover, the tree leaves are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more nights. They will not need the light of a

¹³⁸ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 169.

¹³⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 123–24.

lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. Furthermore, they will reign forever and ever.

Believers are confident that “God who raised Jesus will also raise Jesus’s followers. The Christian faith teaches that reunion with God is guaranteed where the “living and dead will be reunited and will be together with the Lord forever.”¹⁴⁰ Jesus’s resurrection validates the gospel and guarantees the believers’ resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:17–20).

¹⁴⁰ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, 140.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The strength of this research is that it takes advantage of an emic perspective with a post-Hinduism experience—from a devoted Hindu practitioner to one who shares and leads many Hindus to the one true God. The limitation of this research is the narrow focus on the Nepalese context and not on the broader South Asian Hindu community. Although Nepal is the most Hindu nation in the world, Hindus are not contained there. They live throughout South Asia, so the application of this research may have different implications for other variations of Hinduism, such as the Indian form of Hinduism. The gospel presenter, first, is responsible for doing more profound contextual work in the specific Hinduism practiced, yet applying the work done by this research will help to understand some of the overarching and critical beliefs. Second, many religious texts of Hinduism need to be investigated in greater detail; many other documents still need engagement. There is a great need for Christian research into the original language and text of the critical texts of the Vedic documents. There are still broader scopes to investigate Hinduism as one wishes to present the gospel.

Hinduism, which was once contained in the South Asian sub-continent, has rapidly spread throughout the world. Immigrants from South Asian nations are fueling this rapid surge of adherents in Western nations. *Christianity Today* affirms, “Asians are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States.”¹ Like Buddhism, Hinduism has

¹ Angela Lu Fulton, “Buddhism Went Mainstream Decades Ago. US Churches Still Aren’t Ready,” *Christianity Today*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/march-web-only/buddhism-asian-immigration-us-christianity-churches.html>. Accessed on March 23, 2023.

stepped into mainstream American culture. Theological words, such as karma, mantras, and yoga are becoming common words in the Western vocabulary. Hindu deities, temples, and festivals such as Deepawali, yoga practices, and Hindu summer camps fascinate Westerners intrigued by Eastern Mysticism.

In North America, Christians who want to live faithfully encounter a Hindu neighbor and want to witness Christ to them. However, a lack of understanding of Hinduism's theological concepts hinders them culturally and prevents them from sharing Christ. Similarly, in church, the believer may have a call to become a missionary in a South Asian nation or a Christian professional who has encountered a Hindu co-worker and would like to share Christ in his marketplace, but is struggling because they lack an understanding of the Hindu worldview. In the Nepalese Christian context, even though believers have left Hinduism and become followers of Christ, they need more understanding of their former faith's theological concepts or issues. Most Nepalese Christians do not know how to share the good news of Jesus Christ with their Hindu neighbor. This thesis aims to help remedy such a lack of understanding.

My thesis aims to equip Christians, specifically in the Nepalese Hindu context. The church should teach members sound doctrine so each believer may be familiar with God's words (2 Tim 3:16–17), obey him, live a Christ-centered life, and demonstrate who Christ is. The church also needs to train every member with cross-cultural skills and be prepared with a basic understanding of Hindu teaching so that Christians can share the gospel comfortably with people from a Hindu background. This thesis explores Paul's Athenian context (Acts 17:16–34), comparative Hindu teaching, and an examination of Christian teaching, applying Paul's gospel approach to the Nepali Hindu context.

First, I explored Paul and his encounter with Athenians intellectual philosophers—Epicureans and Stoics. Epicureans, whose philosophical and ethical view

was based on the material system, believed that “pleasure was seen as the chief end of life.”² On the other hand, “the goal of the Stoic system was to live in accord with the rational principle that indwelt all things, and so to live according to nature.”³ In this, one sees that Paul paid attention to the context in which he was operating; he knew the Stoics and the Epicureans. Paul’s preaching of the resurrected Christ to his Athenian audience was contrary to the belief and practice of their values because it introduced new teaching (Acts 17:19). Comparing Paul’s context in Athens and the Nepali Hindu context are similar because Christianity in Nepal is viewed as a foreign religion and conversion is prohibited.

Paul made religious and cultural bridges with the Athenian context to preach the good news effectively to the Athenians, presenting five key concepts to them. First, he begins with the “unknown God” and quotes Menander, an Athenian poet, saying, “for we are indeed his offspring” (Acts 17:28c). Paul then proclaimed that the one true God is the sovereign Creator. Paul stressed that Athenians were indeed religious. They were God-fearers who were worshipping an “unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Paul proclaimed that God does exist, and he is the Creator of heaven and earth—everything, including man and woman (Acts 17:24–25). This God needs nothing from humans and does not accept sacrifice like the idols in the temple. Instead, this one true God is an absolute life-giver; he is satisfied and stands above all the creation.

Second, Paul then presents that the one true God, who is the source of everything good (Acts 17:26–27). Paul points out that God made one man, and his offspring are inhabiting the earth. God rules over all his creation. God gave humans the

² Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostle: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 514.

³ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostle*, 514.

responsibility to exercise God's rule and authority on the earth. God's presence is everywhere, sustaining and protecting. Third, Paul described the work of Christ as sufficient for salvation (Acts 17:27). Worshiping idols in the temple, emperors' status in the marketplace, or just believing philosophers' teachings are human foolishness and lead nowhere. It is rebellion against the one true God. Everyone who does something wrong has consequences (Rom 3:23). But the one true God has a plan for humans. According to the Scriptures, he planned to send his only Son to pay the penalty for sin. God has given people the opportunity to repent of their sins and believe the work of his Son, Jesus Christ, takes away sin (John 3:16). Thus, they should seek God through Jesus, find him, and believe in God. Fourth, Paul presented that fallen men have no hope without Christ. God does not reside in a human-made temple nor accept an offering because the one true God has created everything. Because man is disobedient to God, he is incapable of being closer to the Creator God (Acts 17:26–27). The only way to reconcile with God is to accept God's plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ; therefore, people are obligated to know God through Christ and worship him as the Creator. Fifth, Christ's work on the cross is good news for everyone who accepts Christ with repentance. Paul demanded that "repentance" and "judgment" challenged the Athenian dualistic view of the human soul, such as the person being an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body. Paul said, "the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). The one true God is merciful. Nevertheless, God's grace demands humbly responding with repentance of sin and acceptance of Christ or standing before God on the day of judgment.

After looking at Paul's engagement with the Athenians, I then compared the beliefs of Hinduism and Christianity, finding significant differences between the teachings. When investigating the sacred texts of Hinduism, I highlighted these differences. Hinduism is complex to understand because the faith claimed to be all—monotheistic, polytheistic, and pantheistic.

The Absolute Brahman claimed to be one god. Believing in the Absolute Brahman leads to Hinduism as monotheism. In Hinduism, the Absolute Brahman designed humans into the caste system, priestly duty, sins, karma and moksha. He partially assigned priestly duty to Brahmin. He is the cause of sins, bad karma, and cause the humans to work for moksha. The view of eternal life in Hinduism burdens humans because humans must work hard to get there. It seems that the Absolute Brahman is a biased deity because he created humans into a hierarchy system that has a higher and lower caste. The sacred texts *Upanishads*, *Gita*, and the *Law Code of Manu* answer questions about creation, caste system, priestly duty, sins, karma, moksha, and views on eternal life in Hinduism; however, each of them leaves the adherent in a worse position. From such teachings as these, there is no compassion for sinners in Hinduism. Instead, divinity manifests from time-to-time, and its ultimate aim is to save the righteous and destroy sinners.

Hinduism is a pantheistic faith. The Creator declared he is many (*Mundaka Upanishad* 2:2:11). In Hinduism, the Absolute Brahman is a manifestation of various deities. These deities act like the created order mimicking humans and animals. Like humans, they have consorts, begotten children, and compete with each other. They fight, curse, and destroy their rival. When deities fight, the Absolute Brahman becomes vulnerable. The *Upanishads*, *Gita*, and the *Law Code of Manu* show that the Absolute Brahman lacks sovereignty over creation. In Hinduism, the Absolute Brahman is made

into the created elements: creatures, plants, individuals, stones, and every tree, Brahman's manifestation in Creation has led Hinduism to be construed as a pantheistic faith. In *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* 3:9:3, Brahman identifies with eight elements—fire, earth, wind, the intermediate region, sun, sky, moon, and stars.

Christian teaching affirms that God is one (Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29; 1 Tim 2:5). The Holy Scripture revealed that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). God has total control over his Creation. The Bible teaches that, “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chr 29:11–12).

The Creator God is full of love, compassion, mercy, holiness, and justice. Because of his love for his fallen creation, God manifested in human flesh (John 1:14). While living on earth, Jesus went to Zacchaeus's house, who was a chief tax collector viewed as a sinner, and said, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:9–10). Jesus, the son of God in human form, never committed sin. Christ lived a perfect life, showing how to live and glorify the creator, God. His love to the world and finished work on the cross for sinners shows that all people can come to him (Matt 11:28–29). Through his work on the cross, Jesus gives humans an opportunity to accept Jesus as the Lord and Savior and experience God's love. Through this process, humans are to reconcile with the creator; Jesus called him Abba, Father. However, rejecting his love, sovereign authority, and despising his holiness has consequences (1 Pet 1:16). The Creator is full of love,

compassion, and mercy. Hinduism does not have categories for such love from the divine.

Christian teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity is the opposite of Hindu teaching on “trimurthy.” In Hinduism, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are viewed as trimurthy. This trimurthy is found having wives and children and engaging in fleshly pleasures. In contrast, the Christian teaching on Trinity means tri-unity or three-in-oneness (Gen 1:26); therefore, the triune God created everything. This includes his creation of humans in his image (Gen 1:1–2:3). God did not create humans in caste, but just two genders—male and female. God created everything good and perfect. The doctrine of creation highlights the fact that God made everything good for his glory (Isa 43:7). His goodness and glory are seen in his creation throughout history. This one, true God, is to be worshiped and obeyed. The New Testament teaches that every follower of Christ is a part of the royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). Those who accept Christ will have an opportunity to worship God because of his amazing grace. This grace is available to everyone. One day, believers will see God face-to-face and worship him in eternity; that is eternal life.

The common theological concepts between Hinduism and Christianity were explored. To present the gospel, the presenter should make a contextual strategy for the Nepali Hindu context. Knowing his or her audience’s religious and cultural contexts is essential. This understanding makes the gospel presenter more comfortable sharing the gospel. On the other hand, lacking an audience’s deeply held beliefs, norms, and practices leads to confusion, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding. Using Paul’s model in the Athenians context, the gospel presenter in the Nepalese Hindu context may use a monotheistic term while presenting the gospel. In Hinduism, the “Truth” (*Sat*) refers to God, the supreme reality—the *Upanishad* credits Brahman as the first and

everything. However, in *Gita*, Krishna is the creator; in Shiva Purana, Shiva created everything, and in *Vishnu Purana*, through Vishnu, Brahman, and Shiva came into existence, and Devi Bhagavata, Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva came from Devi. The Hindus afraid of the gods. Due to divinity manifestation in various forms, adherents venerate every element they find. They worship fire, earth, wind, sun, sky, moon, stars, rivers, cows, and other humans. For Hinduism, sinning is either a ritual mistake or a moral order violation. The concept of moksha or *mukti* is overcoming the endless cycles of rebirth in different forms due to bad karma. There are four major ways to moksha. They are sacrifice, wisdom, devotion, and karma. Once moksha is obtained through this path, one will reunite with the ultimate reality of Brahman.

Presenting the one true God to a Hindu audience is the ultimate aim of this investigation (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; Rom 1:16). Hindus are often tirelessly working to find the one, true God. Their religious life is deeply devotional. They seek a better way to escape bad karma, to meet the true Creator God. Like people in Athens, Nepalese Hindus are open to listening to new ideas. So, the gospel presenter should be able to present the gospel in a simple way.

God is one, and he is holy. These two concepts make up the critical difference between Hindus and Christians. Learning about one true God and his holiness causes them to ponder. As investigated in this research, Hindu gods are neither one nor holy. There are many of them, and they enjoy the same sort of fleshly pleasures humans crave and disapprove of. In Christianity, once a person accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior, he or she will have the right to call the one true God, Father. God, revealed in the Holy Scripture, is holy, but reachable. Jesus came to this world to save sinners. God has existed forever. He is not a created being like Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva in Hinduism. The God of the Bible has no story of being created, no beginning. God, who is

everlasting, created everything in six days. God created man and woman in his image. Then the human response to the Creator is to love God first and to love creation, subdue, and cherish it.

In Hinduism, God is the author of creating demons and evil. In contrast, the Christian faith teaches that “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Furthermore, there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day (Gen 1:31). The apostle Paul writes, “For everything God created is good” (1 Tim 4:4). However, in the garden of Eden, man and woman violated God’s command. This violation or disobedience is a sin; all evil comes from it. The consequence of this disobedience is death—physical and spiritual. Spiritual death is separation from God and his magnificent presence. Since then, humans have been looking to meet God through his or her efforts.

Nevertheless, they are unable to reach him. Jesus Christ—the Creator, the one true God, becomes human. Paul writes, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5). God is love. He sent his only son for fallen humanity and the world. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16). Christ’s death on the cross can wipe out the consequences of evil karma. Christ’s resurrection breaks the bondage of rebirth. Through God’s love, humans are forgiven if one repents of sin, turns to God and accepts Christ as the Lord and Savior of his life. This action leads to all blessings—peace with God, an opportunity to be a child of God, an opportunity to inherit everlasting life and enjoy the presence of God in eternity.

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ABSTRACT

PAUL'S GOSPEL APPROACH TO THE ATHENIANS: A MISSIONAL IMPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY NEPALESE HINDU CONTEXTS

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Eastern philosophies, especially Hinduism, are appealing to the Western mind. Hindu adherents can be found in many neighborhoods with Hindu temples in nearby towns and cities. Instead of proclaiming the uncompromised gospel to the world (Rom 1:16), many evangelicals today are gradually accepting and normalizing Hinduism concepts.

Christians are commanded to witness in their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The question for believers is how to witness to Nepalese Hindus. As a former Hindu, I found that Paul’s gospel approach to the pantheistic Athenians (Acts 17:16–34) can be applied to the contemporary pantheistic Hindu context. Like Paul, the gospel workers today must hold to sound doctrine but should also understand their listeners’ context, cultural setting, and belief system in which they intend to present Christ.

The thesis identifies the problem that gospel proclaimers face. In the Nepali context, to witness to Hindus is complicated and confusing. A presenter must understand the basic theological concepts of Christianity and the worldview of Nepalese Hindus. The thesis argues that Paul's emic gospel approach to the Athenians (Acts 17:16-34) should applied in modern Nepali Hindu contexts.

Paul's gospel approaches to Athenians raised curiosity in Athenians' minds. Paul presented his Judeo grounded faith to the Athenians. Paul knew they were idol

worshippers. Instead of blaming them, he tells the Athenians, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22). From there, he bridges his monotheistic view of God.

God has been revealed in the Bible as YHWH and is not the Hindus' Brahman as described in the Vedas, Gita, Upanishads, Mahabharata, the Law Code of Manu, or in the Puranas. The Biblical God is incredibly different from Brahman and Hindu Trimurti—Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Finding the comparative teachings from both traditions helps the gospel presenter equip his beliefs that require at least his basic but essential beliefs and practice and his hearers' basic teaching. Essential fundamental Hindu teachings are presented directly from their sacred texts.

Hindus are religious. Their goal is to be free from bad karma and attain moksha. Moksha for Hindus is union with Brahman. Their polytheistic and pantheistic view of god leads them nowhere. To reach a Hindu, an understanding of their monotheistic view of god, their concept of sin, salvation, and the path to moksha are crucial. Hindus need to know that Brahman and YHWH are different deities. The god that the Bible reveals is the Creator, the one true god.

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