

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 258

The Bible Project

February 9, 2019

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guests: Dr. Tim Mackie (TM)

Jon Collins (JC)

Episode Summary

In this episode we chat with Dr. Tim Mackie and Jon Collins about their amazingly successful and eminently useful ministry, The Bible Project. We learn a bit about their backgrounds, individually and as friends, how the Bible Project was born, and plans for the future.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 258: The Bible Project with Tim Mackie and Jon Collins. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing, sir?

MH: Pretty good. Busy as usual. Nothing new there.

TS: Well, Mike, I'm excited about this conversation. I love The Bible Project. I'm so passionate about it, because I really wanted to be Jon when I grew up. [MH laughs] I wanted to do computer animation, but 25+ years ago, it really didn't exist. But man, I sure love what they're doing. I love their videos. I love their style. It's great. I watch the videos with my kids. I think the Bible Project is the perfect on-ramp to what we're trying to do here at the Naked Bible Podcast, especially since they're starting to cover some of the topics that we cover here at the Naked Bible Podcast or that you've written about.

MH: It is. I think that's really accurate. I think that's very descriptive. You know, what can I say? I didn't have any of those early thoughts, and honestly, I'm not as cool as either Tim or Jon. I never would have thought of walking that path.

TS: I'm excited.

MH: Yeah, let's get into it. I've been looking forward to chatting with both of these guys about their history and what they're doing.

MH: Well, we are thrilled to have Tim and Jon of the Bible Project with us, finally. Finally, you guys! This has been a long time in coming.

TM: [laughs] Yes, it has been. Yeah, we're really excited to finally be able to talk.

JC: Yeah, a pleasure to be here.

MH: Our audience includes a lot of fans of what you guys do. But for those to whom you might be new (and that number might surprise us, actually)... We always get surprised about people new to *us*, even who know who I am through Logos or something like that. A lot of people are stunned, "You have a podcast? Really? You're on the internet? Really?" It happens all the time. So I don't want to assume anything here on the part of our audience. So if you guys could introduce yourselves real quickly and give a little bit of a personal history. I know you have a history together as well, which is cool. I'm hoping you'll say something about that. But who you are and what is this thing known as The Bible Project? How did that come to be?

TM: Yeah. Well, this is Tim registering here. Hello, Jon and Mike. So my name is Tim Mackie. I am the Bible/theology nerd/researcher for The Bible Project. I grew up in Portland, OR. And I grew up fully immersed in skateboard culture (or subculture is what I should say, because it's definitely a subculture here in Portland).

That's significant because although my parents were followers of Jesus (we grew up attending church), it was actually in my teenage years, when I was really on the anti-Jesus train by that point in my life, or at least the completely-indifferent-and-slightly-antagonistic-to-Jesus train, that there was a church in northeast Portland that had created and opened up a public skateboard park—a large covered indoor warehouse skateboard park—an awesome park. And they would open it up different nights of the week to the public. So I started going to that park because it was a dry place to skateboard in my teens. I was 16 when I first started going. And what they would do is shut down the park for a little bit each evening (20-30 minutes) and one of the staff guys who ran it (who were all skateboarders, but they were also followers of Jesus)... So they would give a talk about Jesus. So I went to that park every week for years. And that was my re-acquaintance with the real Jesus. [laughs] I had some childhood impressions about him from my family, but this Jesus was just like, "Whoa." This was a different deal. *And* I was hearing him talked about by my peers—skateboarding culture, people I respected. So that, over about three or four years, really sunk in. So when I was almost 20 years old, I gave my allegiance to Jesus and started following him. That was the game-changer for me. That community around that ministry was just amazing—such an amazing community of skateboarders who had a really, really high view of Jesus and the scriptures. So the cool thing to do would be to go skating on Friday nights then go out to a 24/7 coffee shop and

5:00

read the book of Galatians aloud and talk about it. That was how... Or read the Gospel of Mark aloud.

JC: It was a sub-subculture.

TM: It was a sub-subculture. Yeah, I don't know.

MH: How old were you when you when you would do stuff like that?

TM: Around 21 and 22. So that was my incubator for what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It's like skateboard, read the Bible, talk about it with your friends, talk about Jesus with your friends because he's awesome and he's changing my life... A few of those friends signed up for classes at a Bible College (Multnomah Bible College in Portland), and I didn't have any aspirations in my life except to skateboard, so I thought I'd sign up and take some classes. And really, in just the first couple of classes I was introduced to the Bible as Jewish theological literature. And I was just captured. I had never... Because Jesus was awesome, but the Bible as a whole... I had fallen in love with Jesus over those years, and then I started to read the Bible after that and I was just bewildered for the most part. [MH laughs] And I'm glad it went in that order, as I look back now. I'm glad it was Jesus first. Then he's constantly talking about the rest of this book, so I should read the rest of this book. "What? Talking snakes?" And the whole deal. Then I started taking classes, and I just fell in love with biblical studies and biblical languages. And as one thing led to another, I went to seminary here in Portland. And then my Hebrew teacher here in Portland had gone to the University of Wisconsin for the Hebrew and Semitics program where you, Mike... [laughs]

MH: Your teacher was Karl, right? Karl Kutz.

TM: Yeah, Karl Kutz. Yeah. That's where you and I first met, although I was just the entry freshman and you were the graduating Ph.D.

MH: Yeah, I was escaping. [laughs]

TM: You were. Your dissertation defense was the first one I had ever seen in person. And I was terrified. [Laughter] "This is what I have to look forward to?" And you were amazing. But they grilled you, man. Holy cow.

MH: Yeah. It brings back memories. I won't say fond memories... [laughs] So how good were you at skateboarding? Because I'm just wondering, "Did the world of skateboarding lose some future star here?"

TM: [laughter] No, no. I was okay—or kind of good, but no.

MH: Competitive?

TS: What board did you use? We have to know what board you used.

TM: Oh, wow. The board of the week. They would break...

JC: You went through a board in a week?!

TM: In the summers, sometimes, it was a board a week. So my job at the Spaghetti Factory was...

JC: ...just to buy boards...

TM: ...crucial, because all my money went to buying boards. [laughter]

MH: Well, you can't go through a book a week now. You can't destroy one. So it's a little more economical, even though they're so expensive.

TM: Yeah. So that's in short form. I'll let Jon give his version, and maybe he can narrate when we met.

MH: Okay, Mr. Collins, let's hear it.

JC: Yeah. I grew up in the Northwest here. Not in Portland. I was born in Portland, but grew up in Federal Way, Washington, which is a city. It sounds like a highway. [laughter]

MH: Is it close?

JC: It's a suburb of Seattle. I grew up in what I would guess is a very typical evangelical home and was just always on board for the program. And when I was a senior in high school, I had a really influential youth pastor who helped me really embrace faith at a personal level. And then I got excited about going to study the Bible, so I went where he went. It was actually where my dad went as well, here in town, called Multnomah. And that's where Tim and I met. Tim was a senior when I came in as a freshman.

10:00

TM: Hmm... Junior.

JC: Junior? Okay. We were both part of the Skate Church thing.

TM: That was its name. The skate park's name was "Skate Church." Yeah. [laughter]

JC: Yeah. I really enjoyed studying the Bible, but I'm not smart enough to be a true... get a PhD in anything, or really dig through books...

MH: PhDs are about perseverance, Jon, [laughs] not necessarily about super intellect.

JC: I found that what I really enjoy is trying to understand something and then helping other people understand it—the whole craft of communication. I grew up in the church, so I grew up listening to people orating through sermons and heard plenty of horrible ones and good ones. I started becoming obsessed with what makes good communication. And then after college, I got into media and really got obsessed with how to use animation and illustration and video to then help with communication. And that was early on in the days when YouTube was a new phenomenon (2004). It was pretty fresh. Camera equipment was getting cheaper. So that whole industry was changing. And I started making these explainer videos, and then started making those a lot for the marketplace (tech companies and stuff). I just spent a decade explaining all sorts of things for all sorts of people.

MH: So you had a business doing that, doing that for a living.

JC: Yeah. I started a business with some friends, and then really was fortunate in being at the right place at the right time with that business and being good enough at it. And then Tim and I reconnected. Tim came back from Madison where he had gone to school and was working. And we just started talking about doing some sort of explainer biblical theology thing.

TM: Yeah, and you had a studio—a business—and therefore a team that was producing videos.

JC: Yeah, we had designers around and such.

TM: And the idea was, “Hey!” You were starting to get bored with making videos about just tech products. [laughs]

JC: Yeah. I’d made literally 100 videos on some sort of variation of a cloud computing software. [laughter]

MH: So okay. What is an old, good, non-Bible Project video that you made that somebody could actually find on YouTube? Is there such a thing?

TM: There’s a number that went viral.

JC: Oh, yeah. There’s one that I made just for fun. It was in the studio. And I really like this one called “How to Survive a Robot Uprising.” [MH laughs] Google that...

MH: That’ll be useful in the future, though...

JC: And you'll find... That was with another PhD in town, but he's a PhD in robotics. [laughter] And he wrote a book.

TM: You did one on the whole concept of the leap year and our Western calendar. That was fascinating. I remember seeing that.

MH: I have to look that one up. Not at this moment, but I'm going to look that one up.

JC: There's a lot of leap year videos now. That one was probably 20... That would be two leap years ago. Eight years ago.

MH: Did you do a 2012 Mayan calendar video? [laughter]

15:00

JC: No. The thing that got me on the map was I made a video for this product called Google Wave, which doesn't exist anymore, but it was Google's... They built this new software that... Or new service that was supposed to kill email. And it really is a lot like probably what Slack is now. But this was 10 to 12 years ago. And this was 2008, 2009, and everyone wanted Google Wave and it was a closed, invite-only system at that time. So the internet was clamoring with people obsessed with wanting to get on, but at the same time no one really knew what it was and why they wanted to be on it. So it was this weird vortex of confusion. So I made this two-minute video with Sharpies just explaining what it was. And that won us Google as a client.

MH: Wow.

JC: And then I went down and made a video that explained Google Chrome OS, which was their cloud operating system, basically. So yeah.

MH: So when you guys got back together... We can all see where this is heading. You already sort of tipped your hand here. So you guys get back together and the Bible Project is essentially the baby—the bi-product—here.

JC: Yeah.

TM: Yeah, I had been... I was introduced to biblical studies with the wonder of both understanding it as a work of literature (narrative and poetic communication) in ancient Hebrew form. But then also, the approach of biblical theology—allowing the narrative and the shape of the literature itself to determine the beliefs that we derive from it, as opposed to looking at it with our... Whatever.

MH: What a novel idea. [laughter]

JC: That's right, yeah.

TM: So that's just the train I was on. So I'd been in pastoral teaching ministry and seminary teaching and just working out ideas and content. I had developed over about seven years a whole bunch of ways for how to invite people into the Bible, or how to think about books in the Bible.

MH: When did it strike you... What was the "Aha" moment for you about zeroing in on or focusing on the narrative (or metanarrative, or whatever we want to call it)? What hit you between the eyes? This is where we need to camp, right here.

JC: I heard you describe it that's how you were taught, too.

TM: Part of it is was how I was introduced to the Bible when I first started reading it, and with Multnomah. I learned the word "metanarrative" my first semester at Multnomah. It was a professor named Ray Lubek who wrote one book called *Read the Bible for a Change*. It's an introduction to how to read the Bible as a form of literature. But, man, he was just sage. And then I just followed the trail of his footnotes and his most influential authors, and then our early influences were John Sailhamer, Christopher Wright, and N.T. Wright—an Old Testament scholar, Wright, and a New Testament scholar, Wright—so the two Wrights. J. Richard Middleton (his work was influential on me), and they're all trying to... Whatever book of the Bible or whatever idea in the Bible you're trying to grasp, that's the first thing you should do is look at where it's first introduced in the overall narrative. How is it developed throughout the developing story? Where does it climax? Where does it resolve? I was just trained to read the Bible that way.

MH: So other than the Ray Lubek book, what would you recommend to our audience to get their heads in that?

TM: A great introduction now that I've used in many classes is by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen called *The Drama of Scripture*. That's about a decade old now. It was written for a wide audience. I've found it's the most accessible. There's a lot of other ones, too, for people who want to go the next level deeper, especially in the Hebrew Bible. I still think that Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty*... Do you know this one, Mike?

MH: Yeah. I actually talked to Steve at the last SBL. We have connected at the last few of them. He really appreciates *Unseen Realm*. Given that book, it's understandable why.

TM: Yeah. That was early in the developing series called *New Studies in Biblical Theology* by Intervarsity. And now there's 40 volumes in that series.

MH: Yeah, it's huge.

20:00

TM: It's awesome. The whole series is a great set of resources. So once I realized that reading the Bible in Hebrew unlocked the next level, no one could stop me. I just couldn't help myself.

MH: [laughs] You don't have to apologize.

TM: I was well into both... I was done with grad school by the time Jon pitched this idea to me, but more I was now working mostly in local church or seminary contexts trying to put all this to work. So that's when Jon approached me. Because I had made some real rudimentary one-take...

JC: ...white board...

TM: ...videos of standing in front of a white board for five minutes outlining the design and main themes of each book of the Bible, and put them up for a church to use. And I think you saw one or two of those and you were like, "I know a thing or two about making videos..." And you had your own personal story and motivations for what you were bringing to this.

JC: Yeah. I think even more than your videos, it was our conversations. Because I found that there wasn't really anyone else actually that I could think of that I would be able to sit down with and talk about the Bible and the real questions I had in a way that felt safe and intelligent. But it also came from a place of faithfulness, of "Hey, we don't want to rip this apart because we want to abandon ship; we're committed to Jesus. But let's be real with our questions." So I would bring my questions to Tim, and he'd be like, "That's an interesting question. But here's five better questions." [laughter] "And here's five more problems that you haven't seen yet." But then at this time, in a way that was... I guess we were doing our own deconstruction/reconstruction thing. At least for me, that was super-helpful. From how I was reading the Bible to appreciating the Bible anew. And so I just really wanted to take those insights and be able to share them with others. And the best way I know how to share information is with explainer videos.

MH: You guys essentially reproduce in short form those kinds of conversations on your podcast. Essentially, those are your two roles. So what I'm hearing is that it was the videos that came first, and then you added the podcast at some point. Is that correct?

JC: Well, I guess the conversations came first. And then we said, "Let's make some videos." And then my process of making a video is to have a really long conversation to try to understand the topic. And so we kept having those conversations, even more in depth than ever. And then we added writing after the conversation. And then videos came. And then at some point, probably a year into the project, we turned on the mic and said, "Hey, let's record these

conversations and put those on podcasts.” The conversations are just a part of our process of trying to work through concepts.

MH: So when I visited you guys, I assumed that was your normal process, but I didn’t realize it was derivative from essentially how this was born.

JC: Yeah.

TM: Yeah, that’s why it’s been a surprise—because it’s been something we would already do. The process of making the videos was literally just being in a room where there are microphones and turning them on. But then as it’s developed, I’ve... As it slowly became... It took a couple of years where it became enough of a project for both of us to start doing it full-time. Then for me, every video now... I approach it as I would be preparing for a class on that theme or book.

JC: He had lots of notes.

TM: Yeah, so I’m writing notes that I would create for a class (or to write a book or something) so then it’s just super-fun, because it’s just constantly fresh research and new learning.

JC: And then I get to be a student, and I get to be the only student that matters in the class. [laughter] It’s pretty fun.

MH: So how do you guys pick your topics for the videos? Is it that Jon wakes up and has a new set of questions? Do you plot things out? How do you decide where to land? Because you have a limited amount of time. I know it takes a long time to produce just one of your videos; there are a lot of people-hours that go into that. So you have to pick. You need to figure out what you can do and what you can’t do. So how do you decide?

25:00 **JC:** How do we decide? Well, Tim brought... When we first sat down and were like, “Hey, let’s really do this,” Tim brought a spreadsheet of 120 videos. [MH laughs] Here’s the library I’d want to create. So it was, like, “Sweet.” Seventy of those were walking through each book of the Bible and maybe cutting a couple of books in half, and then the rest were theme videos. And that was his big—maybe the most novel—thing, which was, “Hey, let’s just trace biblical themes from beginning to end of scripture and tie the narrative of scripture together through one motif.” And I don’t know if you realized this at the time, but what I began to start to appreciate was that every time you do that, you’re basically telling the gospel in a different way. Because the climax and resolution of this theme in scripture is always with Jesus—his death and resurrection, and then new creation. So anyway, there were probably 25 of those he wanted to make. So we just started going back and forth, “Okay, let’s do a book of the Bible, and then let’s do a theme.” I don’t know how we prioritized which theme. Oh! We thought,

if you were going to go through the Bible, which ones fit with... So we did “Heaven and Earth” first, because when you start reading Genesis, that’s the first thing that you’re introduced to.

TM: The first words that...

JC: Heaven and earth. So I think we were trying to pick themes that worked with where we were at in scripture. And then from there, that library has morphed and grown and Tim will be thinking of something new, or we’ll be having a discussion and we’ll realize, “Oh, that’s a whole ‘nother theme video.” Right now, we’re about to release a spiritual beings series, which, Mike, you helped on. That came out of a conversation we were having about *elohim*—just the word *elohim* and what that means. And then we got really geeky and people started asking questions.

TM: We made and researched a video for a year about the identity of God—how you get from the Shema (“The Lord our God, the Lord is one”) to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That was the basic question, helping people get from... From the first three-quarters, where it’s one God, and then it’s three who are one. So in the course of that, I had read before (in different sections) the *Unseen Realm*, but over the course of that, I worked through the whole book from beginning to end, to take it in as a whole work. And I found it so helpful, clarifying, and stimulating that I started bringing all the stuff to Jon to talk about that was not ever going to be in this video. [laughter] So the cutting room floor of topics that were not going to be part of this video was up to our necks, so we decided to make them a whole series that’s going to start releasing...

JC: In a couple of weeks, they’ll start coming out. Actually, we do these videos called Word Studies now, where we just take a Hebrew word (sometimes a Greek word) and then just unpack that. And so we thought, “Oh, let’s do that with the word *elohim*. That would be a good video.” So we were going to do a word study on *elohim*. And then we thought, “Oh, we’ll do a whole series. We’ll do *elohim*, we’ll do *ha satan*...”

TM: ...the Divine Council...

JC: Yeah. “We’ll do all of those, and then they’ll all be word studies.” And then when we got into it, it morphed into its own series.

TM: And that’s when I called you, Mike. [laughter] “Can you help us to figure out how to...”

MH: Did I get in the way of your spreadsheet, though? Because I’m wondering, have you guys been able to get through your spreadsheet (that original spreadsheet you had)?

JC: There's still some on there.

TM: We're still chipping away. The other series have come onto the radar, so we do those, and then we go back to...

JC: If we had been diligent to just stick to the spreadsheet, we would be done. And we kind of thought... Starting this project, I thought that that's what we were going to do. And even that felt like such an ambitious goal. It wasn't a realistic goal. It was a shoot-the-moon goal. "We can make these 100+ videos." So we had no idea.

MH: So you're not afraid you're going to run out of material any time soon.
[laughs]

TM: No. Another series, born out of conversation was, "Oh, what if I could recapture my experience of sitting in Ray Lubek's classes, that was two semesters of how to read..." So we're still working on that series. We're at episode 12 or 13.

JC: Yeah, how to read the law.

TM: It'll be a 20-part series introducing people to the story of the Bible, the various types of literature in the Bible, and how to read narrative poetry and discourse. And then we're making short videos on how to read the Prophets, how to read the Law, how to read Wisdom.

30:00

MH: I'm going to ask you to guess on this next question: How intuitive do you think your approach is to your audience? Or have you, by this time, grown your own audience? In other words, the two sides here are, there are a whole bunch of people out there who want what you're doing but maybe don't know how to express it or focus on the narrative, as opposed to you've just taught people to do it this way now. Where do you think your audience is?

JC: Interesting. How many people are re-learning, versus learning the first time?

MH: Yes.

TM: Hmm. That's a great question.

JC: I'm always surprised at how many families use this with their children. Because we didn't... We never write with children in mind. But children are just smart humans.

TM: Mm hmm. [laughter]

JC: And so I'm sure they're creating these categories for the first time.

TM: Yeah, you know, with YouTube... it's as diverse as YouTube. [laughter] But I think we have been surprised by the diversity of people and spiritual traditions and countries and cultures and ethnicities that have shown an interest and contacted us. Now we have a team on our team that's working on translating them with partner studios around the world. So we didn't have any of that in mind, necessarily. We were just working out for ourselves how we would talk about it to ourselves and our peers.

MH: I assume you guys both grasp how significant this is. My audience would be a little bit more of... There are people already out there with questions that aren't getting answered, and they're frustrated, and they find Naked Bible Podcast, and they're hooked. As opposed to grooming them in some sort of intentional way, which I see you guys doing very elegantly and intentionally. And over and over again, you're building these patterns into them. But we both, I think... At the end of the day, there's a real advantage to "grooming" people in terms of how they approach scripture over a long period of time, because not only will they pick some of that up by osmosis (they'll learn how to be a better reader at the end of the road), but also, you're creating an audience that isn't going to give you the push-back because they've been taught to filter scripture in XYZ way. This is a generational change. I see what you're doing. And I hope, for our podcast, that if we do this another 5, 10, 15, 20 years, this is a generational change of the way people look at scripture. And I think it has big ramifications for certainly a postmodern, post-Christian audience—just the way scripture is approached. And I hate to put it this way, but a lot of your... And I don't have anything against denominations. I'm denominationally apathetic. There are people who follow the podcast and love my books from all across the board, which is intentional. But it just seems to me that there is going to be a certain sort of dying off of the numbers in your traditional denominations who are taught (I'm not trying to be pejorative here) to filter scripture through a denominational set of preferences. Or that's as far as they sort of penetrate into it on a weekly basis at church. But this is something totally different. This is exponentially not only larger but it's creating a new kind of thinker (of learner). So I'm hoping that that's floating around in your head. Because if it's not, I hope I just put it there. I just see it that way.

TM: Yeah. I think I do see it that way, but when I think about the larger challenges that the Jesus-movement faces in the world, I just get overwhelmed. So what I've found... Parker Palmer's definition of calling and vocation is, "Where your life's passion meets a need in the world, by God's grace, do that with all your might." For me, that's what it's been. And I think for Jon, he can speak to that himself, but... For me, it's just intuitive. I found the Bible so bewildering, but I found Jesus beautiful and compelling. How could I introduce somebody to the Bible (either brand new or for the first time all over again) in a way that's actually going to help them grasp the cosmic significance of the risen Jesus? So for me, that kind of drives the whole thing. So there you go. It's actually very personal. It's very personal for Jon, too.

35:00

MH: I would say the same thing. I'm fine with being one-dimensional. [laughs] You sort of know why you're alive, and okay, just go do that now.

TM: Yeah. You know, one thing... Our mission statement and our repeated phrase is, "The Bible is one unified story that leads to Jesus." It used to be longer on the end, "with wisdom for the modern world," and then we shortened it. But our friend Steve just said this to me the other day and I thought it was interesting, (and we're discovering it with the Project) that the one *unified* story of the Bible that leads to Jesus, when it's understood that way, is the one *unifyING* story of the Bible that leads to Jesus. And we are finding that, in terms of the diversity of the spiritual traditions that are reaching out to us and adopting it in their leadership programs—any denomination you could imagine.

MH: Yeah. Their preferences are fine. If you want to have these preferences, good for you. But can you think beyond them to the larger body of Christ? Are you letting them define (or redefine) the Great Commission? "Now it's about perpetuating our subculture." No, it actually isn't. It's something bigger than that. So can you make that jump? And you can keep your distinctives, but you need to move beyond them to the task that Jesus actually gave us before he went back to heaven.

TM: And there's something in the media... In the digital age, the people with the media microphones that speak the loudest (at least at this moment) are the most divisive and angry. And so, for us, a big part of it is... It's a little cliché that what unifies all followers of Jesus is greater than what divides them, but it's true. So to be able to just creatively communicate about this stuff that everybody agrees on but hardly anyone ever talks about because it's not exciting; it's not divisive... It doesn't define my boundary lines over against this other group. So therefore, the way the market works in Christian media, things don't get attracted to that.

MH: When you think about the bigger picture, don't get overwhelmed. Because you just put your finger on the real impediment, and that is our fragmentation. And now we're... There are too many believers that are moving from fragmentation to tribalism—sort of aping our culture in the worst ways. And that's more of an impediment to the Great Commission than math. Math is not one of its problems. If you just look at the numbers (and I do this in presentations), "Man, in less than 20 years, if just one person led one other person to the Lord in a year's time and then everybody replicated that, we'd have the world licked in 20 years. The math is on our side!" But what's not on our side is this fragmentation that we have. And I think our listeners (your audience and my audience) would know that we're not talking about some cheap, squishy ecumenism here. We're just talking about majoring on the majors and staying in the text.

JC: And it's a very sophisticated, challenging...

TM: ...text...

JC: Yeah, even there, when you're staying in that...

MH: There's enough to hold your interest for a long time. [laughs]

TM: Yeah, according to Psalm 1, there is more than a lifetime's worth of daily focused meditation things to think about.

MH: What do you guys wish you could do if you just throw caution to the wind here? Because you have plenty of work to do. There's plenty of content; you're not going to run out of that. You've moved into translation now. Is there anything that you sit there and think, "Man, wouldn't this be cool to be able to produce this or do that?" Or are you already zeroed in?

40:00

JC: There's some new stuff we're thinking about and even working on. One of the conversations Tim and I had recently was... We keep thinking, "Okay, maybe we have five more years of content." So that's our expanding window, generally. But I keep having this conviction that eventually we'll go, "That's enough explainer videos." And then what? And Tim has said to me that he would be thrilled if the rest of his life he was teaching the Bible in a classroom with other people—just kind of geeking out. And so we started doing that here. So we bring in students now, and we film...

MH: You physically bring them to your location?

JC: Yeah. We select 10 students, and we try to get it really diverse.

TM: We ask our supporters to send in video applications.

JC: And then we film Tim teaching through a book of the Bible. And so right now we're getting our first couple done and we're going to release those. So it'll be kind of like seminary-level classroom stuff.

TM: We're doing it in two and a half days of classroom time, so it'll end up being anywhere from 10 to 14 one-hour sessions online. We'll build it into an online classroom.

MH: Then that's for distribution for whoever wants to watch it, just like the videos?

TM: Correct.

JC: Yeah. We're going to put it on Classroom.Bible and then try to fill out that library. Tim will continue to teach through the Bible, and maybe we'll bring other people in at some point.

TM: I'd like to grow the number of scholars, also. This is also a great chance to do the same unifying thing—of having lots of different types of scholars from different backgrounds. But the content is all biblical theology and literary design and theological themes of books and so on.

MH: Is it set up like a lecture, or is it discussion? Describe the format.

TM: Yeah, it's not talking heads. The whole idea was... There was lots of good talking-head lecture content. But the idea was, what if a really diverse room... What if every student is a totally different kind of background and demographic and ethnicity? And get that diverse of a room around the book of Ephesians for 12 hours. What would happen? So it's not just about the teacher, it's...

JC: But you will teach. You *will* lecture for a 20-minute block, and then there'll be some dialogue.

TM: Yeah. I thought there would be a value added in seeing a diverse expression of the body of Christ learning and talking about biblical theology. So that's the experiment we're doing with it.

JC: We have a guy on the team who's a brilliant technologist, and he is helping us think through the best way for someone to experience this online, too. So we really want to push the boundaries of online learning when it comes to being able to consume this content. That's another thing. There's so much great content online, but how is it done in a way that really keeps you engaged and helps you feel like you're a part of a group of people doing it, and not just watching videos at home by yourself?

MH: So right now, your focus is working through a book of the Bible or a passage? Is that how you're approaching it when you do this?

TM: Yeah, right now, just because that's my favorite thing to do.

MH: Yeah, you're a literary, narrative guy. So yeah.

TM: Yeah. I do want to do themes, though. It would be fun to do classes on themes. Just for my own project, I would love at some point to also start writing and create accessible short-ish reader guides to each book of the Bible, introducing people to design and main themes. So for me, the class is a way to start to take a deeper dive into every book of the Bible than I've had a chance to do. So it's amazing. That's really exciting.

MH: Yeah, that's really worthwhile.

TM: Jon also had... That's kind of been a focus (a new initiative) for me. Jon said...

JC: What are you thinking of?

TM: VR.

JC: Oh, virtual reality?

TM: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. [laughs] We bought a...

MH: Yeah, you put me in that thing. I remember that.

JC: Oh, did you go in, Mike? That's right.

45:00 **MH:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. [laughter] My son liked the video, too, of me doing that.

JC: The first time, maybe two years ago, like in an oculus, and it just blew me away how immersive it was and it was immediately clear to me that there was such educational potential with this platform. And I don't know when it's going to become a thing. When a headset is going to become...

TM: ...like Nintendo?

JC: ...like iPhones.

TM: ... or iPhones.

JC: When it's going to be mass marketed.

TM: But you're convinced it's a win.

JC: Oh, yeah. Yes. For sure. And so we've just been playing around, learning the work flow. Learning what's possible. So I'm really excited about that platform.

TM: You're being too modest. We had formed a team.

JC: We're making stuff.

TM: Yeah. You recreated a third of the Gospel of Luke as an immersive story experience.

JC: Well, we were working on it. Right now you can stand in the tabernacle or in the temple courts. And watch Jesus...

TM: ...watch Jesus storm in...

JC: ...freak out.

MH: I stood in the... What was it? The Last Supper Room? The Upper Room? Is that where you put me?

JC: Yeah, that's getting done. I mean, there's a big X-factor right now with it, in terms of, is it going to be too hokey when you watch characters acting in VR, because they're not real (not human). Will it be too puppet-y? Will it feel like you're on a Disney ride? So it's all new. We're seeing what happens.

MH: Well, you know those old Davey and Goliath claymation videos... Do you remember those? Or am I dating myself?

JC: No!

MH: Go to YouTube. They are primitive now.

JC: It's "Davey and Goliath?"

MH: Davey and Goliath. It was a kid and his dog.

JC: [laughs] That's amazing.

MH: They would tell good moral and... It had Christian content in it, too. But those were used by a whole generation when it was new. So VR is new, so if I were you, my word of advice is, "Don't get paralyzed by perfection." [laughs] Do something here.

JC: No, we're just messing around. But it's brand new stuff for us, so it's a lot to learn. So if we could throw caution to the wind... We talked about doing some sort of documentary on how the Bible was made. The reason I got into media actually was I thought it would be fun to be a documentary filmmaker. I was so obsessed with communication and the best... Of the communication that went the furthest and impacted people the most seemed like really good documentaries at the time, for me. But I've never actually done a documentary. It's all been just these short-form explainer videos. And we might do something like that. It might be like a serialized episodic doc or something.

TM: Yeah, this is another meeting of our passions. Multnomah was like Candyland, in terms of discovery and exciting new territory. My senior year, however, I had been a couple years at Greek and Hebrew and I took a class on reading the Septuagint (the old Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). So I started reading it. And I discovered all these differences from the Hebrew text—

all these ways that that translation is different, with whole new sentences or sentences gone. [laughter] Then I discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls and... I'm curious to hear when you went through this, Mike. I just learned the complicated history of the manuscript history of the Bible and the formation of the canon. And that took me to this next level. And that really took me into graduate school. And I ended up focusing my dissertation on the manuscript history of Ezekiel and the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. What I found was nothing at Multnomah prepared me for that complexity. I was taught how to read the Bible and how it works and communicates, but where the Bible came from and the very public, traceable history of how it came into existence... I was not given anything. I was struggling with my existing categories of inspiration. So I came back out the other end with a modified (and I think more robust) understanding of what the orthodox Jewish Christian views of inspiration actually are. They're actually not very well-known in the modern era. [laughter]

MH: Right.

TM: You know about this. So that's become a big passion for me—introducing people to the real non-scandalous history of the Bible and where it came from, that shouldn't be a threat to our faith. But because people don't have robust enough categories for how the Bible actually was produced, when they hear its actual history it presents a scandal because they have a view of divine origins of the Bible that aren't actually true to what the Bible says about itself.

MH: Yeah. This is a tough nut to crack, because people have these existing categories. To be less charitable, I have a little lecture that I do in different places where I talk about the fact that we train people to have a paranormal (or an *X Files*) view of inspiration. And what we do is we reduce scripture to something like... I don't know if you guys know what the Urantia Book is, but it's channeled material—New Age channeled material.

TM: I see, it's an analogy. But that's good. Tell me more about this analogy.

MH: That's the way we train people to think, that the biblical writers have some sort of zapping—their minds are disengaged from what they're doing—and they go into a trance-like state, or we have automatic writing. Their arms and fingers just start moving, and they're not conscious of anything because they're just out. And then they wake up and they look at the table, and there's a scroll there. And they're, "Oh, I can't wait to read what I just wrote!" [laughter]

JC: That was never explicitly taught to me, but it's kind of what comes to my mind.

MH: Well, there's a reason for that, because we are taught that the writers are possessed by some spirit entity and we dress it up by calling it the Holy Spirit. But they produce a channeled document. They are intellectually, mentally,

emotionally, consciously detached from what they're doing. And it's really damaging because it fails to account for (as you know, Tim) a truckload of stuff that you run into in the Bible.

TM: Yeah, you don't even have to go to the Dead Sea Scrolls. You just have to study the Holy Spirit in the Bible. [laughs]

MH: Even the Synoptic Gospels are one example. I have about 10 different examples, where... I'll use the first few verses in Ezekiel. Why is there a switch from the first to the third person?

TM: Yeah, that's right.

MH: Is the Holy Spirit just being impish? Like he's just trying to freak us out here, or what? Can't the Holy Spirit make up his mind about which person is writing this and who isn't? But even the synoptic Gospels, you don't... Even in English, when the events are the same, the dialogue is different. And if you penetrate the English, even when the Greek lemmas are the same, they might be a different person in number, or a different case.

TM: Yeah, that's right.

MH: This notion of tying the idea of verbal inspiration to channeling is really damaging. Because now we live in a day and age where the pastor and your parents don't control your access to information about things like the Bible. And people are going to run into this stuff on the internet, and there are very clear examples of where the way they were taught to think about this just does not work. It just doesn't work. And I think we make people vulnerable to a low view of scripture when we insist on the categories that are current. So I'm very sympathetic to what you're saying. That is a tall order, though, because now... There are people (professors) we could name here. We could sit here and go through names that, "If what you're saying doesn't conform to the Chicago Statement on inerrancy, then you must be a heretic." Really? When did that...? Who was the omniscient set of people that produced that thing? Do they really account for everything in the text? It's just a tall order. But to me, it's... You have to go there.

TM: Yeah, and we have found our voice and a way of doing it that is, as much as we can, non-provocative. And actually it's a lot of dissatisfaction on my part with a lot of religious media about the Bible, which oftentimes has a lot of special pleading or feels like it's apologetic-driven, as opposed to just, "Hey, religious or nonreligious, dude, this is fascinating how the Bible came into existence."

JC: Yeah.

TM: Here are the claims the authors make about this literature. And you can believe it or not, but at least here's the account. And I find that that's a way that makes it accessible to a wider audience than only people who want to have their pre-existing beliefs bolstered.

MH: Yeah. At the end of the day, we would be really smart to just let the Bible be what it is. And there is a strong apologetic...

JC: Let it address it.

MH: There it is. And it doesn't strip out God as the ultimate reference point for the origin of the contents of scripture. But it restores the fact that he providentially prepared people through their whole lives for the time and place when the Spirit prompts them to "Sit down and write this out. We have a need here. The community needs this or that document, so get busy." It doesn't strip any of that out at all. But do have to use phony categories...?

TM: I have a robust view of inspiration, because now the Holy Spirit is with Pharisee Paul when he's reading Epictetus, you know? And his mind is going, "Ooh, that's a good way to launch an argument!" He reads some Latin authors, and then out comes Romans, which is this exquisite form of a form of rhetoric that he learned in his education.

MH: Yeah, God was in that.

TM: It's so amazing to think about.

JC: I also think it's a better way to end up finding the divinity of the Bible and the sacredness and the God-breathed-ness of it. When I go expecting to not find any human fingerprints, when I find them, I'm scandalized and frustrated. And then I'm spending all my energy trying to smooth them over or figure it out. And I just get lost and demotivated. But I've found in this process of going and really appreciating that God does use the human head and heart, and that's a big part of it, that when you start tracing that and seeing that at work, that leads me back into that this is something much bigger going on here than just that.

MH: It forces you to conclude that instead of God being interested occasionally, when he zaps people... God wakes up from a nap, and he's, "Oh, I'm overdue to zap somebody today." God is not only occasionally interested in the production of this thing we call the Bible, but he has been interested every moment with the people that he is going to decide to use. He doesn't leave the project go.

TM: Yeah, that's a good way to say that.

MH: Well, that was a good rabbit trail. I am totally sympathetic to that, because... You asked what was my point, what alerted me to this, for whatever reason. This

thing (how we got the Bible) was a very early interest of mine as a teenager when I became a believer. And I read a lot in this area, just because I wanted to know. And what I discovered was just... For whatever reason, it didn't bother me. It just seemed like, "Oh, that makes sense!" The notion that God would prepare people and use people and then have them do their jobs was not rocket science to me. Now, having said that, I sat under plenty of people who articulated inspiration in a way that I think is troubling now, and so I *would* run into things that just didn't work with that explanation. But I sort of had my own kind of back-up position. "Well, okay, I know it doesn't work this way, but boy, it just makes sense to look at it this way over here." So I wasn't really... That didn't upset any apple carts. I was unknowingly prepped, I guess, for that. But it was just fascinating, from the very beginning.

TM: Yeah, I agree. And of course, in the Wikipedia age, people have easy access to the very public information about the Bible's origins.

MH: Yeah. And very public criticism of it.

TM: Yeah, totally. [laughs] And what you call Middle Earth, just like, oh man. Ways that misinformation spreads.

MH: See, I don't get discouraged when we talk the bigness of the Great Commission. I *do* get discouraged when we talk about Middle Earth. [laughter] That just... That's more soul-crushing because I see so much potential.

1:00:00 **TM:** I've been signing off of almost everything online recently, so I...

MH: Well, it hurts me because these are the people (if you're talking about Christian Middle Earth) who care. They *care* about scripture. And they're just... The internet is just this wild place where they... "Lord, please direct them to something useful and coherent as opposed to something just wacky." It can be discouraging. It really can. But anyway, that's another rabbit trail. I'm glad we had that discussion. As we wrap up, please, you guys, promote your website. Where can people find the podcast and the videos and anything else you want to alert our audience to and direct them to.

JC: The website is www.thebibleproject.com and the podcast is called The Bible Project.

TM: Then we have a YouTube channel. If you search for "the Bible Project" on YouTube, our channel will come up.

MH: You're on iTunes?

JC: iTunes: The Bible Project. Whatever podcasting service you use, just search The Bible Project.

TM: It's on all the main ones.

JC: It's on Spotify now, too.

TM: Oh!

JC: Which is cool.

MH: You learned something... [laughter]

JC: Yeah, they have podcasts. You should get a Spotify account.

TM: That's cool.

MH: That's sweet. Again, thanks for coming on, you guys, and telling us your story, and working on a few things that are important.

TM: Yeah, and thank you, Trey and Mike, for what you're doing. It's one of my first recommendations for people who are in, get acquainted, are excited about the Bible with our content, and they're excited for next level. I can refer to commentaries and I can refer to Naked Bible. Yeah, you guys are going for it, man. So many great episodes. Seriously, thank you. I know it's a lot of work. But it's a great next-level resource that really goes thoroughly into stuff that most people don't think to even think about.

MH: Well, we're trying to do something useful. It doesn't get any more mystical than that. [laughter]

TM: Yeah, exactly.

MH: Alright. Thanks.

TS: Dangit. I was going to ask Tim if he had any funny stories about you at Wisconsin-Madison. But it would have been interesting to see you defend your dissertation.

MH: Oh, yeah.

TS: Him as a freshman, saying, "Oh my gosh. What did I get myself into?"

MH: Yeah, I would like to go back and see the expression on Tim's face, too. [laughs] Yeah, that would have been awesome.

TS: I'm so thrilled that they're starting to tackle some of the concepts like Divine Council and the word *elohim*, and all the stuff that we talk about. It's just going to open it up to a whole massive audience. And really, we need our listeners' help, that these people who are just now learning these concepts... If they want to dig deeper, we need to help them find the Naked Bible Podcast.

MH: Tell a friend.

TS: Please. Social media. Whatever you can do. #nakedbible. Get it out there.

MH: Yeah, it's important people know it's not just Mike. It's not just me. It's not idiosyncratic stuff. It's biblical studies. So, hey. Get into it.

TS: Alright. Well, that was a good break from Exodus. Next week, we finish up chapter 2. And again, we want to thank Tim Mackie and Jon Collins for joining us. And I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.