

HOW DID IT ALL GET STARTED?



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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of four booklets published by College Park Church describing some of the most basic tenants of the Christian faith. What is Christianity really all about? The answer to that question is found in the Bible, as you might suspect. The Bible is a large and often confusing book that delights some people and frustrates others. The goal of these booklets is to clearly and concisely describe the foundational messages of the Bible that Christians believe.

The Bible is really a big, unified story of the workings of God in the universe – from the beginning of time until the end of the ages. This is a big story and has many acts or underlying stories that contribute to the main storyline. By “story” we do not mean “fiction,” but rather a real and true story of God’s words and actions in our world.

There are four major acts to this big story of God in the Bible. Those four acts will be the themes of these booklets. The booklets will be interactive, with questions and content for you to study. Our goal is to help you better understand the basic and fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith and to challenge you to assess your story and see how your story intersects with God’s story. Enjoy the journey through the four acts of God’s story in creation, the fall of mankind, the redemption of humans, and the restoration of all of his creation. It is the Greatest Story Ever Told, and it is the most important truth for all to consider. It has changed the lives of countless followers of the God-man, Jesus, as they have placed their faith and trust in Him.

IN CONCLUSION...

The first act of the grand story of the Bible starts with a huge punch. It is delightful, and it is a world that we wish would never end. There was no suffering, death, or pain. All was in order and God was in His right place as were humans and the rest of creation. It was all as it should be, and peace (or Hebrew Shalom) was the reality, as the triune God was loved and worshiped in Eden. Obviously, that is not the end of the story, but it is a good beginning and anticipates the end of the story as we will see in the future.

BRIEF QUIZ

At the risk of being like school, please answer the following questions to be sure you understand this part of the story. Try to answer without looking back, but if you need to look, go for it.

1) How can we know God? What are two means to know God?

2) List three attributes of God and briefly describe them.

3) What does it mean when we say that God is triune?

4) What did God use to create the universe?

5) Briefly, what does it mean that mankind was created in the image of God?

Creation also shows beauty. What a wonderful scene was the Garden of Eden. There were true peace and beauty in that location. God's presence was there in the Garden as well. He made the universe to bring glory to Himself, and it certainly did that (Rev. 4:11). The bottom line of creation is that this is the way it is supposed to be. Everything came from God and was designed to bring glory to Him. That is the beginning of the story; it does not get better than that.

WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF HUMANS IN THIS CREATION?

At the end of creation, God decided to put His stamp on His creation. It is like a painter who signs his name to the bottom of his painting, so all will know who painted it. As the pinnacle statement of creation, God created humans in his image.

▶▶▶ Read Gen. 1:26 and summarize the verse:

Mankind – male and female – were created in the image of God. The big question is *“who will bear the image of God on this earth?”* The story of God now includes some people who will represent God on this earth. They will be able to live in relationship with God and with other humans like no other creature on earth. God can be seen through humans.

That is a sobering and wonderful place to be. Mankind was created to represent God. Adam was to love Eve, and Eve was to love Adam; they were to live in a relationship that reflects the love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for each other. In Genesis 1:28, humans were given their job descriptions. They were told the following: Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth with those who would glorify God, and have dominion or rulership over all of creation, reflecting God as the sovereign.

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ACT ONE OF THE BIG STORY: CREATION

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” — Genesis 1:1

The first act in the story of the Bible finds one of the best known statements as mentioned above: God created all that exists. This is a profound and often debated statement because it affirms what many deny – that is, that God is before all reality, and all reality finds its source in Him. In the unfolding of this act of the story, there are four questions that we will consider. Think about these questions as you proceed in this story.

WHO IS GOD?

This is the most important question anyone can ask. The Bible assumes that the reader believes in the reality of God. Some good proofs have been proposed through the years for the reality of God. The fact that everything comes from something suggests that there must have been a first “thing” from which all things came. That first “thing” would be God.

Some have also suggested that the concept of right and wrong assumes one who established morals which are universally understood (such as do not murder, steal, etc.). That would be God. Others argue for the existence of God from the human's intuitive sense that there is a spiritual component to our existence that needs a God to be fulfilled.

Those arguments are helpful in considering the validity of God in the Bible, but the bottom line for the reality of God is faith. We must take this to be true by faith.

▶▶▶ Read Hebrews 11:1-3 and describe the view of faith in that section:

Knowing that the Bible assumes belief in God, what is this God like? What do we know about the God who creates? When you come to a story, it is nice to know something of the main characters. For example, in the C.S. Lewis book *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*, the characters are very interesting, but Lewis teases the reader with the lion character who comes late in the book and who has a mystery to him. The lion Aslan is a figure that Lewis created to resemble many aspects of Jesus. (This is a good and easy book to read.)

Below are some important realities of God that are affirmed by the Bible. These truths help us to better understand the story of the Bible.

1) He is self-existent. This means simply that He depends on nothing outside of Himself to exist. He is totally independent. He was never created but created all things.

▶▶▶ Read Psalm 90:1-2 and briefly restate the verse in your own words:

2) He is Triune. One of the most beautiful and difficult truths of Christianity is the triune God. The definition of triune is that there is one God (Deut. 6:4) in three persons (Matt. 28:20). The three persons of the Godhead are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all are called God.

▶▶▶ Read the following verses and list who is called God in them:

John 3:16

John 1:1

Acts 5:3,4

3) Much more is said about God in the Bible. There is no more important need for humans than the need to know God. The more you know God, the more you will know of yourself and all around you. The story of God starts with knowing God.

▶▶▶ Write one truth about God from each of these verses:

Matthew 28:18

James 1:5

Psalm 139:1-2

Psalm 139: 7-10

HOW CAN WE KNOW THIS GOD?

To say there is a God is one thing. But to say we can know this God is something else all together. I believe there is a President of the United States. But what do I know about him? The answer may be obvious to some. The Bible is the way we know God. The term revelation describes the Bible, in that God chose to reveal Himself to us, and that is how we know His story.

▶▶▶ Read II Timothy 3:16 to see what the Bible says about itself. Briefly summarize the verse:

What a blessing it is to have the Bible, a gift from God, to help us know Him and His story! He has also revealed Himself in creation, as stated in Psalm 19:1, but that revelation is not as clear as the Bible. Christians have always gone to the Bible to know about God and have trusted it to be authoritative, since it comes from God Himself.

As kids we used to sing "The B-i-b-l-e; yes that's the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God; the B-i-b-l-e." Christians believe in the Bible because it comes from the God in whom our faith is placed.

SO WHAT ABOUT THIS CREATION STORY?

As with all these questions, there is much that can be said. Genesis 1 and 2 give the best description of Act One of God's story, as He creates the universe. Like all good stories, the reader wants to know how things started. It is a bit frustrating to read a story without knowing the background to it. Some writers want to tease the reader and will give the background later in the book. The Bible is very up-front with the creation story. He is how it all started. God created everything out of nothing. Read Genesis 1-2 for your own enjoyment. It is a beautiful story.

There are many aspects to the story. It was all good. There was no flaw in creation. It came from God, and as you read Genesis 1, you see the final commentary is "it is good." It is also very orderly. The days are well described, and God gave all that was needed to sustain what He created. The creation was out of nothing. God did not use existing material to make material. He created all from nothing and then formed it into an ordered cosmos. He is the creator, and all else that existed is created by Him.