

Background: The Story of God and Humanity

Here's a very, very brief summary of the story of God and his dealing with humans as described in the Bible.

Humans were created "in the image of God." This includes our ability to reason, to be self-conscious, to be creative, and to choose. This also includes a spiritual dimension - a soul - through which we relate to our Creator.

But built into our nature was also the potential to sin. Humans can and did choose to disobey God. Since then our human reason, self-consciousness and choices always tend toward sin and selfishness. We became lost souls.

Although turning away from their Creator, humans still felt a need to relate to a supernatural power. (We were designed to worship God, after all). So they instead created idols - false gods they both worship and fear.

The biblical patriarch Abraham realized these idols were false and cried out for the true God, who responded. Abraham's family eventually became a people - the nation of Israel - who left a collection of writings called the Bible that lays out God's plan for humankind. Israel's destiny was to be the venue through which a Deliverer or Savior would be born into the world.

Jesus - the eternal Son of God - became that Deliverer, or "Messiah." He was miraculously born into humanity - as a vulnerable baby. He was in essence both completely human and fully divine. Jesus grew up to lead a sinless life, and teach His people how to return to the true God.

But from God's viewpoint, humanity's sin required a punishment of death. So Jesus took the sin - as well as the penalty - onto Himself. He emptied Himself on our behalf. Jesus was cruelly executed by the political and religious authorities - nailed to a cross - and seemingly failed in His teaching mission. But His death was planned by God to be a sacrifice to remove the penalty from humankind.

The cross became the fulcrum on which history turned.

Jesus' death was revealed to be a victory when He was raised from the dead after three days and then ascended to Heaven. Later God's Holy Spirit was poured out on His believers to empower and strengthen them.

Now, those who believe and trust in Jesus' act of redemption exchange their own lives for His resurrection life, and are saved from their "lostness" - forgiven of their sins. By faith they are "born again" or "born from above" and become new spiritual creatures, experiencing eternal life both in this world and after death.

We are now called to share this story with the people in our lives, calling them to

repentance, and to love and thankfully worship God, as well as to love our neighbors through acts of kindness, mercy, justice and self-sacrifice.

We wait for the end of time, when Christ will make all things right at the Last Judgment.