

[Exploring My Strange Bible E1 Transcript]

Tim: Hey, everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 20 years' worth of lectures and sermons where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called the BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at BibleProject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[Musical Break (00:55—1:02)]

Tim: We thought we would start this first episode of Exploring My Strange Bible with a self-introduction so you can know a little bit more about me, Tim Mackie, and why I'm doing a podcast like this, and a bit of my story that explains my obsessions. So real time right now in April 2017, as we're getting things ready for this podcast, I have too many jobs.

[Laughter]

Tim: I'm a professor of biblical studies at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Over the last seven years, I served as a pastor in two different local churches. First at a church in Madison, Wisconsin called Blackhawk Church, and then for five years at a church here in Portland—uh—called Door of Hope. And then the other thing was a— a few years ago, I started with a good friend of mine, Jon Collins, this thing called the BibleProject, and it's a nonprofit animation studio that makes short, animated films about the books of the Bible and the themes and ideas that unite the whole Bible. So

those are my jobs, and, well, the common denominator underneath all of that is Jesus of Nazareth. I am one of his followers. I ca—I can't say I'm the most stellar or best one, but I'm trying, as are m—many of you—uhm—and by his grace, just one day at a time.

[Laughter]

Tim: But Jesus of Nazareth is the one who's at the center of all—of all of my jobs, and that's just such an incredible privilege—and also, these texts that Jesus said bore witness to him, what we've come to call the Scriptures, both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the Old and New Testament. And so why do I have these jobs that are all about Jesus and the Scriptures? How did that happen? And I—I—it's not—certainly not something I planned—uh—like most of you.

[Laughter]

Tim: Life just kind of unfolds, and you find yourself on this amazing ride. And so here's a—a short version of mine. I grew up in Portland, Oregon, which is not known as an epicenter of anything religious—

[Laughter]

Tim: Related to Christianity. My—uh—parents became followers of Jesus in the 70s as a part of the hippie Christian movement that kind of started in Southern California and made its way up here. And my first awareness of anything called church or to do with Jesus had to do with all of these people who would gather in our living room—

[Laughter]

Tim: On Sundays. That was church. And then it got too big of our living room, and so they bought a common house together in the neighborhood, and that became—uh—what was called Open Door Fellowship. It was super chill, house church, hippie Christian kind of thing. But our—our family eventually transitioned to another church

community, which, I didn't know it at the time, but it was a part of the Pentecostal Charismatic tradition. I just thought that's what Christianity was. And for lots of different reasons—some of them the particular church, some of them were just my own selfishness—I just really became jaded towards everything related to Jesus and was not interested, and kind of actively opposing. And this is also closely connected to the fact that my parents—maybe against their better judgment—but they gave me a skateboard—uh—when I turned 11, and game over at that point. We lived right in the heart of Portland, Oregon. The urban playground was just right outside my front door, and I just fell in love with everything skateboarding. And it wasn't just a—a sport. I had never been good at sports. But skateboarding wasn't just about, you know, an activity. It was a—an identity and a subculture. And so I was all in for the clothing that—you know, the styles changed every couple years—and the music and th—it was my community. It was everything. And that pretty much dominated my life and worldview, my rejection of Christianity, which my parents, they really respected that I was not into the Jesus thing for most of my teens. And you know, they'd ask me to go to church now and then or at holidays, but they gave me space to work out the axe that I had to grind—

[Laughter]

Tim: Against Jesus. But then something interesting happened in my late teens. There was this church in northeast Portland that built a large, covered skateboard park in the back parking lot. And the park was open—uh—multiple nights a week, and you could go. The catch was that—uh—someone would shut down the park—uh—midway through the evening and give a short talk about Jesus. And if you wanted to skate the second half of the night, you had to sit through the talk. And if you skipped out on the talk, then you had to come back next week and sit through the talk before you could skate again. And that was the arrangement. Everybody respected it, and—“Deal.” And so—uh—over the years—I started going when I was 16—but over the years, Jesus—uh—be—became unavoidable to me. The stories about him, the wisdom and power of his teachings, the way that he treated people—I was just like, “I—I don't remember anything—”

[Laughter]

Tim: “About Jesus like this from growing up. This guy's incredible.” And so I was 19—about to turn 20—was living in my parents' basement, working a couple manual labor

jobs, and had no aspirations to do anything except skateboard. And a number of things came together and—and all of a sudden I was forced with a decision about whether or not I was actually going to follow Jesus. And so I made the decision to make him the—

[Laughter]

Tim: The true north that I was going to aim my life at and accept who he was and what he did for me, and allow him to take responsibility for me. So I made that decision. Uh—I was almost 20. And man, that was half my life ago—an unbelievable ride since then. There was a small Christian college across the street from the skateboard park, and I started to, like, give the Jesus talk at Skatechurch. And I didn't know what I was talking about. Uh—I had never read the Bible at any length at all. And so I—uh—you could sign up for Bible courses, like, across the street. And I was like, "Deal. I got to have something to tell these junior high skaters—"

[Laughter]

Tim: "At Skatechurch." And so m—I signed up for classes, and I was introduced to these professors of biblical studies at—at Multnomah Bible College—it's now called Multnomah University—and dude, my whole mind, my worldview, my sense of self and others and God just totally blown apart and rebuilt. There were a couple of professors, particularly ju—that just ignited my imagination as I was learning through the Scriptures. And—and in particular, it was my professors who showed me that the Jesus movement and Christianity is not a modern Western thing. It's a very ancient Jewish thing. And I was taught right from the very beginning how to read the Bible as part of ancient Israelite culture, that the biblical texts all came out of the story of ancient Israel and the Jewish people, that Jesus fit into the context and the history and the conversations happening within the rabbis in Judaism and so on, and so I started reading the Bible, and it was incredible. But dude, what on earth? I—the Bible was like a strange new world to me. You guys, there's a talking snake on page three, not to mention all of the sex scandals that follow in the book of Genesis alone. Animal sacrifices, these ancient laws—what does all this have to do with—with Jesus? But I was convinced that it did. And so that began 20 years ago, just, this obsession with the Scriptures and how it is that they bore witness to Jesus. And so I was graced with amazing professors and teachers along the way. I ended up doing a bachelor's degree in Biblical Languages and Theology at Multnomah. And I was like—I finished, and I was like, "Wh—I have so many

questions. I'm just getting started." So—uh—I signed up for classes at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. I met and got married to my incredible wife, Jessica. She's one of the most amazing human beings in the world, and she helped me work my way through a master's degree there and—continued on in Greek and Hebrew. And I really became interested in—in the questions about the history and the origins of the Bible itself—the h—and I g—got obsessed with the Dead Sea Scrolls and how they illuminated the kind of Jewish culture—uh—that Jesus grew up in and the shape of the Bible in his day. So I made the big decision. I shipped off to do PhD studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department there. I got to study in Jerusalem at Hebrew University for a year. Dead Sea Scrolls—dude, I just nerded out. As I was finishing my PhD there, I ended up in pastoral ministry at the church we were attending, called Blackhawk Church. And I eventually, as I finished my degree, came on staff there as a teaching pastor. And I got to teach the Bible to people in this church that was full of university students. I did that for a number of years—moved back to Portland to both teach as a professor at Western Seminary and then to be a teaching pastor at Door of Hope Church here in Portland. So here's the deal, you guys. M—I'm—this introduction's almost over. It's maybe been too long already. I think Jesus of Nazareth is the best thing that's ever happened to the human race. I think that he's alive. I believe and trust that he's still at work in the world and in—inside of me. So I identify and embrace the historical orthodox Christian tradition. I believe that there is a God—

[Laughter]

Tim: And that that God is knowable, that that God's revealed himself through the story of the scriptures of Israel, that that God's the creator of all things, but that ultimately that God is uniquely revealed in Jesus, in his life and teachings, his Kingdom-of-God movement, and his death and resurrection. It's become my conviction that much of orthodox Christianity has totally forgotten its Jewish roots, and I think that's really messed up. Christianity is a Jewish messianic movement, and we should just never, never forget that. I'm also—have a growing conviction that most modern Christians have no idea how much their faith in Jesus is anchored in that Jewish tradition, but also that they struggle to even know how these ancient texts and ancient man, Jesus, relate to the hardest, most difficult questions that we face as—living as modern Westerners in the 21st century. Also a—a conviction that—of mine that grew through years of pastoral ministry is that most of the people that I know that have walked away from faith in Jesus have walked away from a caricature or a distortion of Jesus or Christianity that's not actually the real thing. And so here's what this podcast is going to be all about. Mostly

it's going to start by gathering together and curating about seven year—the last seven years' worth of lectures and sermons that I've given in all kinds of different settings. So some are going to be exploring books of the Bible, some will be series that trace through themes of the Bible, others will be more history and language oriented, exploring and diving into the complicated and wonderful history of the Bible, but at the end of the day, I—when I turned 20 and became a follower of Jesus, it's like Jesus turned on my brain and who he was and—and how he illuminated the Scriptures for me, it was like my mind was opened—

[Laughter]

Tim: That I could finally begin to understand and make sense of the world. And so I just want to pass on the gift of everything I've learned over the last 20 years to you all. And so I hope that the podcast can be stimulating and thought-provoking and fun. Learning should be fun.

[Laughter]

Tim: It might be disorienting at times. I've certainly been disoriented almost every day—

[Laughter]

Tim: Since I said yes to following Jesus. But we should constantly be being forced to rethink everything we thought we know in the light of Jesus. And so there you go. As with all podcasts, you can help Exploring My Strange Bible as we get out of the gate here by spreading the word or going to iTunes and leaving a review. And the first series that we're going to do is a five-part series exploring the strange and wonderful book of Jonah. But I'm really looking forward to what's ahead. Thanks for listening, and we'll keep on going onward and upward.