



EPISODE 3

CHRIST (CLIMAX)

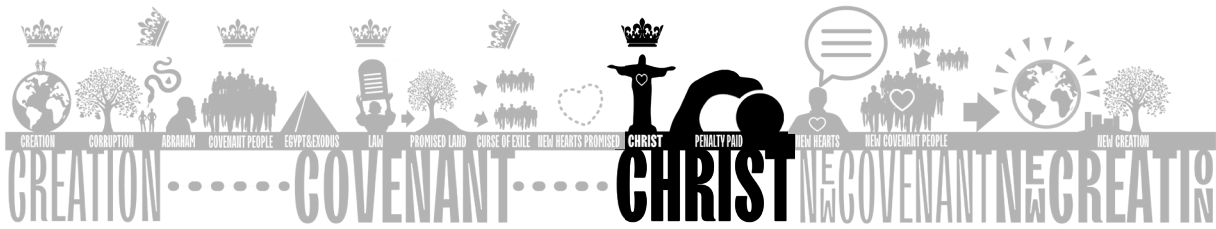
PREVIOUSLY, IN GOD'S STORY...

E3V1 
MPG.ORG.AU/GODS-STORY

In Episode 1 God starts his project of creation to display his glorious goodness. He creates humanity specially for that purpose. But because Adam and Eve reject God's goodness, humanity is cursed with death, creation is corrupted, and God's creation project is derailed. Episode 1 leaves us wondering: Can God's creation project get back on track, and if so, how?

Cue Episode 2: God responds by making a covenant with Israel. God promises their forefather Abraham that the curse on humanity will be undone through a blessing on Abraham's descendants Israel - and then the whole of creation will be blessed along with them. All Israel has to do is love and obey God, and so display his goodness.

But no matter how many good things God gives Israel to help them obey him, Israel disobeys God over and over again. Their hearts are not in it! In fact, what they needed all along was a whole new heart; a new set of attitudes so they can love and obey God and display his goodness because they really want to. Episode 2 leaves us with a promise and a puzzle. How can Israel be saved from their sin (which has left them crushed and in exile) and have their hearts changed so that the rest of creation can be saved too? Cue Episode 3...



THE CHRIST COMES

Jesus is introduced by the prophet John when he's baptising Israelites in the Jordan river. It may have seemed odd, because baptism (which just means "washing") was something foreigners had to do to enter Israel, the people of God's blessing. The Jordan was the river Israel had to cross when they first entered the promised land, the place of God's blessing. John was effectively saying that all Israelites, even the most religious ones like the Pharisees, had effectively cut themselves off by their sin from being the people of God's blessing. Their exile wasn't yet over. They had to repent - turn back to God - to 're-enter' Israel...

Read Matthew's account 3:4-4:11.

1. What was the point of John's baptism? (3:6,11) How does that relate to Episode 2 of God's Story?

2. Did John's baptism actually work? (v7-9) Why or why not? How will Jesus' baptism be different? (v11)

3. What reason does Jesus give for being baptised himself (v15) and what does John find out when it's done? (v16-17)

4. When Jesus is tempted by Satan, he responds with quotes from Deuteronomy. How does Jesus prove different to Adam and to Israel here? What seems to make the difference? (v1)

After centuries of waiting, here at last is a true Israelite, descended from David, who will lead his people in repentance - not because he has sinned himself (which

THE WAY BACK FOR ISRAEL IN EPISODE 2 ...

DEUTERONOMY 30

1 When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations,² and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

THE CUP

PSALM 75

8 In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.

JEREMIAH 25

15 This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

confused John at first!) but representing his people as their Messiah-King and leading them in repentance. In doing this, Jesus fulfils the requirements of Deuteronomy 30: his obedience is wholehearted! As a result, the promised Holy Spirit visibly descends on him - a great sign of God's long awaited promise about to be fulfilled.

ISRAEL RESPONDS

As he preaches, Jesus calls on the Israelites to turn back to their covenant with God, repent with all their hearts, and be forgiven and restored to God's kingdom with newly changed hearts. This is the essence of his "Sermon on the Mount."

5. Read the opening of his sermon in Matthew 5:1-8. What kind of people is Jesus seeking in verse 6? (Will Israel be interested?)

6. To see a summary of how Israel responds, read the Parable of the Tenants in Matthew 21:33-41. The "tenants" in the parable are the leaders of Israel whom Jesus addresses. How will they respond to Jesus and what will happen as a consequence?

As Jesus foreshadows, instead of repenting and seeking true righteousness from changed hearts, Israel's leaders are offended at the idea that they need to change. Especially the Pharisees, who think they're obeying God well enough already. Ultimately, they're so indignant that they have Jesus arrested, tried and crucified.

Just before he's arrested, Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Read Matthew 26:36-46.*

7. What is the "cup" Jesus refers to in his prayer (v39, 42) and what will he achieve by "drinking it"? See also The Cup sidebar on the previous page. (How well are the disciples performing, if they're at this point the best and most willing 'new Israel' as followers of Jesus?)

E3V2

By dying a death he doesn't deserve as Israel's representative Messiah-King, Jesus takes on himself the full force of the covenant curse Israel deserved. The curse is finally ended! The blessings promised to Abraham can finally flow - not just to Israel, but to everyone who wants to join in! Christ has redeemed Israel from the curse of the law, so now Jews and Gentiles alike can receive the blessings of the Spirit (*Galatians 3:14*).

THE BIG PICTURE

So far we've been looking at this story from a ground-level view. There's also something cosmic going on that's much bigger! Back in Ezekiel 36, God said that after waiting for generations for Israel to repent he was finally going to step into the picture himself to put things right. Likewise in Malachi 3, God says he is going to come to his people in person. Jesus is more than just the "best Israelite" or the "best human." He is God-in-flesh, God's own solution to the bent and broken hearts of humanity.

Read Colossians 1:15-22 (sidebar).

8. Why is Jesus' uniquely qualified to bring 'reconciliation' between God and all of humanity (both Jews and Gentiles)?

9. From v19-20, what is the full "cost" of the cross? (How big is the 'investment' in verse 19, and how big is the price paid in v20?)

10. How does the cross ultimately demonstrate God's glorious goodness?

11. Reflect on this: we get to live in God's Story after episodes 1-3, Creation, Covenant and Christ. What difference does this make? As you pray together now, what should you thank God for?

COLOSSIANS 1

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.