

Science and Faith

Exploring My Strange Bible

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Speaker in the audio file:

Tim Mackie

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 ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this 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 be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at thebibleproject.com.

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

Alright. Well in this episode we're going to be exploring and focusing on a specific topic that has been really controversial in modern western culture and that is the tension or at least the apparent tension between science and religious faith. A flash point in modern western culture has been this debate between the scientific account of the origins of life or the origins of the universe, and the beliefs or convictions held by Jewish and Christian religious communities about creation, God as a creator of the universe and of all of life. How and when and by what processes did all that happen. This was never a burning question for me personally when I was a brand new follower of Jesus. I just kind of figured those problems all had a solution. I wasn't really concerned about them.

When I went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison to do my PhD studies in Hebrew Bible, I ended up at a church community that had professors of Biology, professors of Ecology, the Head of the Biology Department was one of the elders of this church. I met all kinds of fascinating researchers and grad students, and many of them didn't have any problem with how to sort out their commitment to scientific method and their religious faith. However, I also met lots of students and faculty who just were deeply conflicted. They had grown up with one set of beliefs about how the world came into being that they said or were taught in church communities that are the Bible's teachings about all of these matters. But then here they are in university, and they're taking Biology 101 and they're learning about the evolutionary development and mechanisms by which species develop and diversify, and how does all this go together? Some people just compartmentalize it, other people ditch their religious faith and just go the route of science, other people stick their head in the sand and don't listen to what

science research is telling them because of their theological beliefs or some people just try and ignore it, and wish it will all go away.

So what we did at Black Heart Church when I was working there was we put on a science and faith conference and we lined up a whole bunch of university professors to teach about topics about this very tension. We did it on a Saturday, had no idea what would happen, and hundreds and hundreds of students, and faculty, and interested people throughout the city came. And it was a really incredible experience. We all learned a ton. So this was a talk that I gave that had nothing to do with science, it had more to do with how to read the first two pages of the Bible without imposing modern western views of the world or the universe on these chapters but rather, understanding these as Ancient Hebrew text that they are and how they speak to us about what the world is. Even if you're a religious person or not a religious person, we need to respect that these are text produced in Hebrew by ancient authors that are making claims about the world and about God and humans within it. What are those claims and how can we respect Genesis 1 and 2 to say what they're saying on their own terms in light of their own culture and language? And that's what this talk is all about. I hope it's helpful for you.

Part of the story of what piqued your curiosity when you heard that we're doing this conference when you saw the poster is that there's some story, kind of in your own journey about why there's tension between science and faith or at least perceived tension. Somewhere in our journeys we perceived that there's a problem, and we're looking to resolve or reconcile that problem somehow. And my guess is that it's something along the lines of that kind of tension that made you want to pay \$7 and come here today. So what I'd like to move towards is, what is that tension and in all the sessions today we're going to be flushing out what that tension is about or ways to recognize that it's a perceived tension but not a real tension.

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In many ways, that's kind of the burden of what we're doing here today. We named the conference Science & Faith, not Friends or Foes, but a thoughtful partnership because it's the deep conviction of everyone who's going to be up here is that there is no inherent conflict between a deep committed religious faith

and scientific method, scientific research. I'm committed to perceived tension and not a real one. I think the tension comes from this, and this may be a really broad way of stating where this tension between science and faith comes from. For most people who are committed to some kind of religious or faith world view, that's usually related to the Bible in some way, scriptures. And so there is on the one hand, conviction what the Bible says about world origins, about human origin there, it just says it, there you go. And then we have another narrative in our culture. And it's the narrative of what modern scientific research tells us about world origins or human origins. And there is a perceived tension between those two. And that tension gets worked out in lots of different ways. So sometimes people will say, "Well, if the Bible really is God's word, then the science, no matter what it says must conform to what it is that God's words says." Or you may have some sort of marriage between the two. Well perhaps the Bible is really saying what we think it says and going to make the Bible and science kind of fit together in some kind of relationship.

Or you have another resolution which would be, "Nah, these two just don't go together. Take your choice and walk away." And I cannot tell you how many cups of coffee during my seven years of being down on campus everyday. How many cups of coffee I've had with grad students, with undergrad students at Espresso Royale, Steep and Brew or Starbucks working this issue out. People having a crisis of faith. And usually whatever position or however you reconcile the tension, it usually comes down to there's some core assumptions at work. And that core assumption is that the Bible in fact has some very detailed specific things to say about the material biological, geological processes by which the world came into being and by which humans came into being. And at least, you know, I'm not going to claim being unbiased. I do have a particular view on how this works out, but it's completely unrelated to science. It's more related to my own journey of trying to figure out what on earth the Bible is, and what it says. And I think for most of us, that's really where the confusion comes in. What does in fact the Bible say about world origins and human origins? What's the million-dollar question, right? That's what I want to tackle in the session here today because I think really what this gets to is a much larger confusion, not about what the Bible says about world origins, but about what the Bible is, and about what the Bible is for, and how the Bible communicates. So if you don't remember anything from my talk, remember this: It's basic observation that I think has huge implications.

The Bible is an ancient text. Right, okay. I already knew that. The Bible's is an ancient text, okay. Next, I'm convinced that most of us, while we say we recognize

the Bible as an ancient text, the reality is, is most of us do not treat the Bible like an ancient text. We treat it as though it were a contemporary text. Now there's motivation behind this, right. So most people from sort of Protestant or Catholic, Christian background somehow believe that the Bible is in some way God's words. That somehow uniquely through this text, God speaks to His people. And so we are looking for a word from God to us in these texts. But how exactly that works out, there's actually quite a lot confusion among most people about what that means. And so what mostly happens is people read the Bible and whatever language they happen to reading it in, usually translation English, whatever French, German, Spanish, whatever language you happen to read the Bible in, and we just kind of immediately correspond those words in the Bible to our lives and to our world, and we expect an immediate fit between the way—what the Bible is saying and between the language and ideas that I may happen to have about the world.

And so that leads to this conflict in a lot of different ways. It will work itself out between science and faith. Well the Bible says this is the face value reading My Bible in English, and here's what science says, look there's tension.

[10:00]

In my mind, there's this—we need get back to a much more fundamental step here because we're trying to join something that maybe ought not to be joined. So if the Bible is an ancient text, what this means is that the Bible is an act of communication. But we rarely think through the implications of what that really means because any act of communication by nature has to be done in a particular language, in a particular culture and historical context. So let's do a little thought experiment here to kind of flush this out. I say the English words, "But my lips hurt real bad." How many of you know exactly what I'm doing right now? Okay. Alright. How many of you understood the English words, "But my lips hurt real bad?" We all knew what the English words mean, right? But there was actually a very small tribe among us who actually know what I was doing right there, right? That was a cultural reference to what I think was one of the most brilliant and absurd movies of the early 2000s, right? And that tribe is small and dwindling, I'm finding. High school students these days, what? Napoleon Dynamite? You're joking. So, we all understand the English words, "But my lips

hurt real bad." But to know the true significance, the background. The resonance and connection of those words, you have to do work. You have to know the cultural background and reference. And that's a very small number of us. I say the English words, "Beat me up, Scottie." How many of you are tracking with me, here? Okay. Exactly right, exactly right. So it's a much wider cultural reference, right? Now let's say we go to the other side of the planet, a hundred years from now. We go to Vietnam and we say the English words, "Beat me up, Scottie." Who's going to know what on earth we're talking about. No, of course not. This is just a fundamental principle of communication. Communication is not just about words, it's about culture. And any act of communication assumes a whole world of cultural knowledge, background, and so on. And so it's not just about meanings of words, any act of communication is a cross-cultural experience. Think about it. Now maybe it's a cross-cultural experience from you to me, and we may live in the same country, speak the same language. But even if so right there, "My lips hurt real bad." It's a cross-cultural experience to try to understand those words. So here's the basic principle how this works out. You would never, or at least I hope you will never go to France and start walking around Paris and assume that everyone is going to speak English to you and want to eat Big Macs and talk about American Idol. That's the height of cultural presumption. To go to someone else's culture and assume that their language, their words, their ideas are just going to fit with the way I see the world. You would never do that. But I would submit to you that most readers of the Bible do precisely that when we open the Bible's pages. We just assume that the words on the page immediately are going to correspond to my way of seeing the world, my culture, my cultural understanding. And I think that's something at the root of what's going on this perceived tension between science and faith. We just assumed that the Bible is speaking about world origins the way we think about it. And in my mind, that's just the fundamental mistake of human communication.

Reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience which means that you need to put aside our ways of thinking about the world and step into another culture's ways of seeing things. And when we're stepping into the early chapters of Genesis, we're stepping into an ancient Near Eastern culture. Culture of the ancient Hebrews and they had a very different way of seeing the world than we do.

So, let's do another example, right. We did that, "My lips hurt real bad." "Beat me up, Scottie." How about this one, "B'reishit bara..." Oh excuse me, dang it. The timing on that one. There you go, so really good quote from John Walton that

summarizes this. "Effective communication requires a body of agreed upon words turns, terms, and ideas. A common ground of understanding. For the speaker, this often requires accommodation to the audience by using words and ideas they'll understand. For the audience, if they are not native to the language and cultural matrix of the speaker, this means reaching common ground may require seeking out additional information or explanation."

"My lips hurt real bad." You need to have a conversation with me about Napoleon Dynamite and how awesome it is for you to understand. It requires homework on your part to understand my words. In other words, the audience has to adapt to a new and unfamiliar culture.

So, let's take one more example here. In Hebrew, B'reishit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz. Did you get that? Oh wait, I'm sorry. That's ancient Hebrew. Alright, let me translate that into English. Well no, wait a second. The moment you translate this into English, the meaning will change. Because in English, we don't have precise—no language has precise equivalents to what words mean in another language because words don't just mean what the words mean.

[15:00]

Words have a whole cultural background to them. But let's just give it our best shot at least in doing this in English. And when we give our best shot, we actually have two equally valid translations.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," or I think more accurately, "When God began to create the heavens and the earth." Now, let's just make some observations here. The word beginning, this is the first sentence of the Bible. The word beginning in English, we think of beginning as a point in time before which there, who knows we're not concerned about a point in time and then a sequence of chronology or sequence of time after that point. So the English word beginning mean. That is not what the Hebrew word reishit means. Reishit is actually a very unspecific word. It's not—it's very general. Hebrew has a word for a beginning point of time from which sequence of events follow. That word is takila. And that is not the word that begins the Bible. The words that begins the Bible is the word, reishit. Which refers to—really, it's about specific as

our English phrase way back when beginning, before now. It's very general. It's an unspecified period of time before now. So way back when, God created the heavens and the earth. Let me pitch another question to you, the English word earth, I say English word earth, and what comes into your minds? What image do you have in your mind? Yes, of course, right? Like the planet. The globe. So let me ask you a question, you can see from the picture up here, how long have human beings had access to the mental image of the Earth, the English word earth referring to a globe, how long? 50ish years. 50ish years to the public. 50 years. How old is Genesis chapter 1? Oh yes, it's like 3,000 years old, right? So if you picture a globe in your head, it's the equivalent of flying to France and just assuming everyone's going to speak English and want to talk about American Idol. No, no, stop, stop. You're importing your view of the world back into this ancient text. We have to respect the author and think, what is the author's conception? And in this case, the Hebrew word, ha'aretz. Earth is probably not a very good translation because the contemporary English means planet. And same with heavens, we think cosmos is galaxies and nebulas, whatever this kind of thing. No, no. From a--someone's saying 3,000 years ago, what does it mean to say Earth? What's down here. What's under my feet. What does it mean to say heavens? Well what's up there? So way, way back, I don't know, way back before now, God made what's down here and what's up there. See all of a sudden we've stepped into another culture. Let's do another example from Genesis Chapter 1 where the meaning of words links to cultural understanding.

The second day, we'll talk about the days of Genesis 1 a little bit here. Verse 6, Then God said, "Let there be a rakia between the waters. Let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the rakia and separated the water under the rakia from the water above the rakia, and the first question that you have is, "What on earth is the rakia?" right? What's the rakia? Well let's turn to our English translations and let's see. Oh what this isn't going to help us. So the New American Standard, NIV, translate it as expands, New Living translation translates it as space, the classic King James translates it as firmament. I don't know what on earth a firmament is. And the new revised translation, translates it as dome. Oh so this is all very clear. So what's the rakia? What is the rakia? What the Hebrew word raqa refers to something that—a smith, a blacksmith or a metal smith does. It refers to the hammering out a piece of metal on the anvil. And so, a blacksmith would hammer out like a shield, it means smoothing out a surface. The rakia is that which has been hammered smooth. Have you ever noticed that when you look up, there's that big blue dome in the sky? It's a dome, right? I mean you get up on high places like, "Wow, it's like a big dome." Do you know why it's blue?

What's on top of that blue dome up in the sky? There's water. It's supporting a whole body of water up there. Now how do you know there's a whole body of water up there? Well because every once in a while the windows of the rakia open up and they drop down some of the water that's up there down on top of us here.

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And then they close and it stops. Stops raining. Whoa, okay. We just stepped into another culture.

In the ancient Hebrew understanding the world, that's a big solid thing up there. That's what the word means, rakia, that which has been hammered and smoothed out and spread like a canopy, you know the passages of the Bible. So this is an ancient under—it's ancient science right here in Genesis chapter 1. Notice there's no solid thing up there. The Bible's wrong. God's word is an error. No, no, no. The Bible is speaking about the world in a different language than our culture speaks, and we need to respect it, and this raises the big question then. Perhaps the purpose of the Bible is not primarily to tell us about the physical structure of our world or about human anatomy. In the Bible, you don't think with your brain because there is no Hebrew word for brain. This was just stuff. Where do you think? And you read through the Bible, where does human volition and thought come from? It comes from your heart which is more likely down here or you can actually think with your guts too. Literally, your entrails, your intestines. We know that thinking that happens in the brain, so that means the Bible is wrong. No, no. It means that the purpose of the Bible is not to tell us about human anatomy and human physiology. So the purpose of the Bible must be to do something else. And this raises all kinds of fascinating questions and takes us deeper, deeper down the rabbit hole. But perhaps the Bible is not trying to tell us what the purpose of the Bible is not to tell us about the physical structure of our world. So you play this out and some of you have done this before, may have been bothered by this, you know, you look to all of the references in the Bible about the structure of the world and how it's put together. And you got the blue solid rakia up there.

Have you ever read in the Bible these references to The Pillars of the Earth? The Pillars of the Earth stands on pillars and will not be shaken. The Lord set it on

pillars. It says in Book of Job. What's the idea? Well, this idea that the Earth as we know it, is flat of course because there's edges of the Earth, you can read about the edges of the earth in the Bible, and it's floating. How do you know it's floating? Well if you dig down deep down in the earth, what do you eventually find? You find water. We're floating, right? Makes perfect sense. It's absolute perfect sense. Of course we're floating. Well what keeps us from sinking? Well, it must be put on pillars. What holds the rakia up in the sky? Well it says in the Book of Psalms, it's the mountains that hold up the sky. And on top of the rakia is water, and then God's space which corresponds to the temple of human space here, because heaven and earth are not disconnected in the Bible, they're interconnected, they overlap. God's space sits on top of the waters up there. So this is how in Ancient Israelites is envisioning the world. This does not mean that the Bible is wrong. What it means is that the Bible is an ancient text and perhaps the purpose of the Bible is to tell us something else than about how the world is put together in terms of its physical structure. So... let's see. So in no instance of the Bible does God choose to update the ancient science of the Bible. In other words, nowhere in the Bible do you read some leap forward in the Ancient Hebrew's understanding of the physical world or human physiology or anything like that. That's just not the purpose of the Bible. So when we're going around looking for big bang in Genesis 1, we're looking for a biosphere or science of evolution. We're flying to France, and assuming that everyone's going to speak English. No, don't do that. The Bible is trying to do something else. Some scholars who are, I'm not just making all this up on my own, Peter Enns, Old Testament scholar, The Bible belonged to an ancient world in which it was produced. It was not in abstract, other worldly book dropped down out of heaven. It was connected to, and therefor spoke to the people in that ancient culture. In cultured qualities of the Bible, therefore are not extra elements that we can just discard to get the real point, the timeless truths. Rather, it's precisely because Christianity is a historical religion. God's word reflects various historical moments in which it was written. And as we learn more about this history, we should gladly address the implications of that history for how we view the Bible and what we should expect to hear from it. And so when we turn to these early chapters of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 2, what this means is we need to put aside our cultural understanding and just say, okay, ancient Hebrew author, what are you trying to do? Let me step into your shoes, what are you trying to communicate? And what are the most exciting things in the last 150 years or so has been the advances of our understanding in biblical study.

Especially related to archaeological digs that have unearthed texts from the Ancient Egyptians, the Ancient Babylonians, the Canaanites, Israel's neighbors of the Phoenicians and so on. And among these texts of Israel's contemporaries, are documents that date like to the time period of the Bible or long pre-dated the Bible. When they speak about world origins, they speak in very similar language and ideas, and motifs of what we find in these early chapters of Genesis. This is not threatening, this is thrilling. Because what it means is that we can even more accurately step into the biblical author's shoes, to understand what it is they really want to communicate to us. William Brown of Colombia Seminary puts it this way, the framers of creation in the Bible inherited a treasure trove of venerable traditions from their cultural neighbors. Instead of creating their accounts *ex nihilo*, it's Latin for out of nothing, it's a good pun in the book on creation, anyway, the composers of scripture developed their traditions in dialogue with some of the great religious traditions of the surrounding cultures particularly those that originate from Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as those of the more immediate Canaanite neighbors. In other words, the Bible's creation narratives are not in dialogue with modern science. Modern scientific concepts of big bang, cosmic background or radiation, DNA, it's just, they're not talking to those concepts and ideas. What they are doing, the Biblical creation narratives, are in dialogue with their neighbors. Those early chapters of Genesis are a Hebrew Israelite author talking and addressing to their Babylonian, Egyptian, Canaanite neighbors. And this accounts for similarities that we'll see, that will point out similarities between Genesis 1 and 2, and other ancient Near Eastern creation stories. But also for key differences. And so let me just kind of throw out their thesis statement for approaching Genesis 1 and 2 in line of all that we've been saying, and we're going to dive into some more examples.

I've adapted this thesis statement by one of the books we have for sale in the resource room by Richard Carlson and Chamber Longman. A thesis statement. Early chapters of Genesis accurately present two accounts of cosmic and human origins in the language and ideas of the Ancient Hebrews. These texts should not be removed from their ancient context and read as if they speak literally about the universe or humans in the 21st century scientific terms. They speak in terms of an ancient Near Eastern perception of the world and should be interpreted within that setting. When we discern the meaning of the text in their ancient context, we

find that they constitute a world view statement about God and His relationship to the world, about humans and their relation to God and the world. This basic worldview statement transcends its ancient cultural setting and commands the attention of God's people in all places and all times. So ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, narratives about world origins and of which Genesis 1 and 2 is one example, but there are Babylonian, Egyptians, Canaanites examples too. They do not have their primary purpose to narrate for us the geological, biological sequence or description of the material origins of the universe. This is not what these narratives are about. These narratives are trying to answer fundamental basic questions like, who are we, where are we, what's the nature of the universe, who are the gods and how do we relate to them? What is this whole thing about? And every ancient Near Eastern cosmology is make a good claim about all those questions. Genesis 1 and 2 are definitely making a claim that was radical in our ancient context. So what am I going to do for the rest of our time is just touch down at different points in Genesis 1 and 2, read it in terms of its original context, how then it would be interpreted in that setting, and then get to what is the core worldview statement at work here. Good.

So what we're going to do is, we're going to dive into some examples. If you have a Bible, you can turn them and have text appear on the screen, Genesis chapter 1. Let me just read the first 5 verses of the Bible, this is a translation—I guess it would be called my own, but I quote elements from lots of different scholars and commentaries and so on.

"When God began to create the sky and the land, the land was wild and waste and darkness was over the surface of the deep waters and the breath of God was hovering over the waters, and God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness and God called the light "day," and the darkness He called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—one day.

[30:00]

Now, dramatic finish, right? Plus, let's notice one thing here, did you notice in this translation, where's the period? Just one. There's only one period. In ancient Hebrew, there is no period. There's no such thing as period, there's just the word "and", eternal and. Everything is and, and, and... Hyper little translation from the

Bible would never have a period, if you're reading historical narrative. Almost never. Very rarely. It's just one long sequence of events, that's worth noting.

Now. So we've already talked about the word beginning. We talked about the sky and the land, now in our English translation, the next thing here is what's—in many of our English translations, the phrase called formless and void. Do you see this here? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and void. That's the most English translations read. Now I don't know what on earth comes into your mind when you think of formless and void. That's an old English translation that actually comes to us from the Tyndale, when the first English translations, and then this authorized version of King James in 1611. Formless and void, if you're already thinking about a planet, you know, from misunderstanding the earth as a little kid, it was like a play planet floating in space or something. That was just a bizarre image, you know, that comes into your head. So sky, land. Way back when God made up there and down here. Now what's down here? Problems. Huge problems. What's down here? Begin as *tohu wa-bohu*. It's a little poetic rhyme phrase right there. That's why I adopted Evert Fox's translations, *wild and waste*, to catch that rhyming bit there. *Tohu wa-bohu* refers to a space that is uninhabited and inhospitable to human life. Now ancient Hebrew, what kinds of places are inhospitable and uninhabited? Yeah, what's to the east of the ancient Israelites? Now you go down to the Dead Sea, ended up in modern Jordan, and then what? Far as you go, at least you're going to be alive to make it. What are you going to see? *Tohu wa-bohu*, deserts. Just a big, huge desert. *Tohu wa-bohu* in Deuteronomy 32, it gets translated as *howling wasteland*. So okay. This is very important for us to see here.

The ancient Hebrews, and they have no categories for thinking of the universe as being nothing and then God creating something out of nothing. The category of nothing is a very sophisticated modern concept actually. And I don't claim to understand quantum physics at all. But at least as far as I understand quantum physics or as far as anyone does, nothing actually doesn't truly exist because even what you think is empty space, and nothing is really nothing, explain that one to your kids. So nothing's a very sophisticated concept. And the ancients had no categories. When they thought about the beginning of the world, it's not something coming out of nothing. It's, how do we have this beautiful, flourishing land that we live in. There are plants, and we have the capability for agriculture, because you know what, east of here is *tohu wa-bohu* and I know that probably everything has not always been beautiful and flourishing here. When they envisioned the world, they envisioned the world as beginning as a wild, howling

wasteland. You turn to the Babylonians, you turn to the Egyptians, you read their cosmology stories. That's precisely, it always begins with some sort of desert wasteland and the gods are god bringing life for potential for flourishing life out of the desert, wasteland. That's precisely what we see here in Genesis chapter 1. They're dialoguing with their Babylonian neighbors.

So we find darkness, and howling wasteland. But we find the breath of God there, in the midst of the darkness howling. Howling wasteland. Put your hand up to your mouth with me if you would. Right close, so please say with me, "Hello." Did you feel that? Say it again, "Hello." You feel that? What is that? That's your ruach. That's the word breath there, often translated in spirit. So when we speak, we exhale our ruach. Our ruach. So God's ruach is out there hovering in this dark howling wasteland. And what is the first act of the God of the Bible? Speaks. The imagery is all connected here in these first sentences of the Bible so God speaks, and what does God speak into being? Light. Let's just stop right here again.

Modern scientific view of the world, what is light? Is it a wave, is it a particle? I don't know. Solve that one, you know. So we have technical term for the smallest little packets of energy that we call light, and that term is, photon, right? Photon. So God's making photons here.

[35:00]

No, God is not making photons. That's like flying to France, and so, you get the idea. So okay, let's step into the culture's shoes. Light is not a thing. You can read many, many commentaries, and they just assume. Well in our culture assumption, light is a thing, so that must be what Genesis 1 is talking about. Holy cow. Light is not a thing. What does God call the light? It's the first clue. God does not call the light photon. What does God call the light? Day. What is day? Day is not a thing. God is not creating or manufacturing anything here. What is God doing? God is designating the sequence of time. Day and night. For whom are the words day and night meaningful? Us. Day and night is part of our construct of how the world functions and His meaning. What's the basic building blocks of how things grow and flourish and humans can do what they do? How is the sequence of light and dark, light and dark? It's like the same every single day. It's regular, it's coherent, and it creates the potential for meaning in our lives. Where did this come from? Who ordained this rhythm of the world? The Israelite God.

So God's not creating a thing here. And as you work through the days and Genesis chapter 1, often God's not making or manufacturing anything. He's creating as John Walton says, we've posted here before, his book is on sale. He's bringing function and order out of chaos. He's creating the potential for beauty and meaning out of chaos. This would be jaw dropping in the ancient Near East. The perception of God here in Genesis chapter 1. Because in the ancient Near East, one of the most common motifs for cosmology, especially Babylonian and Canaanites as a thing called, the motif called theomaki. Just two Greek words, theo, god, maki comes from maka which means fighting or battle. So one of the most ancient depictions of world origins that we have from the ancient Sumerians is the idea of the Sumerian God named Girsu, fighting a seven-headed dragon, claiming the dragon, splitting it open and from the two-parts of the body, making heavens, the sky, and the land. In the lower left, you see an ancient depiction of the Babylonian God, Marduk. And he's fighting this ancient Goddess Tiamat. Tiamat is this goddess of the waters. It's a very well-known story from the Babylonian creation narrative in Enuma Elis. It can be quite graphic, you know, don't read it to your kids when they're too young because—Marduk, he's the Babylonian God, he's the one who found Babylon and made Babylon the greatest, most powerful nation ever. So he gets into this battle with Tiamat, and he causes a huge wind to come to Tiamat, and catches Tiamat when the mouth is open, and then the wind is going down her throat, she's like... You can picture the scene, I don't know. Like the lips going like this... And Marduk shoots an arrow, arrow goes down, pierces her, and this is horribly graphic, and Marduk takes her sticks in mouth and rips Tiamat in half. And out of one-half makes the sky, and the other half makes the land. The lower right, you see the Canaanite God, Ba'al, or in English we butcher it to Ba'al. And in Ba'al, it's like—is Israel's contemporary neighbors have a cosmology about Ba'al fighting the same God of the Sea except in their words, it's called Yam. Yam, same thing. Ba'al slays Yam, also fights another God to bring order out of chaos, to make the world. And that God, interestingly is called, Lotan. It's the cognate word to Hebrew word you find in your Bible Leviathan. When Ba'al killed Litan, who is Litan? Serpent. A fleeing serpent annihilated the twisting serpent, the ruler with seven heads, the heavens grew hot and then they withered and then after Ba'al kills Yam and Litan, Ba'al creates his royal palace in a seven-day ceremony inaugurates his rule over creation.

What's the world view statement being made in these narratives? The world is the result of a violent conflict which creates all this in the present. How are humans? What's the nature of humanity and how we go about relating to each

other and flourishing in our world? It's a narrative of violence and conflict that's the root story of the nature of humanity.

Contrast this with Genesis 1. Israelite neighbor goes and has a cup of coffee with a Babylonian friend, and he says, "Actually, the world's quite different. Actually the world is not the result of a violent conflict among the Gods. The world is a result of this unrivaled God. God of Israel. It's the God who rescued us out of Egypt, and slavery, that God.

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And this God has no rivals. The world that this God creates is not the result of violent, selfish conflict. No, no, no. This God creates a world like it's a royal artist, just speaks, commands as a royal king. And kings come into being. And the world that our God has created is the world of goodness, the world of beauty. It's like a work of art and this thing, this baby just hums," you know what I'm saying. Because day and night, and this God has packed this world with potential for self-regeneration of flourishing on its own. It's a worldview statement. It's what Genesis 1 is.

So how do the seven days relate to all of this then? An ancient Israelite author and again, John Walton summarizes this in his book, I'll just go through it briefly, seven days would have had an immediate cultural reference just like, "My lips hurt real bad." The seven days structure of Genesis 1 would have had an immediate cultural reference to the Israelite readers because seven days was the official period of time in which an ancient Israelite King or an ancient Near Eastern King at the beginning of their reign, they would claim authority over the temple and there would be either the construction of a new temple or inauguration of an existing temple to show that this king is now reigning over the empire or the universe and so on. So you can read this in the Bible when Solomon built a temple, he built it in seven years. He has a seven-day dedication feast, and a seven-day inauguration ceremony. What happens on the seventh day

of that inauguration ceremony? In the narrative First Kings, God's presence comes to dwell in the temple. God comes to rest in His temple. And what scholars have often noticed about Genesis chapter 1, is what's this like symmetry. This artistic symmetry design of Genesis 1. And so you have two panels. You have God ordaining structures that make the world meaningful. Time. The sky and the weather. Land and vegetation and agriculture. And then the next three days are lined up right next to them with the functionaries or the inhabitants of those domains. With the sun, the moon, the stars that guide our view of time, with inhabitants of the sea and sky. And then the sixth day, humans are at the pinnacle of God's creative word. M

any scholars, they tune in to this. They make the case, John Walton does again the book that we have on sale, that Genesis 1 is not trying to talk to us about chronology. Chronological sequence of world origins. It's not about cosmic chronology, but cosmic theology. It's making it feel the chronological claim about the nature of the world, that the world is God's temple. That the world has order and coherence the way our world came into being was through coherence and meaningful order not violent conflict, but beauty, and meaning, and order. And then as the crown of God's creative work like any ancient Near Eastern King, he came to rest in His temple. Now here's what's fascinating, for six days in Genesis 1, there's a little concluding formula. There's evening, there's morning, one day. There's evening there's morning, second day. Three, four, five, six. There's no concluding formula for the seventh day. And why is that? Is God no longer ruling the world? No, God is ruling in control of the world. The seventh day has no end. We're in it. That's the theological claim, being made by Genesis chapter 1. And so that is what Ancient Israelites commemorated every seventh day to rest in the fact that God is in control of the world. It's a different way of seeing world origins. Genesis chapter 1 in fifteen minutes, there you go.

Genesis chapter 2 and the scholars have been long aware of this, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 have two distinct narratives when it comes to human origins, and this is the point of contention. Hot topics these days especially in Protestants and Evangelical old testaments scholarships. So in Genesis 1, you have a sequence of events where you have land, plants, animals. Humans are the pinnacle of creation in Genesis chapter 1. In Genesis Chapter 2, humans come first. And then they tend the grounds for agriculture and then animals, and then man, and then female. So two distinct views and the author just plops both of them in front of us. So that's the first clue that a literal like whatever you want to do with a literal reading. You just got a huge problem right there off the bat.

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Maybe the author is not trying to tell us about chronology. Maybe he's sitting two distinct statements about the world in front of us. So when it comes to the human origins, again, the Israelite author is engaging with his Babylonian neighbors, and making a very radical claim.

We'll move down to humanity in Genesis chapter 2. And this is the statement in Genesis chapter 2, "The Lord God formed the man," and if you've been in Black Hawk very long, you know the Hebrew word for man because I say it all the time, adam or Adam. That means humanity. God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathe into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. And we hear that and we think, okay. So God has hands apparently. He's reaching down into the dirt, and like forming a little lump of clay. Hold on.

The Ancient Israelite author is sitting down with his Babylonian neighbor right here in Genesis chapter 2. The idea of the gods forming humans out of the clay of the earth is a very common motif in Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. In Babylonian Cosmologies, one very well-known one called the Atrahasis Epic, the gods are—they're tired of working and providing for themselves. And so, they want to create beings that will be slaves for them. And so they say, well none of us like the god Kingu, so let's kill him. Let's slit his throat and drain his blood into the clay of the earth. And then out of the blood mixed with the clay we'll make humans and they will be our slaves. And that's how the story goes until the humans make too much noise and then they get mad at them so they send cosmic flood to wipe them all out, right? And so that's where the story continues. This idea of humans being the result of a murderous act of murder and blood, but divine and earth. Humans are both from the earth but are connected to the divine. And the Israelite author steps into this conversation and says, "Yes, but... Yes, we know that humans are from the earth because you die and they rot and go back to the earth. Yes, we know there's something unique about humans that connects us to the divine breath here." And they use the image as their Babylonian neighbors formed out of clay. The Hebrew word form here is a very technical term, *yatsaris* what describes the work of the potter sitting at the wheel, forming a pot out of a lump of clay. But the unique claim, the worldview claim of Genesis 2 is this, is that humans are no slaves of the gods, God was the first one

to plant the garden and to make the world a beautiful, flourishing place, and what's happening here is God is creating a creature of His own nature, divine, but also connected to the earth, how are humans treated by God in Genesis 2. Wonderfully. He sets them up for great piece of real estate. You know what I'm saying. And He says, "Have a blast. Go for it. Imitate my creative acts by becoming co-creators and making the world flourish, go have a blast." It's a totally different vision of the nature of humanity. It's a dignified vision. Every human is infused with the nature and character of the divine. And so one Old Testament Scholar connects it this way, this is where the Imago dei, humans reflecting the image of God comes from, which is very radical idea in Ancient Near East, that every human is made in the image of God. It's the claim of Genesis 1 and 2 that God granted a royal priestly identity as Imago dei to all humanity whereas in the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires, whereas power in Babylonian and Assyrian Empires was concentrated in the hands of few, power in Genesis 1 is diffused and shared all humans are made in the image of God. No longer is the image of God applied only to a privileged elite, rather all human beings, male and female, are created as God's royal steward entrusted with the privilege task of ruling on God's behalf. This democratizing of the Imago dei in Genesis 1 constitutes an implicit critique of the entire royal priestly structure of Ancient Mesopotamian society. There's a radical claim about the nature of humans here in Genesis 2.

We don't hear it because we're stuck on, God has hands? And he's making clay? No, you're miss—no, no. Fly to France and learn how to speak French. Like learn what these authors are doing in their context. This also raises questions about human origins and the relationship of Adam and Eve and these kinds of things. This current spectrum of views, of how this relates on how to think about Adam and Eve and so on just to summarize very briefly to conclude you have on the one hand, views. This is all held within even conservative Evangelical scholarship right now. You have Adam and Eve, they're more like literary characters, and the story is meant to describe all of humanity's struggle with temptation.

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You have another whole other side of this discussion that this is a literal, historical narrative just like the Book of Kings or the first entry gospels about Jesus and

they're telling us, real people, real places, actual couple. This is how sin and death entered into the world. Then you have mediating views between those two that there is a real beginning to humanity. Yes, humans had a real origin and they are reflective of the divine in some way. We are morally accountable and we have morally failed. But the language of Genesis 2 is not literal language describing those real events. You've got a whole spectrum here. And I would encourage you if you have questions about that, you want to flush that out, we will more than glad to do that in the Q&A. So the basic principle to conclude is that the Bible is human word, the Bible is a divine word. As a human word, what this means is we need you to use all of our tools, our thinking caps to understand the ancient setting, the ancient background that the resonance it's in connections that the Biblical creative narratives would have had as intended by their authors. And our understanding will continually develop because we're not given the privilege of ultimate understanding. So we always hold our interpretations loosely because human knowledge is always growing and understanding. That's our God-given task as we flourish in God's world. The Bible is a human world. That shouldn't scare us. It should excite us, and thrill us. And motivate us to do some homework when we read the Bible. Now the Bible's not just a human word. It's my conviction that the Bible is also a divine word and so all of our efforts to do background, to do homework, all need to be in the service of hearing across the millennia, this divine voice that is addressing every single one of us as hearers of this word, the voice that's telling us who are, what this whole world is about. It's a voice that's calling us to respond. And as good readers of the scriptures, that's the voice we need to pay attention to most.

Well I hope that was helpful and more importantly, I hope it's stimulating my real hope is that you're asking a ton of questions right now and needing to rethink a whole bunch of things you thought you already knew about, and that's awesome. If you're looking for further resources, I have actually done a number of other lectures on the same topic, and they'll be coming out later on the Strange Bible Podcast.

If you're a bookworm, let me throw a few books at you. One I referenced in the lecture by Hebrew Bible Scholar named John Walton, the book is called, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, look it up on Amazon, it'll change the way you read Genesis 1 in light of its Ancient Hebrew language and context forever. If you're looking for something that's a little more basic, not so like, right into the original language and culture, there's a book called, *Great Titles*, one of my favorite titles on this topic, it's called, *In the Beginning We Misunderstood*, interpreting Genesis 1 and

its original context. It's by two pastors actually. Johnnie V. Miller and John M. Soden and it's written for anybody no matter what background or no background you have in the Bible. Super helpful introduction into this whole debate, specifically talking about why this has been so politically and emotionally charged in the history of the church in America. It's very, very helpful survey of this issue.

And then last of all, something that's pushing the conversation in a new direction is a recent book by a scientist and a biblical scholar, Scott McKnight who's a professor of New Testament and then Dennis Venema who's a genetic scientist. They wrote a book called Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science. Super, super insightful. And this has more to do and not just with world origins, but with human origins and how it's connected to this whole debate.

So we'll be addressing more matters of science and faith in the Strange Bible Podcast and episodes to come. So to be continued. Thanks for listening you guys.

[End of transcription 54:41]