

## The Bible in Context Ep 1: Interpretation and Inspiration

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Hey Mercy Hill, right now Nate is taking us through a series on Genesis and doing a good job of showing us the intention of the original author as these texts were written, as Genesis was written, and showing us how Genesis points us back to Jesus. Genesis really is a very rich book and a very dense book. There's a lot to cover and there's a lot more than can be covered just on a Sunday morning unless we want to take the next decade or so to go through the book. So after talking about it a little bit...

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We want to do this podcast to supplement the sermon series for those who want to dive a little deeper and understand some of the more difficult questions that Genesis raises to its readers. I think most of the time it'll be Nate and myself doing these recordings. For this time it's just me. I'm just going to give us a little introduction to our Bibles before starting off in the first book of the Bible. So anyway, here we go. So why take this deeper dive into the book of Genesis? Well,

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first of all it is the first book in our Bibles and it begins a very long narrative that stretches from Genesis to Kings. Now, the thing with it being a narrative is the first chapters of Genesis, the beginning book of the Bible, is going to set up for us all of the important themes, all of the important literary structures, it's going to teach us how to read the rest of our Bibles. So for that reason we need to start at the beginning and try to understand

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the contours of the narratives that it presents. We need to understand the style of the book, we need to understand the literary structures that it likes to use, we need to understand the themes that it opens up, the expectations that it creates for later narratives, and that will teach us how to read the rest of scripture. And once we are familiar with these narratives, we will also be able to understand things that are not narrative in the Bible, like the prophets and the poetry and...

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the letters in the New Testament because they are all picking up on the themes that are present in these beginning narratives. Now, before we can talk about these narratives and these themes, it would be beneficial to talk about inspiration. What are these narratives? What is the Bible? And also, what is it not? How did the Scriptures come to be, and how does that influence the way that we read them? Now, first, I just want to point out that

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The Bible is a divine and human book. Sometimes the divine aspect of the Bible gets overemphasized, which it absolutely is brought forth by the spirit of God. But in doing that, we

lose the human aspect of the Bible and what that means for our study of scripture. So there's a popular idea that, and I grew up with this, that

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the human authors of scripture did not know what they were writing uh... maybe even to the point that they were under a trance when they were writing their books

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And I think it makes sense why a lot of us may believe that or why I was somehow taught that as a new Christian. And that may or may not be where most of you are, but I just want to put my finger on that because that is a popular belief that does affect how we read the Scriptures. If we look at it as purely from God's finger written by His hand with no human mind active in the writing of Scripture.

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books down the road.

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So the way that the Bible actually depicts the process of authorship is that God will come to a human who he has providentially prepared through their lives. He has given them his spirit to enable them to write these books, to give them wisdom, and to craft them into the person that he needs them to be to write these books. And then with many of them, as we see in the prophets, God will come to the prophet and say, hey, I have a message for you to go deliver.

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the message and writes it down. Often they write a narrative that surrounds their message. Because again, for some of us this may be very familiar territory, for others this may be very strange, very weird. It may seem like this view takes some of the divinity away from the Bible, which it absolutely does not. It is God's Spirit who enables and crafts the person into who they need to be to write this, who gives them the wisdom to write these books.

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Now, first of all, think of Paul and his letters, or most of the New Testament. A lot of them are letters, and so I don't think many of us think of Paul when he's writing his letters as in a trance or having no idea what he is doing. He actually is crafting his letters, the literary structures, he is crafting his arguments very intelligently using his mind. It doesn't seem to be like it's directly out of God's mouth. It's not spoken that way. I think that's an easy way for us to familiarize.

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ourselves with this concept. And even if we look in Luke's Gospel, he starts out in chapter 1 verse 1. It says, Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also having followed

these things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus. So Luke's Gospel is based on

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into the story of Jesus. He says, well I've been a disciple for a while, he never actually was with Jesus, but he says I've been hanging around for long enough and I have heard a lot of the stories. I should be a good historian and write some of this down so that I can pass on the gospel message, in particular to Theophilus. So a portion of Luke's book is not based on direct divine knowledge beamed into Luke's head, but it's based on careful examination of witnesses. Now this makes the book of Luke no less inspired by the

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spirit. The spirit was with him, helping him and training him as he was doing this. This is a work of God, but it is very much a work of the human mind at the same time.

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Now to take us back into the Old Testament, I think Jeremiah is a good case study for how inspiration works in the Bible. So we see in Jeremiah 1, God comes to Jeremiah and the story is recorded as God says, hey, I have a sermon for you to deliver. I have a message for you to deliver to the people, to tell them that they have not been faithful to the covenant and so they are going to have to suffer the consequences of the covenant that they agreed to.

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Thinking this is going to be an effortless experience where I go under a trance and write this book He he says I can't speak. I'm I'm a youth. I don't talk too good. And so I don't really want to

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So the beginning of the creation of Jeremiah's message is given to us here. And it wasn't a divine knowledge beamed in the Jeremiah's head kind of situation. It was rather a narrative of Jeremiah having a will that interacts with God. And here he tries to argue with God and say, I don't want to do it. We see in the next chapter, the beginning of chapter two, it says, the word of the Lord came to me saying, go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, thus says the Lord.

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that Jeremiah proclaims. Now the important thing to that is that Yahweh didn't come to Jeremiah and say, hey, I'm going to take over your body and start writing or start speaking. Rather it's, hey, I have a message, I just want you to relay it. Take it, memorize it, and then go and speak it. And that's exactly what Jeremiah does. And then later in Jeremiah 36,

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Jeremiah is actually compelled by Yahweh to write down all of the sermons that Yahweh has given him thus far. So he recruits a scribe and they begin writing down his sermons and they send it to the king. Well the king doesn't like it so he burns the scroll. And then at the end of

chapter 36, Jeremiah is told to write the scroll again. So it says Jeremiah took, this is verse 32 of chapter 36, then Jeremiah took another

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who wrote on it, at the dictation of Jeremiah, all the words of the scroll that the Jehoiachim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.

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So here, maybe these words were commissioned by Yahweh, but the prophet seems to take the liberty of adding some words to the scroll of Jeremiah. Now if the Bible, or at least the book of Jeremiah, had been written by God, been dropped out of heaven, completed, or been beamed into Jeremiah's head and written down all at once, then why is there this editing process? Why is Jeremiah adding words? It should have been a complete book at the very beginning.

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rather Jeremiah as the prophet, since he has been commissioned by God, he has the authority to add to these messages to expound upon what Yahweh has told him to share with his people. We even see similar editorial comments in Genesis. In Genesis 22, Abraham is going up Mount Moriah with Isaac to sacrifice him, and at the last minute Yahweh provides a ram to sacrifice instead of Isaac. And so in verse 14 we're told,

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place the Lord will provide. And as it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.

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Now, as it is to this day, that is the author of this book, or maybe a later editor, looking back on this story and saying, we still say that today, but when is today? This is some time later in Israel's history. It's obviously not today from my perspective or our perspective. This is today from the perspective of a Jew that probably lived 2,000 to 3,000 years ago.

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he is the active human mind in the authorship of this book and he is leaving a note for his readers so that they will be able to better understand the story and have a connection their own culture it in their time and there are other little notes throughout scripture where a later editor or the author will reach in and just give some cultural background information may have been irrelevant to the actual subject of the narrative say like abraham or moses

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Jew who is living, you know, a thousand years later, a few hundred years later, it would be more meaningful. We wouldn't expect to see this kind of thing if the Bible were completed all at once by God who is outside of time.

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Now I just want to highlight one more thing as an example of how the Bible is inspired. I think that looking at Bezalel, the guy who constructed the tabernacle or was in charge of the effort of the tabernacle construction, is a really good case study for the Spirit's work in inspiring people to create the Bible as we know it. So this is in Exodus 35, starting at verse 30. It says, Then Moses said to the people of Israel, See the Lord has called by name Bezalel

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of her from the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, and cutting stones for setting and for carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or a designer, or by embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns.

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twine linen or by a weaver or any sort of workman or skilled designer. Now what's important here is Bezalel is filled with the spirit of God and I don't think many of us would imagine him going under a trance every day going into work because this is a process this is not a quick sit down and make this tabernacle and you're done. This took months and months so

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he is also not only gifted with the ability, the skills and the wisdom.

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by the Spirit of God to build the tabernacle and all of its furnishings. But he is able to teach and lead teams of people who are going to do this. This is not a quick and done project purely motivated by God's Spirit moving and creating the tabernacle, but rather God has decided to use his spirit to empower humans to organize as a community and come together and build his home. The tabernacle.

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operating by these means, by using his spirit to empower humans to carry out his plans and purposes. After all, he made us in his image to be his royal representatives to represent his goodness to the earth and his rule and his life.

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Now, what does this mean for our reading of scripture? It means that we should expect very human things as we read. We should expect a cultural context. These were ancient Israelites living in what is called the ancient Near East, where there's Israel and Mesopotamia and Egypt and ancient Canaan. All these peoples lived in the area of the Mediterranean, you know, 3,000 years ago. And we should expect to see elements of their

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culture in the Bible.

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It also wouldn't be surprising for us to find intricate literary structures in the Bible. We've already mentioned that the first part of the Bible is laid out as a narrative. It's a big story. Something that I've seen in the past is when you see scripture as something that is purely divine, that is more or less dictated to the prophet when he has no idea what he's writing or better yet it is beamed into his head so to speak so that he doesn't even realize that he's writing.

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of scripture where we are looking for special information that would not make sense on the surface. But if these books are written by humans inspired by God to humans, these books are meant to be intelligible. They are meant to communicate Yahweh to a group of people.

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In particular, it is meant to communicate Yahweh to a group of people in the ancient Near East, 3000 years ago, who at some point in their history came out of Egypt, brought out by Yahweh, and settled in the midst of Mesopotamia and Egypt and Canaan.

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and this narrative that is communicating Yahweh to them and telling them something about themselves, they're going to see it in terms that they can understand. They're going to see the cultural elements that are around them. Just for instance, in our culture we have probably about a hundred different Cinderella books and movies that are all telling the same general storyline, but there's different little twists, little variations on the story in each retelling to communicate something

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So in that sense, the makers of these different Cinderella movies, they are using a cultural motif, the Cinderella motif, and they're even often putting the title Cinderella on there so that you know what to expect. And then they communicate profound things by just changing the story a little bit or adding some new element that causes you to think about it in a new way or think about something in your own life in a new way. The biblical authors are doing that.

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what the Israelites already know from their neighbors about who God is or who humans are and often he often he's not just taking those and making small changes he's often turning those ideas on their head to show who Yahweh is and who humanity is in light of Yahweh but he still uses those cultural elements so that it makes sense to the Israelites

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I bring all this up because we're going to run into this a lot in Genesis and without having this knowledge in our back pocket, a lot of it will be very confusing or will be very liable to be misinterpreted. And I want to take us back to the ancient Eastern context. I want to take a look at the literary structures and bring out what the narrative is supposed to mean to them and then

transfer it into our own culture. What does it mean to us in light of what it meant to its original audience?

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And I don't want to bog this down with a whole lot of technical jargon going into the Hebrew, going into specific cases of the ancient culture, but I want to talk about it just a little bit as it comes up, just enough for us to understand what the biblical author is trying to do and what the narrative is supposed to mean to us.

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So I hope this is helpful to everybody. I'm looking forward to it and I really hope that by looking further into Genesis, like I said, it really forms a world. And as we begin to properly understand these narratives, especially in Genesis, we'll start to live in that world such that the parts of the Bible that are usually for us strange and distant hopefully

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the tension in the poetry so that it matters to us. These are not facts that we need to try and extract from the text and learn how to apply them specifically, but we inherently understand the weight of what is being said. And by living in this world we'll be able to better meditate on Scripture and be shaped by and conformed to it. And ultimately I hope we'll be able to see Jesus more clearly and be able to better understand what did he do and

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And the things that the Gospels tell us that are already so meaningful to us, how do we dig down another layer and understand what Jesus did and what he says to a new depth? Or even those passages that just don't make any sense and that we just can't really find a way to connect to? I'm hoping by understanding the themes and living in the world that particularly Genesis creates, those passages that are difficult to understand will actually become very profound.

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texts. I've found that as you dive into this material, as you understand the first five books, the Torah of the Bible better, that

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things that I would have ordinarily just glazed over uh... have the most profound meaning in them everything is so rich with imagery and symbolism that all come out of this with this world view that Genesis presents so looking forward to go over this and thanks for listening