

A Summary of the Bible

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The Bible is full of history, poetry, and principles for living, and all are tied to a single main theme. This theme begins with the very first words of the Old Testament (OT) and is consistent through both testaments, right to the end of the book of Revelation. This is a summary of that theme.

1. The very first words of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) are "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This can be called in a word, "Creation." According to the Bible, there actually was a beginning of time and space, so one can actually know the historic origin of things.

This most basic verse in the Bible states more, however, for it makes plain that at the time of the "beginning", God existed. He is in fact "eternal." So at the outset the Bible takes into account the fact of what has been called a "supernatural reality." Everything there is, in other words, cannot be judged on a materialistic or physical basis. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit existed before the beginning, and it was this Trinity Who decided to create. Which is also another way of saying that we live in a personal universe.

The Bible therefore begins by assuming God's reality and thus explaining the origin of the material world. But it also answers a question troubling many persons: "Who am I?" Rather than just a "speck of protoplasm floating on a sea of meaninglessness," as one person described him, man according to the Bible is a creature made by God, and as such bears His image. Man really is somebody! He has value and worth! And furthermore, as God's creation, he has been given a purpose. God designed him with something particular in view, and man despairs until he fulfills it.

So God began by creating the first man, Adam, and the first woman, his wife Eve, and He put them in a beautiful place called the Garden of Eden. Here the first couple enjoyed their worth and purpose before God. It really was paradise!

Now God certainly showed that He loved man, but He also wanted man to love Him. God is personal after all. He's living. He can be known...communicated with...loved. So God arranged for the testing of man's love for Him. Would man choose to maintain his wonderful relationship with his Creator, or would he go independent? The Bible states that under the temptation of Satan, a rebellious and fallen angel, Adam and Eve willfully chose to go independent. In effect, they rebelled against God and His love. So in this way, sin historically came into the world. The covenant--God's arrangement with man--was broken. Man by his choice had brought down on himself and his descendents all the consequences of his rebellion of which God had warned him...guilt, shame, misery, and ultimately, death.

Now the whole story could have ended here. God could have just wiped everything out and started again. But His plan was to establish another arrangement or covenant by which He would restore a people for Himself. In Genesis 3:15, God declared that He would bring this about through "the seed of the woman," and that's what the rest of the Bible is all about...how God would do it.

This promise was first given to Adam and Eve. Later God renewed it to Noah, the man who built the ark at the time of the Great Flood. Still later God appeared to a herdsman named Abraham and said that through his "seed--a person--all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham's son Isaac was next to hear the promise, and his son Jacob (later called Israel) was chosen to get this good news. Jacob had twelve sons, and the choice fell on Judah, the one from whom the name "Jew" derives. Thus, through the descendents of Jacob or Israel, God made clear His Messiah, His anointed One, would come.

2. When you begin reading the second book of the Bible, Exodus, the children of Israel, you'll find, had become a nation down in Egypt, and God was going to lead them back to Canaan--what is now modern Israel--by a man named Moses. Moses led all these people across the Red Sea and on toward the Promised Land until they came to a place called Mount Sinai. There on Sinai, a craggy peak you can visit today, God summoned Moses to meet with Him, and on that historic occasion God gave Moses his "Law", what has been commonly called the "Ten Commandments."

Now this Law came from God, Whom the Bible describes as holy, pure, good, and everything right. And the Law showed that kind of character. That is why there is a right and a wrong; because of the way God is. But when man looks at this Law, he discovers that he's not that way himself...he is unGod-like. This Law, being perfect and righteous, suddenly makes a man or woman realize how different from God he or she has become when it comes to character. Loss of temper, depression, self-centeredness, discontent, hate, murder, war, ...on and on we could go naming evidences of the stark truth that man is a law-breaker. While it is often hard for a person to admit this, at least it gives a plausible answer to his or her question, "What am I like?" The answer is simply, a rebel against God and His Law, and also suffering the consequences. Unlike what many people think, God gave Moses his Law in Exodus 20 so man could know his real condition. It's like what one reads in the New Testament (NT) in Romans 3:20; "...through law comes the knowledge of sin."

With this Law, however, came hope as well, for God also gave careful instructions to show how such sinful persons could worship and find acceptance with such a holy God. Since the first sin committed by Adam brought death and its curse, so it could be only through death (sacrifice) that God would accept man. That may sound strange, but that really is the way it is, according to the Bible. Consequently, God gave detailed directions for offering sacrifices, including a place of worship called a Tabernacle (or tent), and elaborate duties for a regiment of special priests. Now the Bible explains that the ritual itself did not make the people holy or acceptable to God, but rather it pointed to the coming Messiah--the seed of the woman as promised -- Whose predicted death would make man acceptable to God. The "Old Testament", therefore, the first part of the Bible with its kings like David and Solomon, through whose descendents the promise would come, all looks forward to this Coming One...the seed of the woman.

3. As one begins to read the "New Testament", he discovers something is indeed new! The Promised One is coming. Born of a young virgin named Mary, supernaturally conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, God's Son came into the world. He was named Jesus for He would "save His people from their sins." Thus, born in Bethlehem in poor conditions and reared in Nazareth in his stepfather's carpenter shop, Jesus Christ spent the first thirty years of His earthly life.

Now at this point, the Bible tells us He began to carry out His specific purpose in coming. A man called John, nicknamed "the Baptizer", introduced Him to the world one day by saying: "Look, The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) This title sounds strange, unless of course one remembers what has been said about the necessity of sacrifice for acceptance with God. The significant thing about this statement is that God Himself sent Jesus into the world to be His sacrifice for sin. God in history was in the act of carrying out His promise or covenant through the "seed of the woman", Jesus.

Everywhere Jesus went, He went about doing good. Where Adam had refused to love God and obey Him, Jesus was perfectly responsive to doing God's will. He served God by choice. He kept the Law of God absolutely perfectly. He was in the sight of God really righteous. But in addition to this, He showed that He had come from God by healing the sick, curing the crippled, and even on an occasion or two, raising the dead! Everything about Jesus' character and life pointed men to God. He was in fact God in the flesh. So the Bible says.

But Jesus also preached. He told men about God, about themselves, and about the world...and about why He had come. He showed by His love and concern that people--men,

women, and children--had worth, yet he spoke plainly to them of sin and the judgment of God on sin. He bluntly told people, "Repent!" He commanded them to turn from self-centeredness and independence back to God. But while what He said was true, lawbreakers usually do not like to hear the truth. So the people with their leaders drummed up false charges and pressured the Roman governor, Pilate, to sentence Him to death. There at a place called "Calvary", outside Jerusalem, Jesus was nailed to a cross, where He died. People--in the heat of their sin--had actually killed the Son of God. But their plot fell into the plan of God, for in fact, they had been the means by which God's sacrifice for sin had been offered. The Lamb of God had died. But three days later, Jesus miraculously came back to life, His work on earth completed.

This is the heart of the Bible's message. In a few words, it can be said this way (I Corinthians 15:3,4): "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures." This focal point of history, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, points out the answer to man's question, "What do I need?" Of all the things that man wants and needs, he basically needs to be brought back into a right relationship with his Creator, God. It is really of first importance, because through the perfect life and death of Jesus, God actually does restore man to His fellowship. And according to the Bible, that is the ONLY way God does it. But in order to appropriate the work of Christ, man is commanded by God to put his faith and confidence in Jesus. In other words, God offers mercy and forgiveness to all who look to Jesus' death on the cross as the complete sacrifice for their sins and then follow Christ as their King. And according to the Bible, such persons receive eternal life.

A short time after Jesus rose from the dead, and after having shown Himself to His friends, He returned to heaven. And the Bible states that He is there today, alive and ruling. When He went back to heaven, however, two angels told His disciples, "This same 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, Jesus will, in time and space, come to earth again.

4. Unlike His first coming, Jesus' second coming will be with power and splendor. The Bible states that everyone will see Him, and everyone will appear before Him in judgment. Simply put, He will confront every person and pronounce his or her destiny. In John chapter 5, verses 28 and 29, Jesus said it this way: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life (or heaven), and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of 'damnation'(or hell)."

So, when a person asks the question, "What is going to happen to me?"—a very important question to everyone--the answer in the Bible is clear. Each is going to meet Jesus Christ; and Christ, as God's appointed Ruler, will pronounce judgment. Those persons who have put their trust in Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and submitted to His rule over them will enjoy everlasting life in the presence of God. As it states in II Peter 3:13, "But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." On the other hand, those who have neglected or refused Christ's sacrifice for sin and persisted in their own independence and rebellion from God...well, they must suffer the consequences. It's simply an eternal future of hell and God's anger.

You can see why the person who understands and believes the Bible knows what is ahead. It's no mystery really. The next great event in history will be the coming of Jesus Christ and the final judgment. We today do not know how long it will be from now until then, though we do know how long it has been since Jesus died and rose. The Bible just does not give that information. But just like it explains the origin of all things, so the Bible predicts the end of world history. Every event is another step toward that moment when Christ will come, the judgment will be pronounced, and the new heavens and new earth established. And there you have a summary of the Bible.