

GOD'S STORY

AND OUR PLACE IN IT



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INTRODUCTION



Go to mpc.org.au/gods-story to watch a video of this introduction. This symbol will appear throughout the booklet next to sections available as a video. If you're reading this on a screen, tapping / clicking on the play button throughout will take you to this link.

We all make sense of life through story. Modernists tell the story of how science will make the world a better place. Postmodernists tell the story of how tolerance of all 'truth' is our best shot at peace. Muslims tell the story of how Allah will judge the infidels. Buddhists tell the story of how suffering will end once you transcend the illusion of self. Christians live by the story of the Bible, the story centred on Jesus Christ.

Whether we're conscious of it or not, we all place ourselves in a particular story of the world, and the shape of that story shapes your life profoundly. So how do you live by the Bible's story?

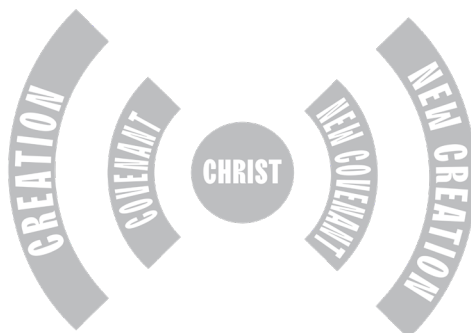
The first thing is to realise that the many books of the Bible do in fact form one big story, from creation to new creation. It's God's story. And the centre of God's story is Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, written before Jesus, all leads up to him. That's actually what Jesus himself said. After he'd been crucified and resurrected, he told his disciples:

"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:44-45)

The apostle Paul put it this way: "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2Corinthians 1:20). In fact, Paul says the main point of "the Holy Scriptures," the Old Testament, is that they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2Timothy 3:15). The Old Testament all leads up to Jesus. Then the New Testament, written after Jesus, is all about Jesus and flows from him. Jesus is the centre. Jesus is the climax of God's story.

The next thing to grasp is that God's story has a clear shape to it, and that shape shows us our own particular place in the story. In this series, we summarise God's story in five episodes (each starting with C for easy recall!):

1. **Creation**
2. **Covenant**
3. **Christ**
4. **New Covenant**
5. **New Creation**



The first five weeks of this series unpacks each of these episodes and how they relate to each other. But as a starter, here's an overview of the episodes:

God's aim has always been to display his glorious goodness by gathering to himself a people willing to live with him under the blessing of his rule. Because of our corrupted hearts, that doesn't work in Eden (1), and it doesn't work in the land of Israel under their covenant law either (2)... but God shows his glorious goodness as Jesus dies under the curse of that law (3), and rises to call together a people freed from curse to live with new hearts shaped by his Spirit (4), who will finally live with God in his perfected place (5).

Once we see this five-episode shape to God's story, it helps us see that followers of Jesus are living in episode 4, New Covenant, and not in episodes 1, 2, 3 or 5. That means the majority of the Bible actually doesn't apply to us *directly*. We're not living under Israel's covenant (episode 2) or in the perfected New Creation (episode 5), for instance. Instead, the parts about episodes 1, 2, 3 and 5 apply to us as they clarify our role in episode 4. Each episode actually has the same pattern: there's always God's *people* in God's *place* on God's *project* (so the 5 Cs contain 3 Ps!). But the particular details of the people, place and project changes with each episode. So the last three weeks of this series give us a chance to look at exactly what it means in practice to be God's people in God's place on God's project in episode 4.

If you're brand new to the Bible, we know this series will be challenging. Though we've tried to make it as simple as possible, the Bible's still big and there's a lot to get your head around! But our hope is that what you'll end up with is a simple framework for reading the Bible and living your part in God's story for years to come.

If you've been reading the Bible for decades, hopefully not of all this will be new to you. But this is God's story we're talking about - the story of the infinite, eternal creator. So expect to pick up some new insights into God, his story and your part in it, even now.

The five-episode framework of God's story will help us further throughout the year. It'll help us read and apply the book of Judges (episode 2), and the letters of Peter (episodes 4 and 5). By the end of the year, we'll use it to address some really hot topics, like gender identity and climate change, all in light of God's story.

The Bible is the story of God being rightly glorified for his goodness to us in Jesus. Our prayer is that this series will help us become better readers and enactors of God's story, that he might be glorified as he deserves!

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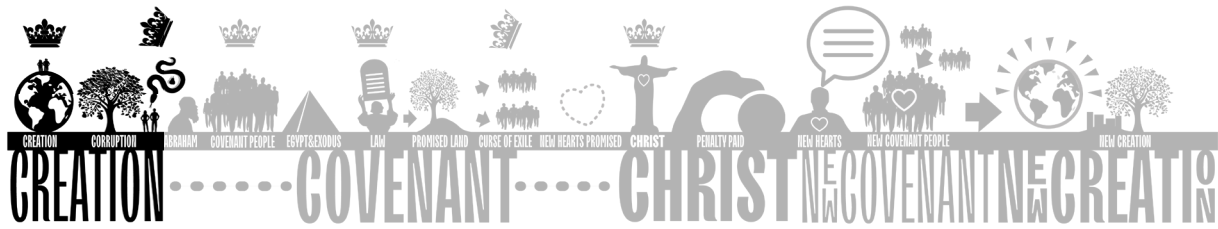
EPISODE 1

CREATION (& CORRUPTION)

Have you ever tried to come in on a movie halfway through? You don't get what's going on. Everyone else gets annoyed by your constant questions: Why did he do that to him, weren't they friends? Why did she say that, is that true or not? You need to start from the beginning. What's driving the people in the story. What defines their character. How do they relate to each other. Miss that and you miss the rest. Let's not do that with God's story...

THOUGHT STARTER

God's Story starts with his creation. When you look upon a beautiful sculpture or painting what questions are raised in your mind?



SCENE 1: CREATION

 **E1V1** @ MPC.ORG.AU/GODS-STORY (OPTIONAL)

God's Story starts (Genesis) with God himself and we catch a glimpse of how good the world was meant to be and, with humanity's mandate for good stewardship, how good it could become. We also see the stark consequences of rebellion against such a good God. These opening chapters of Genesis set the scene for the rest of the Bible story.

1. What questions does the first sentence of the Bible answer?

2. What do we learn from Genesis about:

- God?
- God's purpose for the world?
- God's purpose for humanity?

SCENE 2: CORRUPTION

Sadly, the significance of God's greatness and goodness comes into much sharper focus against the backdrop of humanity's rebellion. And humanity's wickedness comes hot on the heels of God's display of his own goodness and generosity in creating everything. This sets up the Bible's story of how God in his infinite greatness and goodness puts things right again.

Read Genesis 3 in your Bible.

GENESIS 1 - 2

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light...

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...

2:7 The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.⁹ The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil.¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden...

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

GENESIS 6

5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

ROMANS 1

21 Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...

25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

3. Adam and Eve believe and obey the serpent, Satan, instead of God. What belief about God lies behind Adam and Eve's act of rebellion?

4. As a result, what happens to humanity's relationship:

- **With God?**

- **With each other?**

- **With the rest of creation?**

5. Humanity multiplies and increases, but then so does sin. Read Genesis 6:5 (sidebar) for God's assessment of humanity during the time of Noah. Paul says something very similar in his letter to the Romans (sidebar). What does this tell us about the problem with the human heart?

6. What glimmer of hope is there amidst God's curse on humanity and creation?



Humanity came to believe that God had not been good to them, and that the good life lay in disobeying God. As a result we lost relationship with him, with each other, and with the creation we were meant to enjoy and make even better. There is a deep-seated problem with our "hearts" - the very centre of our being. Thus God's project of displaying his goodness in creation has been derailed. This shows us the nature and enormity of the problem that needs to be solved. The rest of the Bible shows that Adam and Eve's sin is not just a momentary lapse. Such a colossal human problem will require an incredible divine solution!

SO WHAT?

7. How have these chapters helped you understand:

- God's greatness and goodness?
- The extent and nature of humanity's rebellion against God?
- The terrible consequences of rejecting God's good rule and how this constitutes a reversal of God's original good creation?
- That the Bible is about how God puts these consequences right?

8. Do you trust that God's limits on us are only for our good? Or do you feel you could have a better life if only you had freedom from the commands of Jesus?

9. How might this episode of God's Story speak into our Australian culture which increasingly views God as mean and limiting?

WHAT'S NEXT?

E1V3

This is the problem at the heart of God's Story: How can God's goodness be displayed as it's meant to be when humanity - whom God made to display his goodness in creation - has abandoned God's goodness?

The first answer will be the Covenant with Israel (episode 2 of God's story). The ultimate answer will be Christ (episode 3) and his New Covenant with Christians (episode 4) leading to the New Creation (episode 5). Stay tuned for the rest of the series!