

Torah Crash Course P1

Exploring My Strange Bible

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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 this is going to be a first of a three-part series called the Torah Crash Course. It represents one long evening of lectures that I did when I was a teaching pastor at Door of Hope many years ago. My desire to do this Torah Crash Course came out of a conviction that grew over a number of years of teaching the Bible and pastoral ministry. I came across so often people having deep misunderstandings of Jesus and what He was all about. I found that those misunderstandings were typically rooted, not just misunderstanding Him, but not understanding the larger story that Jesus was a part of and that Jesus saw Himself contributing to and fulfilling and bringing to its climatic fulfillment. And so it's kind of like if you were to not watch the very first Star Wars episode 4: A New Hope and you were just to just dive in the very first watch Episode 5: Empire Strikes Back. You know you could follow what's going on and you could track what the plot line of the movie, and you would kind of like Han Solo anyway. He's a likable character, but you would be wondering like, clearly he, and Leia, and Luke Skywalker, like all these people have some previous history that I'm not being told, right. You're lacking some pre-story that makes sense of why these characters are doing what they're doing, and saying what they're saying. And something similar is going on with picking up the New Testament and reading the stories about Jesus, and the Gospels. You can dive right in and figure out Jesus is awesome, and this is really cool. But, you're constantly going to be asking yourself, "Why are they talking about these older scriptures, the Old Testament so much, quoting from them? Why did Jesus do that? Why did He say that to those people?" And same kinds of things, and it's so much easier to misunderstand when you don't have the backstory.

This set of lecture is really me effort to condense the first five foundational books of Jesus' Bible because they introduced the core story and the plot conflict and the promise that Jesus sees Himself as contributing to, and bringing to His fulfillment. And so there you go. It's just a conviction that I became reformed. If I want to follow Jesus, I need to understand the story that He thinks He's a part of. And that story is found in the first five books of the Bible.

This first lecture is a little bit longer. It just explores the Book of Genesis and how it sets you up for understanding the whole of the biblical storyline to follow. And the following lectures will do rest of the Torah, but this first lecture is just on Genesis. Hope it's helpful for you.

How many of you have seen the things called "photo mosaics" before? They're big pictures made up of hundreds and thousands of tiny little pictures? You can go to websites and make your own. Just put in your own pictures or whatever. Anyway, so... But they're useful. They provide useful illustration of why these books of the Bible we're going to dive into tonight are so difficult to read.

So you know, I don't know what your relationship is with the Bible and especially with these first five books of the Bible. My guess is that we could all get in a circle and have some therapeutic sharing time. Most of us would probably end up confessing at some point that our relationship to the Bible and especially these books of the Bible is, the way I put it, is kind of like the way you relate to your weird uncle. Because he's family so you know you're supposed to hang out with him at obligated times, you know what I mean. Holidays or whatever. But it's awkward, and it's strange, and you don't really like talking to him because he's weird. And so you're like, "Yeah." There's half of Exodus, Leviticus, it's like the weird uncle in the Bible, like what do you do with a book like that or Numbers? What do you do with a book titles Numbers? Who wants to read that, you know? Deuteronomy. So, I think that's somewhat the relationship that we have.

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And part of it is because it's big, it's many hundreds of pages in our Bibles. And secondly, it's just this amalgamation of this seemingly... there's some bright spots, "Oh yeah. Noah and the animals. and Moses and Abraham." And then there's all of the hundreds and hundreds of pages full of people in place and list

of names. Do you guys know what I'm talking about here? It's like wandering in a jungle or it's like looking at a photo mosaic.

And now He's going to say about these five books of the Bible that they are about him, that they point forward to Him. And I think part of the reason why we might read that we say, "Well, that's great. He can say that because He's Jesus. But I sure don't know what He's talking about."

So I think for the most part that's because of the way we are taught to read or the habits of reading that we have for any book of the Bible, but especially these first five books is like this. And so, we think of the books of the Bible, I mean I don't know how we think of them. But I think a lot of us think that it's a collection of hodge-podge. I think many of us read the Bible kind of like key dipping style. We're just like, "Okay, I'll try this page today. What am I going to find here? Oh, it's a weird story about a guy murdering a whole village. That's weird. I don't like that. Let me turn to the story about Jesus." That's basically how it works because we're so close in, we don't ever back up and see the order. And so our approach to these books of the Bible is this little phrase I find helpful to remember, different ways of reading the Bible. It's just this tool called, Big Story, Little Story.

And essentially the entire Bible, third of it is narratives, and the narrative books of the Bible are collections of little stories. Hundreds and hundreds of little stories that have been very intentionally woven together to make a much larger plotline that's working itself out from cover to cover. And the meaning of any little individual story, you can appreciate it just by reading a little story about Abraham and Isaac or a guy killing a village or something, whatever. You can read that and maybe appreciate it in its own light, you might be puzzled. But the key really is you might be backing up and seeing how this story fits into the story that comes before it and after it or that group of stories fit to the group of stories before it, and all of a sudden you start to see intelligent life in the way that the stories—you start to see an epic tale that someone has had their hands on as weaving together this grand tale and all of the themes within it.

So that's kind of what we're going to do tonight. We're going to be reading a bunch of individual little passages. But mostly, we're going to float 30,000 feet over the big story and we're going to trace what I call kind of Afford Big Movements in the story of the Torah. These are five books of the Bible. We'll kind of float and then we'll land in on the passage that gives us light on core scenes of the story and we're going to back up and float 30,000 feet. That's from Luke Chapter 24, one of the resurrection stories from the Gospel of Luke. So, Jesus has

already disappeared from the tomb, the disciples come and they find the tomb empty, He's not there, and then all of a sudden there are these stories of saying that He appeared to us, as a human, He's alive and so on. This is one of them.

Luke Chapter 24 Verse 36, While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them

How did He get there? Just all of a sudden He's there. Strange, strange part of the story.

And he said to them, "Shalom. Peace be to you guys."

They were startled and frightened because they thought there were seeing a ghost. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, why do doubts rise in your mind? Look at my hands and my feet. It's I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When He had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they did didn't believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "I'm hungry. Do you have anything to eat?"

It's a great—real part of the story there. Their remembrance is they're freaking out and Jesus is like, "Man, I'm hungry. That was a long three days." Such a strange...

And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and he's eating in His presence.

You can picture the scene, right? Have you ever been the only one eating at the table full of people before? You know how that's a little awkward? So think about how awkward is this scene was. He's alive from the dead.

He said to them "Listen, this is what I told you guys when I was still with you: Everything that's written about me in the Law of Moses,"

Which is a reference to the first five books of the Bible.

[10:00]

"The prophets, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, and the Psalms."

Everything had to go. Just the way those books of the Bible said it would.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "Listen, this is what was written: That the messiah will suffer, rise from the dead on the third day, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all of the nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

That's Jesus' cliff notes of the Old Testament. And where like, "What? Where? What are you talking about?"

He said, "You're witnesses to these things. I'm going to send you what my Father had promised; but stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

What is that referenced to? So it's reference to Coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Acts chapter 2. So twice He is able to bring in a very nonchalant way, just said, "Listen, I mean we had these conversations before. I told you that the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms. They were telling a story that was forward pointing towards everything that has happened, and the last couple of years, and the last week." So He just assumes that.

Here's why as a community of Jesus, we read these books of the Bible, and why we read the Old Testament. I joked about this at the Last Friday Night Live, but it's true. I think as Christians, reading the Old Testament is very often a labor of love for Jesus because these are not easy books to read. I don't think, I sure hope you don't think so because I think you're not telling the truth. Because they're not easy books to read. And I actually don't think I would choose to read them if I just found them randomly on the sidewalk or something like that. So why has the church, the community of Jesus from the very beginning, held tightly? These books of the Old Testament, Scriptures, and specifically these first five books. That comes out of this conviction right here. That they illuminate who Jesus is. They tell a story without which we can't truly grasp the significance of Jesus. And so I think why that's difficult for us is because we're reading up close all the time, and we're like, Okay, No, an ark, and animals, that's cool. We're like, how does this little picture, how does this little individual story point to Jesus? And as we're going to see, there are some really amazing individual little passages that clearly point forward to the coming of the Messiah and such like that. But actually most passages in the Torah, these first five books don't do that. But that doesn't mean they aren't about Jesus. It means they play one little roll in the developing storyline that's pointing forward to Him.

So another analogy would be like, think of The Chronicles of Narnia or something like that. Who is the main driving character in all of the stories of Lewis'

Chronicles Story of Narnia? So Aslan. Is Aslan in every scene of every story in the story of Chronicles of Narnia? No, actually there's a handful of them where he doesn't appear until very late in the story. He's very much behind the scenes like horse and his boy, boy and his horse? Horse in his boy. Yeah, exactly. Aslan's very much hidden for very long in the book. But the stories are entirely about Aslan, aren't they? And his relationship to the characters and stories of the world. But he's not on every page explicitly. But the entire story's about him. And I think that's what Jesus has in mind here. And so this is why we're going to float and essentially we're going to look at what I call the architecture of these first five books of the Bible. 30,000 feet and you start to see someone deliberately is taking these hundreds of little stories and arranged them and working out themes that all of them find their resolution and meet their fulfillment in Jesus. So that's kind of where we're going. That's our rationale for what we're doing with the Pentateuch or the Torah.

Just so you know, when Jesus said the Law of Moses, that word Law refers to the Hebrew word, Torah, which literally means teaching or instruction. And so teaching and instruction can take many different forms. It can take like in the Book of Proverbs, the Proverbs are often referred to as Torah, teaching or instruction. And so we just think of laws, reading a law book or something like that. But the word torah, just itself means teaching or instruction. Which really is what this entire story is doing. It's instruction us, teaching us about what kind of world we're in, who are and what God is up to in the world. So that's its Hebrew name, that's the way these five books refer to in Jewish tradition.

In Christian tradition, they're called the Pentateuch phrase meaning five teuchs. I have no idea what a teuch is. I should look that up. So five teuchs. It's a five-part book. Okay, so, if it's a grand story, where should we begin? In the beginning. We're going to take the story Torah, looking at four main movements of the story.

[15:00]

So you got two on one page, the other two on the other side. We're going to tackle the first two.

So the big main movements here are Genesis 1 through 11, 12 through 50, and then Exodus 1 through 15. This is a collection of stories about Israel being redeemed out of slavery in Egypt. This is a collection of stories about a really dysfunctional family. They all come from a guy named Abraham who's introduced to us here in chapter 12, and three generations of his family. This is a collection of stories about all of humanity and how screwed up we all are. And how all of this relates—even just stop and think about that. So you have a story that begins with the origins of everything. And then tells a story about all humanity. And then all of a sudden, it's just like whiplash, you know. We're tracking thousands of years of all of humanity here and then it's just like the camera zooms in, and then time slows down, and we just focus on one guy and his family. Why would you tell a story that way? You know what I'm saying? So somehow, even just looking here, whatever the connection is, what's happening with this single family here right here, the family of Abraham is somehow linked to the fate of all of humanity. Does that make sense here? We're just thinking intelligently about how you would tell a story. Why would you tell a story? This is actually quite presumptuous. This would be like saying, telling a story where you tell the founding of the United States, or something like that, the revolutionary war, and then Tumaki was born like the next page or something, you know. And that can be quite presumptuous because what are you doing? As the way you're telling the story, you're assuming the birth of this individual in the story is somehow linked to the fate of a whole nation. Do you see what I'm saying here? It's reflecting on the three big chunks of these first two main movements of the story gets you into the flavor. Then all of a sudden then, God rescuing this family out of Egypt isn't just a story about something God did way back when. This is a story about what God is doing to rescue or do something that's going to affect all of humanity and so on. It becomes a very epic drama. So we're introduced first to the stories of God making everything. So page 1 of the Bible, 30,000 feet you guys. It's a big picture. You guys ready? Okay. Alright.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now, dear reader, what does the earth refer to right here? It refers to the globe. No, no. This was written by an author 3,000 years ago. So earth means land under my feet, heavens means what's up there. And in the beginning is a very ambiguous term. We think of beginning as a point in time through which nothing before is envisaged and then you have a sequence of events that follows after it. Ancient Hebrew has a word for this. But it's not the word used right here. The word used right here is Reishit. Essentially Reishit is the way of talking about in undetermined period of time in the past, it's totally ambiguous, that's not the point of using this word. The point

is that, it's the undetermined period of time in the past where foundational events took place, now let's get the story going. So in other words, the first sentence of the Bible is actually quite ambiguous about most of the things that readers go to Genesis 1 looking for which is like how long, and when, and how exactly. Whatever. And the author just says, "Yeah, way back when before God made what's up there and what's down here." And there you go, the universe exists now. And what's included in everything that's up there and everything that down's here? Everything that's up there, and everything that's down here. Now it's all here, but it's like a big, desert wasteland. Now what's down here, the land was formless and empty. Does anyone remember that Hebrew phrase? Tohu wa-bohu. Yeah, there you go. So, wild and waste is my favorite English rendering. It preserves the rhyme. And so these are words that refer to a desert wasteland elsewhere when the words get used. So you have this idea that creation, everything exists, but it lacks order. It lacks meaning and purpose. It's just in this neutral state and humans can't live in tohu wa-bohu, and that's what God is priming this whole world for here. And so, this is so cool, in the beginning God makes everything. Happy face, sad face?

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Yehey! This is awesome. What a great story so far.

Now what's down here is tohu wa-bohu. Happy face, sad face? Yeah it's really just neutral face. Just like, "Oh, whoa. This is not going to work. And darkness is over at the surface of the deep." Happy face, sad face? No. Darkness. Humans can't flourish in darkness. But the spirit of God is there hovering in those dark waters. Happy face? Yes. It's like a rollercoaster already, you know what I mean? So it's like, "Yes, this is awesome!" "Oh no, what's going to happen?" "Yes!" The word spirit is just tying together a bunch of themes that are going to reappear later. Some of you might know. This word spirit in Hebrew, it's the word Ruach, clearing your throat word, ruach. And so, spirit is a fine translation, rauch is a much broader concept in Hebrew because it can be used of breath or wind or a person's wind, he's not talking about their guest, right, but the ruach.

It's actually very simple. Some of you have done this with me before. Put your hand in front of your mouth, like this. Put your hand up here and say, "whatever." Whatever. Can you feel that on your hand? That's your ruach that you feel against your hand. That's your ruach. So what do you release when you speak? Ruach. So ruach, it's a sign of life, it's like your vital life energy. It's a sign that you're a living, energetic being, and so on. And ruach comes in and comes out. The biblical poets talk about ruach as a gift. Everybody; animals and humans, ruach is a gift from God. And so, God's ruach is there. It's a way of talking about his personal presence there, hovering in the midst of this darkness. His ruach is there and what's the first thing that this God does to begin to bring order and meaning and beauty out of the dark, watery chaos? He speaks. Which is an utterance of the ruach. So the images are all tied together here. And also notice this isn't lost on the guy who wrote John Chapter 1 because in the beginning you have God creating through the presence of His spirit which is intimately connected to the speaking of His word, come on. See if God and His spirit and His word, which is precisely the Gospel of John's way of talking about the God who is 3 in 1. He even gets that vocabulary from His first verse of the Bible here. And so God's ruach is released out into the dark, watery chaos, and all of a sudden things start taking shape. So again, 30,000 feet, we're just going to assume that the rest of Genesis 1, all the debates about how, how long exactly, we're just going to skip over that because we're flying 30,000 feet. We're just going to assume that the rest of Genesis 1, all the debates about how and how long exactly. We're just going to skip over that because we're flying 30,000 feet. But God takes this tohu wa-bohu and turns it into a beautiful garden.

Go to verse 26 with me. This is the next key part of the story. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image," not to get this. The Hebrew word for man is the word Adam or adam. Let us make Adam in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock over all the earth, over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created Adam in his own image, in the image of God he created them. Humanity viewed as a whole, male and female he created them. That is humanity viewed as male and female. That's better evidence, isn't it? God blessed them and he said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the whole earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, over everything creature that moves on the ground.

Okay. So there are a lot of different things going on here. But what stands out to you? What makes these creatures unique? So the image right? The image—this is

a fascinating word, it's the word tselom. Tselom. There's a Hebrew letter that's the word TS together. Isn't that interesting? The word tselom refers to statue. This is one of the most common words in the Hebrew Bible that talk about idols when Israel is not supposed to make or bow down to idols in the worship of other gods. So this is so interesting because, is Israel supposed to make a tselom to represent Yahweh their God? No. Can Yahweh make a tselom of Himself? Apparently.

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Here's a room full of them, right here. So, this is a very powerful statement being made here. You know, most people tend to think, what is it? Is there some unique trait about humans, you know, like rationality or reason or relationship or love or something? And there's only actually two things unpacked in the story right here of what constitutes the image. First of all, look at the first—back to verse 26, what's the first thing that said after God says, "Let's make humanity in the image and in the likeness to rule and reign?" So the idea is, that these are little physical representatives of the royal creator. And if God's will and rule is going to happen here on Earth, God is willing, choosing to have His rule and will be accomplished in the world through these creatures. I mean, really the idea is, that these are—we can use different words, like co-rulers or He's going to go on and tell them to take all of the raw, potential in this incredible planet Earth and assert their will over it in the way that makes it flourish even more, and so on. The image from chapter 2 will be gardeners. But this is so foundational. I mean, this is something that really—this is a theme that underlies all of the scripture. I think many of us read the Bible, and our view of God is that His will is the only will that's done in the world. I'm getting into a debates about sovereignty of God and human freewill and so on. But this is a pretty foundational statement, right? From the beginning. How is God's rule, His kingdom and His will, how is it going to be established here on Earth according to verse 26? Through whom? Through human beings. So, a practical implication is any time we say, "Why didn't God...?" I think what this narrative is forcing us to say is, "Why didn't you?" You know what I'm saying here? Why didn't God prevent this from happening?

Well according to Genesis 1, He's commissioned human beings to be the ones to effect His will in the world. So the real question bounced back to myself. It's sort

of this, when we pray to God's kingdom come, His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven and so on. You know often I used to pray that in the mode of, God just like, zap Portland and save everybody or something. And I think the way Jesus taught you to read His teaching, He always turned it around whenever people were projecting on to someone else something and He said, "Well what are you doing? Where's the state of your heart?" It's this foundational view, humans are given a very high status here. Co-rulers. Executors of God's will here in the world.

And verse 28, I mean, they're supposed to have a great time about it too, right? He busted them, just have a blast, just go for it, you know. Reproduce. That's going to be great. Bring out the potential of the earth. Be fruitful and increase. Kind of the mark that. So there's two phrases right here that we're going to mark. Key theme right here is image of bless and it's linked to this blessing and commissioning of God to all of humanity. Go, have the earth. Flourish. Have a great time. Make neighborhoods and music and gardens and farmer's markets and the whole thing, you know. Just go, go. And that all takes place under God's blessing and his favor and His support and so on. This little phrase, "Be fruitful and multiply," mark. Tuck that one away. That's going to occur again in the Torah quite a bit. But it's like all this divine blessing that occurs right here in Chapter 1 verse 26.

Chapter 2's way of talking about the same exact thing is, it kind of... it reboots the story back to tohu wa-bohu and there's no farms or gardens or anything. So God plants a garden, go to chapter 2 verse 7.

Genesis 2 doesn't talk about the image of God. Instead it uses a number of images to get the meaning of it, verse 7. So the Lord God formed man, it's the image of a potter working with a lump of clay. He formed man from the dust of the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, the ruach, and man became a living creature.

So again, a lot of these narratives, especially early on, if you really press it for—so there was like invisible hands forming a pile of dirt or something... Okay, that's a wrong question. Question is, what does this mean? There's significance about the nature of human beings being given to us right here. So humans are earth and divine breath. They're on the boarder of heaven and earth. They're connected to the earth, we go back to it, we come from it, we live our life on the earth but yet there's something transcendent and divine also about human. Divine in a sense were animated from sort of divine energy or something like that, the ruach.

[30:00]

So this is Genesis 2's way of getting at the meaning of the image. Human beings are little places in theory. We're heaven and earth connect. And so, verse 15.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to care for it.

So in Genesis 1 they're called the rule and help flourish. Here they're called the work, like a gardener. Work the ground and care for the ground. It's like a stewardship and to care for it. It's a great story, right? So there's debates about all the details of how and when and so on. But don't miss just the big picture here. This is setting the stage. So there is a sense in which anybody who found these books on the sidewalk can read these first chapters and immediately, these chapters are making a claim on any human being that's ever lived. Did you see that there? It doesn't matter who you are, where you live, what millennia you were born in. This story is wrapping its arm around all of universal history right here. This is a story about and for everybody. And we're being told about, who are we. This is kind of like fundamental worldview questions that most human cultures answer in some way.

Where are we? Who are we? What's wrong? And, what's the solution? This is the baseline story that every single human culture has some way of getting at, and telling, and these stories is what these Genesis stories are doing. So where are we? We're in a world that didn't have to exist, but by the gift of this really, pretty creative, whoever could think of wombats, you know what I'm saying, it's pretty creative. So we're in this crazy place that's very improbable that we should be here and exist, but here we are. And we are creatures that were made from the stuff all around us, but yet we have this transcendence that's connected to this bigger picture in this, whoever is responsible for all of this. What's wrong? What's wrong? That's the story of this tree and serpent. So again, flying 30,000 feet here because we want to get moving in this story. It needs to be the most familiar story in the Torah. So humans are given this choice with this tree, knowledge of good and evil, are they going to trust? You could say it this way. We're in verse 15, so let's look at verse 16.

The LORD commanded the man, "You're free to it from any tree of the garden, the whole creation is yours. Go, go, go. But don't eat from one tree. The knowledge of good and evil, when you eat from it you'll surely die."

Now, who's been the provider of good in the story so far? God has been. Seven times in Genesis 1. He pronounces this world, this world really, really for the good. What's the issue here is as the humans flourish, and go about their work, and reproducing, and under God's blessing and so on, are they going to trust God's definition? His knowledge of good and evil, were they going to see seize the knowledge of good and evil as something good that they're going to define for themselves to do what's right in their own eyes, call the shots, that kind of thing? That's the story. How long do the good times last? So it's like a page and a half, right. And so, the humans at the prodding of the serpent, which is not a theme that gets brought up again in the rest of the Torah, serpent and this dark figure appears only in the story as somebody that exists before the humans and wants to destroy them. And so the humans give in to the deception and they want to become, oh this is a good one, look at chapter 3, this is part of the tragedy.

Chapter 3 verse 5, the serpent says, "God knows that when you eat of this tree your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God," now just stop right there. What's the deception? You'll be like God. You're already like God in way possible way you would dream of. But there's one thing that we're being told God's holding out on. He doesn't want you to call, to go your own way. Since I taught them this a few weeks ago, I since read the short little book, Perelandra by... go read Perelandra. It's the most brilliant retelling of Genesis 3 that you will ever read in your entire life. It's absolutely brilliant and it's not a super long read. C.S Lewis Perelandra. And you realize this is not just a weird story from the past, this is the story about the past, but this is also a story about every human being that's ever lived.

And so the human beings, they take, they seize the fruit, this idea of defining good for themselves. The whole thing just falls apart. And so where the story goes from right here, then is from Genesis 3.

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Genesis 3 through 11, what does it say on your handout? There you go. So the image bears, they foolishly rebel and what happens from here is the storyteller of Genesis has collected a whole bunch of little vignettes. Each of which showing humanity's spiraling deeper and deeper down into "Lostness" into rebellion and

into selfishness. And so here, this is where we begin the vignettes and all the little, little stories, The stories about two brothers, one murders the other. Cane and Abel or the story about Lamech, this weird savage of a man who kills boys and collects wives like property and sing songs about it, you know? So that's all like five verses. Then there's another vignette about humans making these grand cities and so on with their technology and then there's a story about humans becoming so violent and unjust that God washes, he washes the creation clean with the flood, but he saves one family, a guy named Noah. So there's Noah and the flood here and what's the first thing that Noah does when he gets off the boat? We make the sacrifice which is great, and God makes a covenant. What's the second thing he does? So right. So plants the **(? 36:15)** and he gets plastered and then something really sketchy and not okay happens with his son in attempt.

Genesis 9. It's a very disturbing story. The last vignette is in Genesis chapter 11 here. So people make the city and the Tower of Babel. And this is about all of humanity uniting, and they have this new technology called the brick. And they build the city out of bricks which is much more efficient than stones because stones they're not all the same shape and you can only stack them so high. But bricks, you can mass produce these suckers and make them all the same shape, and you can make walls that are taller and you can make them faster than anybody else. Okay. And so they want to build a tower up to the heaven.

Go to Genesis 11 with me. And these stories are fast-paced, they're short, our heads are just spinning when we're reading Genesis chapter 1 through 11. We're like, "No, this was not supposed to happen this way. No." Chapter 11. Now the whole land had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward and they found a plain in Shinar and they settled there.

And they said, "Come, we can make bricks." We can make microchips. So humanity with a little snake wrapped around their hearts now but they have these tools of technology to remake the earth. So they bake them thoroughly and they use brick instead of stone, and tar instead of mortar. So they can make them faster, higher, stronger than anybody's ever done before. Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we can make what for ourselves?" A name. So tuck that away. This is humanity with their wisdom and technology and their dark, selfish hearts making a name for themselves and a tower that reaches up to the heavens, right up to the gods. So that we will not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

What was the blessing that God gave humanity in chapter 1? Go, make a whole bunch of yourselves and just go for it. And here's humanity saying, "No, we want to all come together in one place." So the Lord came down to the city and the tower the people were building, and the Lord said, "As one people speaking the same language, they're doing this. Then nothing they planned to do will be impossible for them." And God is not biting his fingernails right here. He's seeing the horror of what the human race can do when they have unlimited power and technology combined with their darkened hearts. Sounds to me this is Genesis 11 is a tale told precisely for the generation and the century that we were all born in, namely the 20th century. The bloodiest century in the history of the human race is the story of Genesis 11.

And so Yahweh God, He says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they won't understand each other." And so the Lord scatters. Which is an act of judgment, but it's an act of mercy at the same time because He's trying to save them from themselves. And so He scatters them. There you go. This is the first part of the story. Happy face, sad face? Horribly, horribly sad face. I mean this is tragic. Everything that God meant for good, humans are now turning into evil. And they're doing it so that they can make a name for themselves. So Genesis 11. Sad.

Look down after the story about the Tower of Babel. The little story about the Tower of Babel. What follows it? What comes after it? What kind of—you have a story of the first half of Genesis 11, what's the second half of Genesis 11?

[40:00]

This puts you to sleep, that's what it does. So we're right here, that's where we're at. This is so, "What? Who cares about this? I—Sorry, I'm going to go read Romans or something," you know. Right? "No, no, no. don't do that. No. you're missing the story." Why is this dark flower shape next to the little baby wolf that's a little lighter next to whatever that is, that's a little—you know, why is that next to each other? Well because when you back up, you—oh, it had to be. Because it's describing this whole other part of the painting. We have this scattering of the nations and what this genealogy is going to tell you is about tracing a family lion that goes out of the scattering. So you can say, "Make this blue." So the nations are scattered. Scattered out into the world. And what this genealogy is going to

do, if you read it closely, is it's going to say, here, let me show you one family that comes from this division of the earth. You'll read it. And then it traces this family down ten generations right there to a guy named Abram. Abram or we'll just call him by what his name is changed to later in the story, Abraham.

And then all of a sudden, look at chapter 12, what's the first words of chapter 12? Yeah, God just starts having a conversation with this guy. This was a story about all of humanity destroying itself, lost, rebellion against his creator, and then you're going to tell me a story about God having a conversation with this random guys. This is weird. That's weird. So that's like as, just like telling a story about the revolutionary war and then fast-forwarding and then Tumaki was born. Right, that's the idea. Somehow this guy has everything to do with the fate of a lost rebellious humanity. The words you're about to read, and also look at the format of the words. The first words in chapter 12. What are they formatted like? Are they formatted like poetry in your Bible? It's good. They're poets because they are. This is the favorite technique of the author of the Torah is to insert poems at key moments in the story to enforce you to slow down because poetry by nature you have to slow down to read it as you should. And usually it's in the little poems that are inserted or it's like a musical. Man, did anyone see the new Les Miserables? Part of our Valentine's day date and it ruined our date. I'll just say that much. In our humble opinion, you're welcome to your humble opinion. But there's a movie experience where the whole thing is music and poetry and so you don't know what's important and what's not because it's all... So think about it like a musical to have acting and then moments where they break out into song. That is poetry. Pay attention to poetry when you come across it in the stories. And so let's read the poem here. Genesis 12.

The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, your father's household, go to the land that I'll show you.

I'll make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, whoever curses you I will curse; all the peoples literally all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

Now just by word repetition alone, what's the main idea? Clearly it's blessing. So here's theme number 2. So this is how you tell stories in the Bible is if you want to emphasize something, you just repeat it. If you think about it, you're like, oh, yeah, totally. So pay attention to repeated words are you read through the stories of the Bible because they'll lock you into the main themes. And so he's receiving

like hyper blessing. I mean, humans got one blessing, you know. Abraham's getting five blessings. And so God is going to bless him, what's He going to give him? "I'm going to make you into a great nation," so he's going to have a huge, "I'm going to give you a big family, lots of kinds. I'm going to bless you," and what comes after that? "I'm going to give you a great name." What has rebellious humanity defining good and evil for themselves, what were they trying to do? Make a name for themselves. So God scatters them. So he scatters the proud, but he exalts the humble and just as a sheer act of grace and gift, He says, "Here's this random guy, I'm going to make your name great and I'm going to bless you and give you a huge family with loads and loads of kids, and this family is going to be somehow under the providential direction and protection of God. And what's the last line of verse 3? This is absolutely key. Does God just like people named Abraham? Do you think he's good looking or something like that?"

[45:00]

Like, why is he doing this for him? So that this blessing can spread back to whom? All the families of the earth. All the nations of the earth. What have the nations of the earth been up to in the story so far? Making themselves enemies of God. And so what does the God of the Bible do for His enemies? He set in motion a plan to bless them. There you go. So, if you all you had was Genesis 1 through 12, you would know a lot about the God of the Bible and you would know that his intentions are to bless his enemies and to set a motion in plan. And so it's not just blessing. The idea is, the blessing is what humanity lost in the garden. And so God is going to do something through this man, and through his family that he's going to give what humans have been looking for but in all the wrong ways. It's going to give it to them as pure gift and restore them to his original intentions he always meant for the humans to experience. But it's not going to be through what humans do because what we do is ruin everything. It's going to be as a sheer gift and a surprise of God's grace.

This is loads of theology built into this little poem right here. And most of it just comes from saying, why does this story come after this story? And what are the implications of that? And so essentially, right here, the whole story of the Bible, at least the Old Testament specifically, flows right out of this promise to Abraham right here.

Why is the rest of the Old Testament about these people of Ancient Israel? Well this is why. Because what you're supposed to have in the back of your mind is that somehow, God is going to do something with this people to rescue and save and restore blessing to all humanity. And so it's not like God likes these people more than anybody else or something. Out of His grace, the family he chose is the vehicle for his blessing and salvation for all of the nations. In the second part of the story here, so we're now in the big story part 2.

So what's going to happen then is fast-pace, moving really fast, little vignette, thousands of years, you know going forward and then the story right here is that reaches part 2 is just going to slow down and now we had 1 through 11 chapters for thousands of years, and now we have 38 chapters for just 4 generations of one family. The story ways slows down and it zooms in. And so we're given stories about Abraham, and then he has a son who inherits the promise after him, what's his name? Isaac? He has two sons and who's the son of the promise? A guy named Jacob, whose name means deceiver and then Jacob has twelve sons that become the twelve tribes of Israel. And so here you go. So what God is going to do, if you're reading through Genesis and you're looking for this key word here, God is going to repeat these promises to bless all the nations through this family. He's going to repeat that over and over and over again right straight through. And he's not just going to repeat it. He's going to make an official promise. Go to Genesis 15 with me. In Genesis 14, Abraham just picked a fight with five of the most powerful kings in the land and he has reasons to be scared, so chapter 15.

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abaram in a vision:

"Don't be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me? I don't have any kids yet and the one who is going to inherit my estate well it's this this guy, Eliezer of Damascus."

See what's happened? What did God promise him in chapter 12? Lots of things. But lots of kids. What does Abraham not have yet? He doesn't have any kids. So, you know, he's been waiting. Waiting. And he's going to continue to wait for a while.

So he says, "You haven't given me any children; a servant in my household will be my heir." So the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who comes from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside

and he said, "Hey, look up at the sky and count the stars, chuckle chuckle, if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "This is what your offspring, your family's going to be like."

Now just stop right there. A nomadic tribesman, got about 300 people or so, you're in your 70s, your wife is in her 70s, never been able to have kids.

[50:00]

How do you feel about these words spoken to you right now? It's a joke, cruel joke. Come on, you've been telling me this for a long time now. And what is Abraham's response here? This is about the only thing he does right in the whole Book of Genesis, and it has nothing to do with him. He believes. He has faith in God's promise. He believes in Yahweh and he credited it to Him as righteousness. So simply, again, what does Abraham do to gain this status of right relationship with the God and the creator of the universe? He just trusts his word. So with all of these stories about Abraham and Isaac, they're actually very quite detailed. They're very earthy stories about this family, and this guy who's struggling to believe in the promises of God, and he doesn't get it right. I mean he gives his wife away twice without thinking about it. He's constantly making these really bad decisions and Yahweh God keeps stepping in to rescue him. But this one time, he gets it right. And what does he do right? He trusts in God's promise. We have to finish the chapter.

So God said to Him, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

But Abraham said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer." This will be a good line in a West Anderson movie. Because you're having a conversation, "How do I know I'm going to gain the inheritance?" "Bring me a heifer." What does this have to do with anything? Like bring me a heifer? What? That's so weird. So bring me—bring a heifer, a goat, and a ram? Each three years old? Oh yeah, and bring me a dove and a pigeon. So Abraham brought all these to him and he cut them in two, gross, he arranged the halves opposite each other, but the bird, he didn't cut those in half. Then the birds of prey were coming down, like vultures coming

down on the carcasses, but Abraham drove them away, literally, said he shoed them, he poofed at them, poof, poof. And then as the sun was setting, Abraham fell into a deep sleep. There's one other character in the Bible who's brought into a deep sleep. Adam in chapter 2. And then God scoops his whole side out and makes the woman, right. So a deep sleep. And a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. The Lord said to him, know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own. They're going to be enslaved and mistreated for 400 years. But I am going to punish the nation that they served as slaves and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

What just happened there? This is flash forward, yeah? So in my area, this would be, Wayne's World really. So this is a flash forward. So right here in chapter 15, there's this flash forward to what story? The next story. Yeah, it's the next story. It's like shooting a little arrow out to the next story. Joining this—do you see what the author is doing here? With all of these key words and references, he's linking all of the little stories together into this grand, big, huge story so that you never forget the big story that makes sense of all the little stories. So he says here, they're going to go there afterwards, I'm going to bring them out, you however, yeah, sorry. You're going to die. You're going to go to your father in peace, be buried in good age, the fourth generation of your descendants is going to come back here for the sin of the Amorites, the inhabitants of the land, hasn't yet reached its full measure. This is in reference to the Canaanites currently living in the land. Now when sun had set, and the darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot and a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. What on earth is happening? Bring me a heifer. And like, cut them all in pieces, bloody, but not the birds, and set them like this. And then this smoking fire pot floats between the bloody pieces while Abraham's drooling in his sleep? This is a strange story. Nod your heads with me. This is bizarre. What on earth is happening right now? The author knows that we're sitting here, scratching our heads and so he comes along, gives us the punch line: Dear reader, I know you're totally confused right now, verse 18, let me just tell you what's happening here.

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abraham.

So this is some kind of ancient ritual and the details of which we can mostly piece together from a couple of other passages and then from other text, Canaanite text outside the Bible. So two kings, you make an agreement, and you say, "We hereby make an agreement on there, we're going to cross this line and take that city over again. Deal." And so they would do this ritual. They would cut the animals in half, and the two kings would walk between them and they would say, "May my fate be like that of these animals if I ever cross the boundary and come take your city." It's like a way of saying, "I swear on my life I'm going to do this." Who alone walks through the bloody pieces? Who does not walk through the bloody pieces?

So God's making an official promise to Abraham here that He's going to fulfill His promises and do all of this, the blessing, and blessing of the nations and all this. And on whose faithfulness does the promise depend? God. On whose faithfulness does the promise not depend? Abraham. Yeah. Which is really good news because we wouldn't be sitting here if it entirely depended on Abraham's faithfulness. So to your descendants, I will give this land from the river, then He describes the land here. So this is the key chapter, chapter 15 because we have this theme of faith, tuck that away for later. He has faith in God's promises, and God makes covenants with him. So God puts his name on the line, His reputation, He personally commits himself to this family, to fulfill His promises somehow through them to bring blessing to all of the nations that rebelled right here. Okay, we're going to fly really far now and come to the end of the book of Genesis.

The rest of the Book of Genesis as God repeats his promise. It's mostly stories. You would think, "Oh, these are the heroes of the Bible. They're great people." No they're horrible people, and they do horrible things to each other. If you just look at the Bible as a collection of stories about how you should live, like don't do that. It's like the worst book you could read if you're looking for models of good behavior. Because these are horrible people. Especially Jacob. His name means deceiver. He steals from his old blind father, you know what I'm saying? You know who does that? What a horrible person. But in every step, God intervenes, he keeps them from completely running the train off the tracks, and it's this theme here of this battle. Here's God's will to bless and here's what humans do. Humans take what God gives them for good and it's the same story, really as just Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they just keep doing horrible things and then God keeps coming along and bailing them out. This theme, human stupidity and rebellion and God's desire to bless in conflict with each other. Running through each other. This theme gets brought to its highlight and climax in the last main section of the

book 37 through 50, the story of who and his brothers. Joseph and his brothers. So just think about the story here. Again, little stories. Especially a longer story, it's about 12 chapters. So you have this punk little kid who likes to tell on his brothers, right. And rat on his brothers. They don't like him and he gets to wear the special cloak, his dad likes him more than any of them. And so they want to kill him. But they don't. They decide to sell him to slavery instead. As if that's a better option, right. So that's what they do. And you think the family's imploding by killing each other and selling each other in slavery. Like how can—what's worst?

And then through this crazy kind of circumstances, Joseph's in prison, and then he meets some people in prison and he got crazy stuff about interpreting dreams and the next think you know, he's somehow like second in command over all of Egypt and then there's this famine, and his brothers come to Egypt looking for food and who do they find? Their brother, and they don't even know it's him, you know. And so this is irony is that their brother, their act of evil, right, their stupid, selfish act of evil, paradoxically God redeems that very act to now be the thing that saves their lives. Do you see that in the story there?

What an amazing story. It's like, even when humans intend to ruin what God meant for good, we can't even do it. God won't let us. His promises are too precious.

And so go to the last page of the book, Genesis 50. Genesis 50:20. Joseph guides their father. Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You guys intended to harm me," and again this is really—this is all a part of the literary art of the storyteller here. This were to harm, it's the word ra in Hebrew. It means evil or badness.

[1:00:00]

"You intended to do evil to me but God intended it for good," which is the word tov. Have you heard about good and evil before in the book? Oh yeah, at the very beginning. So, what is it that humans, this is the words that are summarizing the Joseph story, but they're also casting a glance at the entire book and actually showing you what the whole story of the Bible is going to be about. What are humans up to in the story? Ra. Humans do ra. That's what we do. And what does

God do? He doesn't just do good in His providence. He actually responds to our ra and works it out so that even our ra can become tov and result in his plans to redeem and to save and to accomplish His blessing. So there you go. If you want a summary of what the Book of Genesis is, Genesis 50:20 is about as good as you could get. God intended it for tov and do accomplish what's now happening. People's lives are getting saved. That's what God is up to in the world. So who's going to win? Humans or God? Well you get a hint here from Genesis that God is going to accomplish His plan to bless but how is He going to get the humans to partner with Him again? How is He going to restore them and bring their ra and turn it into tov and restore them to Himself, dear reader?

Alright. Thanks for listening to Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast. I hope that was an interesting dive into the first book of the Torah. Such as compelling story. We're going to keep exploring in Part 2 of the Torah Crash Course Series. That's going to come up next. So thanks for listening.

[End of transcription 1:02:07]