

## WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW (#WCSK) EPISODE ZERO: A BRIEF BIBLE SUMMARY FROM CREATION TO CHRIST

***What Christians Should Know (#WCSK): Volume Zero* takes a step back and investigates basic ideas about God, the Bible, and the Christian faith. This series provides crucial answers to critical questions about belief.**

**For more on basic Christian doctrine, please feel free to explore a wealth of online resources on the official website of *What Christians Should Know*, [wcsk.org](http://wcsk.org). There you will find free e-books, online Bible study, a blog, and the WCSK Podcast.**

The Bible is a love story about a devoted God chasing after His creations. If that surprises you, then you have to keep on reading.

The full story of the Bible reveals that the mercy of God triumphs over judgment. If that surprises you, then you have to keep on reading.

The Bible is not a fictional story. It is full of real, broken, messed-up, and completely dysfunctional people who had real life problems and dealt with real historical situations. In fact, the more good these people did, the bigger their personal problems were. The Bible tells a story about real life so that everyone can relate to it. If that surprises you, then Episode Zero is the perfect place to start.

*Why Episode Zero?* Because, for some, the Bible and Jesus may feel unnecessarily complicated. It may feel far away and irrelevant to everyday life. In many cases, people can't see value or significance in the Bible because they never got the complete story—they never heard *in full* what God was trying to tell them. When one does take a step back and look at the drama of redemption, what he or she will discover is a very intimate and pertinent story about a loving Father seeking for and reaching out to His lost children in order to restore a broken relationship.

*So, what is a brief summary of the story of the Bible?* Although *our* story begins in Genesis, the Trinitarian God is eternal and has always existed. What is so compelling is that before He created our universe, He already knew everything that was going to happen in the future—including all those who would reject and despise Him. And this is how powerful the love of God is: He was willing to say yes to us even though many will say no to Him. God's love is not coercive and invites us to freely choose.

And so, the drama begins “In the beginning” when God had (and He still has) the purposeful intention for humanity to be in a close, deep personal relationship with Him. He intended for perfect harmony for all of creation, and God created Paradise for Adam and Eve. God dwelled among them and walked with them in the Garden He prepared. God saw *everything* that He created, and all of it was *good*.

But then, a revolution happened. Adam and Eve thought that they could do better than God, and so they sinned. With their free will, they rejected God and everything He provided for them. Sin drove an infinite wedge between God and humankind. And, as a result of sin, harmony turned into strife. Fellowship turned into separation, and the God who walked among us became hidden and far away. The world learned what a reality distant from God felt like—fallen and filled with evil, heartache, and pain. It was now possible to be a creation in God’s world but still not know God. Because of Adam’s sin, our first parents were exiled from Paradise, and the rest of humanity inherited a sinful nature and the same rebellious tendencies.

The exile had to happen because there are always consequences to every choice that we make. The exile had to happen because God is just and simply cannot say “never mind” to sin. Yet God is also merciful, and so before Adam and Eve left Paradise, God already had a plan for redemption to one day bring His chosen ones back into Paradise. God *could have* ended the story of humanity right there, but He refused to leave creation alone. So, He provided for Adam and Eve by clothing and covering them.

For the rest of human history, men and women would endlessly search for ways to get back into Paradise and escape the penalty of sin: death. They would try vague spirituality, other gods, reason, science, logic, philosophy, and politics, but none of these things could deliver them from the grip of death. If the story ended here, there would be no hope.

As time moved on and the generations passed, God focused His attention on a particular group of people, the Israelites. He freely chose them with one ultimate goal in mind: to redeem humanity and restore a broken relationship. God began by choosing Abraham. He formed a covenant with him and his descendants. God freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and promised them that THE LORD would provide. He invited them to serve Him and Him alone. God even put the Israelites into a figurative “Paradise,” the Promised Land. But unfortunately, just like Adam, the Israelites rejected God. In spite of everything God did for them, they chose to rebel against God over and over *and over* again. So, the Israelites were exiled from the Promised Land and cast into the hands of foreign conquerors. The exile had to happen because God is just and simply cannot say “never mind” to sin. Yet God is also merciful, and so before the Israelites left the Promised Land, those who spoke on behalf of THE LORD (the prophets) told us that Someone was coming who would at last deliver humanity from its misery. God *could have* ended the story of humanity right there, but once again, God refused to leave creation alone. If the story had ended there, all we would have would be tales of despair and unfulfilled promises.

This where the story *really* gets good. After a period of silence, God pierced the veil of our material reality and Incarnated as Jesus, fully God and fully Man. Throughout His life, Jesus, the Son of God, showed us how to be divine and drew our attention back to God and away from the false systems of religion that were exposed as fraudulent. Jesus lived a life of perfect, flawless obedience and revealed to us that God loved His creation so much that He gave His only Son to us *for our sake*. He gave Him to us so that we could know God—we could see Him, speak to Him, learn from Him, and understand that

God is reaching us where we are *for our sake*. God didn't want us to deny our senses and believe in a mystical being "somewhere up there" but to come and see Him for ourselves. God told us that when we believe in His Son, we would inherit eternal life.

Because God wanted us to believe, Jesus came into the scene during the time of the Romans, who, at the time, made up the most powerful empire on the planet. The Romans did a great job of connecting the known world at the time, so when something happened with Jesus, everyone would hear about it. Jesus even recruited real, everyday people who were eyewitnesses to things that He did. He recruited one guy called Matthew—a tax collector—a man used to people lying and trying to cheat him. God chose a human lie detector to write a discerning eyewitness account of what Jesus said and did. God chose a fisherman—a regular, everyday guy—to tell the story of Jesus to other regular, everyday people in plain language. God would eventually choose a fiery opponent of Jesus—the apostle Paul—who would have a dramatic turnaround to become one of the biggest forces *for* Jesus. Paul's testimony for Christ was so powerful because he had made a name for himself (as Saul) hurting the very people he now fought for.

The story takes a sad turn when the same people that God first chose (the Jews) accused Jesus of being a heretic, and the Son of God was nailed to a Cross by the Romans. However, what the world didn't understand and intended for evil was what God used to fulfill His good purposes. Despite the fact that once again, God was walking among us, *yet again* we rejected Him. Despite the fact that Jesus came in peace and tried to explain that God was trying to liberate people and not enslave them, He was rejected. Despite the fact that Jesus shunned the "religious elite" who considered themselves better than everyone else, He was rejected. And despite that fact that Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, the disenfranchised, and those on the margins, the world told Him, "We don't want you!"

Yet, in spite of all of this, Jesus willingly gave up His life and shed His innocent blood on the Cross because God refuses to leave creation alone. Jesus endured torture before the Cross and then suffered in agony for hours while on the Cross. He served as a substitutionary, eternal sacrifice to pay the full legal price for sin and to remove the wedge that separated God and humankind. The Cross had to happen because God is just and simply cannot say "never mind" to sin. God takes sin so seriously that He decided in His steadfast love that *He* would bear the penalty of sin through Jesus.

What is so moving is that Jesus did not *have* to do any of this for our sake. He could have, in His omnipotence, gotten off the Cross and struck all of His accusers down in the blink of an eye. Yet He didn't do that because God still refused to leave creation alone. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself for our sake, was crucified in weakness, and then died. Then, after they buried the Messiah, there was silence for a time. People began to wonder if God had finally had enough with us and given up on humanity.

But then—and this is the best news—Jesus was raised from the dead three days later. In His victorious resurrection, the Messiah forever conquered death by coming back from the dead and telling everyone about it. His resurrection was the ultimate signal that God

cannot and will not leave His creation alone, and to deliver us from our iniquities and guarantee the salvation of the elect, He gave of Himself to redeem us. Jesus is the One who now holds the keys to eternal life and is the way to defeat death and return back to Paradise. Every shackle became loose, and the deceiver was crushed as The King of Kings and THE LORD OF LORDS broke every chain that kept us from our loving Father in Heaven.

Now there is hope because the only One who can give you eternal life is the One who conquered death. The good news is that the only thing that you must do to inherit eternal life is to believe *in Jesus*. The good news is that you don't have to pick and choose, because there are not many roads to eternal life. There is only one: Jesus Christ. No one else died *for your sake* on a Cross, and when the Messiah returns to inherit His kingdom, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Soon after the resurrection of Jesus, He sent His disciples out into the world. For just as the Father sent Jesus, He now sends us into all the nations. We are sent to deliver the liberating message of the good news of God's kingdom: that those who are elect and have faith in Jesus as the Messiah will not perish. These disciples go out *from* the church, the place led by Jesus and where God's Spirit dwells. Those in the assembly of the church spread the love and light of Christ to *all* human beings in word and deed. Through witnessing and evangelism, the redeeming, transformative power of Christ is demonstrated to the entire world. God refuses to leave creation alone, and because we serve Him, we cannot leave creation alone either. The good news of Jesus Christ is so good, we can't keep it to ourselves. We have to tell others about it because it changes *everything*.

It is at this juncture in the story of redemption that the history of the Bible meets us in the present and compels us to take action. That is because in the final chapter of the Bible saga, God will return. For those who have faith and worship Christ as Lord, this return will be a time of celebration. For those who reject the Messiah, this return will be a time of judgment.

Day after day, Christians all around the world hear the awesome story of God and realize that from the very beginning, God has been chasing after us without ceasing. He has not stopped chasing after us, and the lovingkindness of THE LORD is perfectly embodied in Jesus. For it is because God so loved the world that He gave us His Son, and whoever believes in the Son will not perish, but will live forever. Had God done what is "fair," our story would have ended a long, long time ago. Thankfully, the grace of God is totally and completely unfair, and because of this, redemption is possible. The Bible is a love story because the only thing that can explain such senseless, seemingly illogical chasing by a perfect God toward an imperfect creation is the love of a warm and caring Father seeking, reaching, and restoring relationships with His lost children.

That is a story worth telling and sharing.