

GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

UNIT 13

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YOUR PASSIONS

WAGE WAR

WITHIN YOU

“If the Lord Is God, Follow Him!”

by Y Bonesteele

American Idol is a singing contest that promises to make the winner rich, famous, and ultimately an icon to be worshiped by many for his or her singing ability. In one sense, we all want to make idols of ourselves. We all want to be the center of our universe and sometimes the center of other people’s universes. This is what we call idolatry. There can only be one supreme being at the center of the universe, however, and that is the triune God. If we put anyone or anything other than Him as the center, we have sinned against our Creator.

IDOLATRY FROM THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit that God told them not to eat, they were proclaiming that their wants were more important than God’s commands, that they knew more than God, and that they could do whatever they wanted without any consequences. How wrong they were! Expelled from paradise and exiled from walking in daily

fellowship with the Lord, they exited Eden with shame and death on their backs as God had to kill an animal to clothe them. When we make ourselves idols or make idols for ourselves, God’s intended natural order and goodness in the world goes askew, and brokenness and death are the natural consequences that appear at our doorstep.

God’s chosen people had a habit of worshiping idols even when God explicitly gave them instructions not to. This eventually led to their demise as their kingdom split in two and both kingdoms fell under the leadership of mostly bad kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. That’s a phrase that occurs often in the Bible, characterizing ultimate evil. Whereas Adam and Eve knew well enough not to sin in front of the Lord, this new evil was so boastful that those who participated in it didn’t even care whether God saw it or not. Of course, God sees everything, but the human authors were trying to convey that this evil was blatant, had no shame, and disregarded

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God in totality. Kings Jeroboam and Ahab, among others, did not even try to hide their evilness. Their “evil in the sight of the Lord” eventually led to death.

GOD’S COMPASSION AND PURSUIT

In spite of all the evil of the kings and people of Israel and Judah, God continued to pursue them and to give them opportunities to repent and turn back to Him. He sent prophets and messengers to point out their sin, to show His power, and to instruct them to walk in the Lord’s ways. We read of Elijah and Elisha and how God used them as instruments to guide the people back. They performed miracles through the power of the Lord, they spoke judgment for those who did evil, and they called on people to repent.

Some listened. Some didn’t. But still God kept pursuing.

The Lord knows that people following idols is hurtful not only to Him as the Creator but also to all His image-bearers. Idolatry is evil, a violation against God’s good instructions, but it is also foolish, senseless, and purposeless. When we follow idols, we exert energy toward something that will only turn to ashes, falling through our fingers like dust. So God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6), does all He can to draw us back to Him.

OUR MODERN IDOLS

The idols of today include fame, fortune, sex, success, our homes, our happiness, among a myriad of other things. If we make these things central in our lives, if these are the things we worship, God will do what is necessary to bring us back to Him and help us see that only He is worthy of worship.

As we read about Jeroboam and Ahab, we find that nothing much has changed over thousands of years. We are still pursuing the same idols as the same God tries to direct us back to what is truly fulfilling and good for us.

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But God allows us to have a choice. He's not going to take over our minds and make us follow Him. He tries to persuade us with His own words, with messengers, and with consequences. Some of us may listen, and some of us may not. Those who don't listen refuse God's kindness because they have forgotten who God is, His faithfulness in the past, His presence in the present, and His hope in the future. Let the pages of old, the words of prophets and scribes, be a significant warning to us to remember that the Lord is the only true God. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who has no beginning and no end. And yet, He chooses to call His created beings—us—into a familial relationship with Him.

A BETTER ELIJAH AND ELISHA

There is only one way for us to find forgiveness and freedom from our idolatry. We no longer have Elijah or Elisha to lead us back from our modern idols. But we do have someone better—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Him, God took on human form to come down in flesh to our level so that we might be persuaded to return to the one true God, that we might trust in Him and find

salvation and hope. Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus performed miracles and spoke truth and called people to repentance. Yet unlike Elijah and Elisha, He was both man and God. He died for us, was resurrected for us, and is coming back again for us. He is prophet, priest, and king, and through Him we can have direct access to God. No other person could have done that for us.

God did this because of His love. Because He is slow to anger and abounding in love. Because He is a God who pursues sinful people. Because He desires that no one be lost in eternity. Jesus's work fulfills God's covenant to His people to multiply them, to redeem them, to save a remnant, and to call all nations to Himself. And as we know, God always keeps His promises.

