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#122 Tom Holland & NT Wright talk about Paul

June 16, 2022



Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Who was Paul? What difference did he make to the world? What do we know about his conversion? Justin sat down with NT Wright and popular historian Tom Holland to talk about NT Wright's then-recently published book Paul: A Biography in a conversation that took place in 2018.

Watch the conversation between Tom Holland and NT Wright:
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Transcript

Hi there, before we begin today's podcast I want to share an incredibly special resource with you today. If you're like me, life can get pretty hectic pretty quickly, but one thing that helps me slow down is connecting with God in new ways. And I'd like to share a resource that has really helped me do that.

It's called "Five Ways to Connect with God" and you can download it for free right now at premierinsight.org/resources. I think you'll find refreshment for your soul. So go right now to premierinsight.org/resources and download your copy. That's premierinsight.org/resources.

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

Hello and welcome back to the show. I'm Justin Briley, premier's theology and apologetics editor. And this is the program where we bring you the thought and theology of NT Wright.

And we're going right back to 2018 on today's show. This is a conversation that I hosted between popular historian Tom Holland, no, not the Spider-Man Tom Holland, the popular historian Tom Holland, and NT Wright shortly after the publication of Wright's book, Paul a Biography. In fact, it was shortly after this conversation that we cooked up the idea of the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

So yeah, you can go back to this particular conversation for the genesis of this whole show. But this was a great conversation. Now, I've had both Tom Holland and NT Wright in conversation since then on last year's Unbelievable Conference, which you can also find the conversation of on the archive of this podcast.

But this was the very first time that Tom Holland and NT Wright had met. And what a great conversation it was as we talked through who St Paul was, what difference he made in the world, what we know about his conversion. Those were the kinds of questions we were covering.

So you'll hear the first part of that conversation on today's show. I just want to give you a heads up as well that we've got some really interesting stuff coming up from premier Unbelievable, including a conversation between Michaela Peterson and John McCray. That's our live big conversation event on Tuesday the 12th of July.

It's absolutely free to be part of it online. You just need to register over at Unbelievable.live. Or you can find the links to that and lots of other shows and past Ask NT Wright Anything shows at our new website, premierunbelievable.com. All the links are with today's show. And we've also included with the info the video of today's conversation if you want to watch it as well.

For now, here's my conversation with Tom Holland and NT Wright. Well today we're asking how did St Paul change the world? NT Wright or Tom Wright as he's popularly known is one of the world's most influential Bible scholars. And his new book, Paul Abiography, is a detailed study of the apostle who brought Christianity from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.

St Paul's influence is almost incalculable, perhaps second only in the world to Jesus Christ himself. As he took the good news of a Jewish Messiah to the Roman Empire that ruled the world. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has described Tom Wright's book as an enthralling journey into the mind of Paul by one of the great theologians of our time, a work full of insight, depth and generosity of understanding.

So it's pretty good when you can get endorsements like that on your book jacket.

Opposite Tom Wright for today's discussion is another Tom, Tom Holland, a popular historian whose best-selling book such as *Rubicon* and *Dynasty* have told a story of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. While not a believer himself, Tom Holland is also working on a new book on the way that Christianity became the most revolutionary force for changing the world.

And it would be interesting to hear how you've been getting on in that endeavor, Tom. Today, though, is really an exchange, a collegial discussion between two people who are simply fascinated in this era of history. What can we know from Acts and the letters in the New Testament about Paul? What are the gaps that we need to fill in about who he was and how he went about his mission? And we'll talk, of course, about his famous conversion and the unique way his theology developed as he brought Jewish monotheism and Jesus the Messiah together.

So Tom Holland and Tom Wright, welcome along to the show. Thank you very much. Thank you.

It's great to have you both joining me today. We'll come to you first of all, Tom Wright. I'm probably going to have to use service just to distinguish you both today.

So you've been writing and researching Paul for decades now, haven't you? Yes. I mean, the last, well, a couple of years ago I had you on when you wrote your magnum opus. That's actually amazing.

It's five years ago. That came out. Yeah, it's gone to the two volumes, sort of very echo.

And is this really, I suppose, in a sense, the popular level version of what you wrote? Well, sort of yes and no. When I did that big book, several people, both including colleagues in the discipline said, wish you'd do a shorter one. Of course, part of the point of the longer one was that I've been writing shorter things and articles and people had always said, yeah, but you didn't explain this.

Or, yes, but surely that has to be contextualized there. Okay, you want the big thing? Here it is. And then, of course, they all said, oh, it's far too long.

So Jesus said, you know, we danced for you and you wouldn't sing and we wept and you wouldn't mourn. But this isn't exactly a potted down version because that was a book on Paul's mind and theology. Now, there's a lot of mind and theology in here, but part of the whole point of it is that what Paul was thinking and saying was contextualized in a rich, multi-layered life, which was to do with both his Jewish upbringing and his amazing knowledge of the Jewish scriptures and with his contextualizing in the Roman world where he was a citizen and in the Greek world where he knew his Epicureans from his Stoics.

And we see Paul navigating these things in a multi-layered way, which I find just

perpetually enthralling because I grew up with a Paul who was basically a brain box who said prayers as it were. And then the rest of it was off on the side. And the older I've got, the more the whole man speaks to this whole man.

And that's been really exciting. You probably feel like you know his era almost as well as you know your own now. Well, let's put it like this, my students mock me because when I say the war, I mean the Jewish Roman war of 66 to 70, not World War I or II.

And they say, well, yeah, I sort of mentally live in the first thing. I've tried to diversify more recently and get back towards our day as well. And just kind of give us a sense of how you structure this particular, because you've called it Paul a biography.

And in that sense, you are trying to write something that's sort of a narrative of his life. It's not a sort of academic book in the traditional sense. No, no, it's not at all.

I mean the only footnote. So basically references to bits of the Bible or bits of classical sources and so on. So there's no discussion of other scholarly views.

Or if I do say there are various views here, I don't actually go into detail as to said it. You can find those elsewhere. So this is going through from what we know about or can infer about his early life and how he got to the point where he was on the road to Damascus, when dot dot dot.

And then what happened next? And as with virtually all ancient history, there are gaps. And that's quite normal. But when you have gaps in any narrative, ancient or modern, what you can do is probe cautiously from either side, as it were the bits you do know, and say, well, it's possible this.

It's likely that or it's almost certain that, such and such. And that's what I tried to do to construct a whole story. And to us, 2000 years later, that he was obviously a prolific letter writer.

Well, he comparatively prolific, but actually the letters are short. How many volumes do we have of Cicero's letters in the lab classics? I mean, just that's... Oh, they go on and on. They go exactly.

Exactly. Exactly. They do go on and they're fascinating.

And they shared a flood of light on all sorts of things in first-century BC Roman culture. But for Paul, we've just got these snippets because he's writing on the go. He's not leisure sitting there with all day to compose.

He's really sending bulletins from the front, as it were. And so most of his time, he isn't writing letters so far as we know. He's talking with people, he's preaching, he's praying, he's trying to organize these little communities.

And then from time to time, he has to buzz off a letter to somebody. And you're always obviously hearing one side of the conversation. And you sort of have to fill in gaps.

And I suppose as a historian, Tom, what you're doing as well is saying, well, here's what we know was going on in the wider culture. And that makes sense of why Paul said this and did this. And particularly, I mean, I am very fortunate in that I kind of came to age as a scholar just when the contemporary revolution in modern Jewish studies was happening.

So that we've got the Dead Sea Scrolls in good modern editions, we've got new good editions of Josephus. We know much, much more about the early rabbis than we did 50 years ago because of massive work that's gone on. So we can reconstruct quite a lot about how Jews in that period were thinking.

And of course, that's controversial too, but we can see a big picture within which then the way Paul is going after things makes sense if you say, take somebody in that world who is also very much alive to the Greek and Roman context. But who then happens to believe that God has fulfilled his promises by sending a messiah who was then crucified. That's bizarre, but the sense Paul makes of it is the sense that it would make within that Jewish world.

And just before we come to Tom Holland here, that was going to be my next question. Will people reading this book simply know a lot more about Paul by the end of it? Or will it give us a better picture of Jesus, the person he was obviously speaking of? I'm not sure it would necessarily give you a better picture of Jesus, but it would give you a better picture of how the very first followers of Jesus were wrestling with the question. What does it mean that God's messiah was crucified and raised from the dead? That's not part of the game plan, but if that's what we've got, how does that reconfigure everything? Obviously, I and many others have written quite a lot about Jesus as well.

That's another story. But it's probing back. I just go on being fascinated by the fact that within, I would say, 20 or so years of the crucifixion, here is a highly intelligent man saying he loved me and gave himself for me.

That is extraordinary. It's hard to imagine anybody saying that about anybody else in the last 20 years, unless all sorts of things were true as well, and yet Paul says it. Tom Holland, thank you for joining us on the program today.

We've thrown you in at the deep end. You really have. You first discussions on Paul and it's you, Tom Wright.

The terror. Well, thank you for putting yourself in the opposite chair. As I say, sometimes this program is combative.

I have a feeling that won't be the case today. It'll very much be a meeting of minds. Tell

us where your interest in the whole classical age really began.

You've sort of been doing this all of your adult working life, haven't you? Well, it goes right the way back to childhood. I was the kind of child who loved dinosaurs. I liked them because they were big and they were fierce and they were glamorous and they were extinct.

My interest in really, I suppose, in the Roman army and then by extension, Roman Empire. It was a seamless movement from Tyrannosaurus Rex to Caesar. And so the glamour and the beauty and the power and the cruelty of the Greeks and the Romans, I found very appealing.

And in contrast to that, although I went to Sunday school and I was very, very interested in biblical history as well, I found them all a bit po-faced. I didn't like their beards. I preferred the clean, shaven look of Apollo.

And so in a way I was kind of seduced by the glamour of Greece and Rome, I suppose. And so the first books I wrote of history were about Greece and Rome. And in many ways, you know, the appeal particularly I think of Rome is that in certain ways they do seem very like us.

You were talking about Cicero's letters and this is a man who is worrying about property prices. He's worrying about the weather. He's bitching about people.

Sounds very British, didn't he? Yes, so in all kinds of ways he seems very familiar. But the more you live in the minds of the Romans, and I think even more the Greeks, the more alien they come to seem, the more frightening they come to seem. And what becomes most frightening really is a kind of quality of callousness that I think is terrifying because it is completely taken for granted.

There's a kind of innocent quality about it. Nobody really questions it. And what sort of form would that take? Well, if we're in the age of Cicero, you know, Cicero's great contemporary Caesar is by some accounts slaughtering a million Gauls and enslaving another million in the cause of boosting his political career.

And far from feeling in any way embarrassed about this, he's kind of promoting it. And so when he holds his triumph, people are going through the streets of Rome carrying billboards, boasting about how many people he's killed. And this is a really terrifying alien world.

And the more you look at it, the more you realize that it is built on systematic exploitation. So the entire economy is founded on slave labor. The sexual economy is founded on the absolute right of free Roman males to have sex with anyone that they want, any way that they like.

And in almost every way, this is a world that is unspeakably cruel to our way of thinking. And so this worried me more and more. And it was kind of like I was thinking, well, you know, I'm clearly not as I'd vaguely imagined the heir of the Greeks and the Romans in any way, really.

And so where am I coming from? And it was like a kind of itch, you know, you go on your back and you can't find it. And this was then enhanced for me by then writing a book about the about late antiquity and the emergence of Islam from the late religious, the religious and empirically. And again, finding in Islam a profound quality of the alien that, you know, there were aspects of Islam that were very familiar, but there were many aspects of it that again seem deeply deeply alien.

And I began to realize that actually in almost every way I am Christian. And I began to realize that actually Paul, although in many ways, he seems a much less familiar figure than Cicero, the kind of, you know, a vain man with his property, but he's not a human. And I began to think that Paul was a man with his property problems.

You know, Paul never had any property, he has made me tense. In almost every, you know, what is it, seven letters that are conventionally, people absolutely accept that, you know, as Tom Wright was saying, you know, this is not a very lengthy amount of writing. It's very, very small amount of writing was almost everything that explains the modern world.

Well, the Western world as we take for granted. Yeah. Yes, but also the way that the West has then moved on to shape, you know, concepts like international law, for instance.

So the fact that the, you know, concepts of human rights, all these kind of things, ultimately, they don't go back to Greek philosophers. They don't go back to Roman imperialism. They go back to Paul.

Paul really is his letters, his letters, I think, are along with the four gospels, the most influential, the most impactful, the most revolutionary writings that have emerged from the ancient world. When you penned that article, I think it was for the new states, new states, where you said what I got wrong, and you sort of came out as it were and said, as far as my values and background and concern, I am a Christian. It was interesting to see the response to that because I saw lots of atheists and humanists saying, hang on, you know, we democracy, that goes back to the Greeks, you know, don't pretend that Christianity gave us everything we're grateful for.

But you honestly think that actually people simply haven't appreciated just how much we owe to the judicial question. I think, I think, I mean, if we're talking of Paul, I think of him as a kind of depth charge, deep beneath the foundations of the classical world. And, you know, it's not anything that you particularly notice if you're, you know, in Corinth or

Alexandria.

And then you start feeling this kind of rippling outwards. And, you know, by the time you get to the 11th century in Latin Christendom, everything has changed. And you have this, I think essentially what Paul's significance is, is that he sets up ripple effects of revolution throughout Western history.

So the 11th century where with the paper revolution essentially it establishes this idea that society has to be reborn, reconfigured, that vested interests have to be torn down. And then the reformation, what we call the reformation is a further ripple effect of that, and the enlightenment is a further ripple effect of that. And, you know, it's spilled out so much that now in the 21st century we don't even realise where these ripple effects are coming from.

We just take them for granted. Hi there. Before we go any further, I want you to know about a very special ebook we're releasing this month called Critical Race Theory and Christianity.

This ebook draws from two unbelievable podcasts with Neil Shenvie, Rasselberry, Owen Strand and Jermaine Marshall, addressing questions like, has so-called woke ideology taken over parts of the church, or is white privilege a problem in the church, and is critical race theory compatible with the gospel. I'd love for you to have a copy of this powerful ebook as my special thanks to you for your gift to Premier Insight today, the ministry that brings you this podcast each week. You see, all of the conversations, insight, resources and encouragement that you get from Premier Insight programs, like this one, are only possible because of the support of wonderful friends like you.

Without your generosity, none of this would be possible. So please go to premierinsight.org/give and make a donation today. That's premierinsight.org/give. And don't forget to download our newest ebook, Critical Race Theory and Christianity, as my special thank you.

I can hear Tom Wright you want to come in and come in and come in. I haven't actually read from cover to cover, but Stephen Pinker's two books where he's saying effectively- I had him on the show quite recently. Oh really? Okay.

But he's saying, forget all that religion stuff. We invented the real world as it should be in the enlightenment, and all we have to do is apply that more and more rigorously, and just kick that religion stuff into touch. And it's very interesting that some commentators have said, well if that was going to be the case, it would work in America better than they were else, and look at America and what's actually happening and you'll see that it doesn't.

But I think I want to respond with what Pope Benedict said 10 years ago when he was

speaking at the United Nations, when he said that the whole idea of human rights is absolutely rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. And if you try and get the fruits of that without the roots, all you'll get is the thing will collapse into shrill, special interest, rhetoric. Everyone claiming the status of victim and shouting- Now when I had Stephen- Well of course, the power of victimhood is again something that is part of the revolutionary inheritance of Christianity- Yes.

Because that is the point of the crucifixion. Nobody in Caesar's world would have said, oh I'm a victim therefore I've got to be prioritized. Paul calls it a scam.

When I had Stephen Ping in the very jail sitting in, right now, Tom Wright, his response to this argument which at this point was being put by Nick Spencer, who's written a very good book as well on the evolution of the West making this very argument. His argument was no, but you know, okay Christians may have given us some good principles, but all we need to recognize is our universal humanity that we're part of the same species we're all sent in. That gives us every grounding we need for treating each other with dignity and human rights.

And who thought like that in the first century? I mean Paul talking about Adam and Christ basically. So are you saying that kind of a belief doesn't simply emerge from a vacuum in the sense? Yeah, the idea of a universal humanness is something that actually even in the 18th century they struggled with. You know, when missionaries went to America and came back arguing about whether the American Indians had souls or not.

Were they really the same species as us? And then John Wesley and George Whitfield and so on saying no, these people have to be taught to love God like any of us. And so there's stuff going on there which is again rooted in the question. And you're part of the pushback on this in a way, aren't you? I mean it seems to me that the most influential phrase for understanding why we have a notion of a kind of common humanity is in Galatians where Paul says, you know, that there is no, neither Jew or Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.

And there you have this idea that we are of course he goes on to say in Christ Jesus and that for the contemporary world is, you know, we just, but... That's a way people want to do that. But of course there is an issue there as Daniel Boyer in a, you know, a fast Jewish scholar writing about Paul says, yeah, okay, so Jewishness and Greekness, gets dissolved into this universal humanity. But what if I as a Jew want to stay a Jew? And so in a sense there also you have the kind of, you know, the issues that continue to obsess our society, which is essentially, you know, if you don't want to be part of a kind of universal commonality, what then do you do? The dangerous thing, I was at a conference in America a couple of years ago, two or three years ago based on the big book on Paul, and there was an African American theologian, a woman at full of seminary, who basically pushed back at me on this and said, the danger is that when you say we are all

one in Christ Jesus, what that means is that everyone else is an honorary white male.

And the white males have got it. And that everyone else has to say, okay, we're sort of part of your team as it were. And I said, if that's what you're hearing, that's certainly, absolutely not what I was intending.

And certainly not what Paul was intending either. And I know Danny Boyerin, and we've had this debate, it's great fun, because I think what we're seeing there, a very interesting cultural moment on the cusp of the church. And I think it's a very cultural moment on the cusp of modernity and postmodernity.

And David Horrell in Exeter, his book on Paul Solidarity and Difference says it all that on the one hand, we've got this cultural drive towards we're all part of this, what's going on with the European debate at the moment, Solidarity. We're all just part of this nice big family, and that's how it all works in the economy of scale and so on. And then lots of people, including in Scotland where I now live, saying, no, that's squelching our identity, and we're not going to let you do it.

And the interesting thing is that Paul, in say first Corinthians, is faced with the same issues. How do you navigate partially and theologically where you're simultaneously saying, we've all got to be one family? And then you're saying, but if your conscience means that this is where you are at the moment, here's how we live with that and how we have to respect that. And he's basically wrestling with the big issues that we're wrestling with as well, doing so very sophisticatedly.

So let's come to some of his specific story, because you do a fabulous job in the opening chapters of the book in setting the scene of who Paul was, what we can know about his background, the sort of Judaism that he came from. And for me, one of the fascinating bits was you're kind of speculating on what he might have been thinking about when he was on that famous road to Damascus, because I thought that was quite interesting. What was occupying Paul's mind at the moment when that famous event occurred? So do you want to just walk us through that, because I think this is probably the most famous conversion in all history in a way.

Yes, if conversion is the right word. That's the key. Well, but right off the top, the danger with saying conversion is that what that word means in our world.

If I say so-and-so just got converted, the chances are this means that so-and-so is probably an atheist or an agnostic, and they have now found some sort of faith. And one would hope it might be for me, it might be a Christian faith. That's not really at all what's going on for Paul, and it's certainly not about swapping from one religion to another.

That's the layers of misunderstanding there in terms of what the word religion meant in the ancient world, in terms of what the word religion means in our world, neither of those

fit what's happening to Paul. Paul always had believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Creator God. He never for a moment stopped believing in that God.

He was living in a narrative which said all those ancient promises have got to come true. God's got to show that he's in the right, that he meant what he said, and that he's going to renew the whole world quite possibly, not all Jews believe this, through a Messiah who will come and do justice and re-establish the temple in Jerusalem so that God will come back and live there gloriously, etc. So Paul is living with that narrative, and in particular within that.

And you see this in the later rabbis, but it's clearly there in Maccabees as well. There are two figures from the ancient world, the ancient Jewish world, who Paul is identifying with Elijah and Phineas. They are the great messengers of zeal, if you like.

Bad things are happening. We've got to do some sacred violence to stamp out the nonsense and get Israel back on track. And Paul is role modeling Phineas and Elijah and the texts which embody their stories are clearly present.

And he was very much part of this movement wanting to keep the law better so that we hasten on this. And let's be quite clear, this is not, as used to be said in Protestant rhetoric, about earning my ticket to heaven or doing enough good work so that God will be pleased with me. It's God wants to renew and restore this world, and for the sake of that, he's called Israel to be a special people, holy people, and so it's for the sake of God's purposes they have to do this and make more and more Jews do this stuff.

So, yes, this bunch who are letting the side down and going off after a crucified Messiah, who ever heard such nonsense. So Paul is off to do the Phineas thing, the Elijah thing. These are like the new prophets of Baal, and we know what we have to do with them.

And then, if you're in that mode, how do you pray? We know from everything Paul says, he was a person suffused with prayer, and they're a standard Jewish prayers. And it's a guess, but I'm not the only one to make this guess, that on the road to Damascus, he was meditating like many people in his tradition did, on the throne chariot in the beginning of the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet sees the whirling wheels and then the chariot, and then his eye is raised up and he sees the figure sitting on the throne and he falls down, crash as though dead, and then the prophet is commissioned, et cetera. I think Paul was meditating on the throne chariot, longing to get a glimpse of the God he'd worshipped all his life, and I think he gets to that glimpse and it's Jesus of Nazareth.

And simultaneously, all his life is fulfilled and all his life is shattered, and that is just the most devastating and the most fulfilling moment. And in a sense, he spends the rest of his life working out what that means and encouraging other people to explore with him. I wouldn't want to say forcing them to do and believe what, because you can't force people to do and believe that kind of stuff, but helping them to share the sense that

Jesus really is Israel's Messiah.

Lots of people have given different explanations for what happened to Paul's psychological, some epileptic fit, ladies who knows. Where do you go as a historian, Tom Holland, with this obviously very significant event that I think you'd agree there's some historical basis to that something happened on the road to Damascus? What do you think happened there in your view? I think in the broadest context, Paul is negotiating a tension that is inherent within the understanding of the God of Israel, because he is on the one hand the God of Israel, and he is on the other hand the creator of the entire world. So how do you negotiate that tension? And in the globalizing world of the Roman Empire in which many Jews live, this becomes particularly pressing action.

How do you live in the Bible? Yes, so to what extent is God also the creator of the Greeks and the Romans and the Egyptians and whoever? This is kind of somewhere and anywhere kind of question that we were talking about earlier, still we still have today. And I would suspect that Paul is struggling to negotiate that as a Greek-speaking Pharisee. What persuades him to think the things that he does, I think is profoundly mysterious, and I have no doubt that he did think that he had a problem with the people.

That he had seen Jesus. I mean, I can't think of any other reason that would explain why he does what he does. And I mean, it's mysterious in two ways really.

One is that he chucks over what presumably would have been a very comfortable career to essentially embark on a life as a kind of wandering balm who is going to face repeated beatings, ultimately face death. And the other is why it would ever cross his mind that in some way a crucified criminal is a part of the one God of Israel. And the strange thing about all his letters is that although he's arguing repeatedly for his understanding of who Jesus is and how he should be understood and how he should be comprehended, I mean, I may be corrected on this, but I don't think at any point does he feel the need to actually argue that Jesus is in some way a part of God.

I mean, this is just taken for granted, and everyone seems to understand this. And it used to be so. And when you had Larry Hertado on the show, you would presumably discuss these kinds of things.

It used to be thought that Jesus only was regarded as fully divine much later, like the end of the first generation or even early second century, only at the end of the New Testament period. And I think now most New Testament scholars are convinced that actually this is on the table from the beginning. And it's taken for granted in Galatians, which I think is all the earliest letter.

And the strangeness of that is something that we perhaps are kind of immune to because it's in the Bible, so you read it. But you think, why would he think this? Why would anyone think it's a very strange thing about Jew to have thought? But I would

guess, and I can't remember whether you say this in your biography because I read it when it improved. But having had presumably this kind of convulsive experience, presumably then he turns to scripture to try and work out what's happened.

And essentially, he reads through all the passages and kind of constructs this theology. I think one of the things we fail to realize often in modern Western Christianity, never mind the secular world, is the stories that people had in their heads about what God was going to do. And particularly, the end of the book of Ezekiel, hugely important, and parallels in Isaiah, particularly, Isaiah 40 and 52, God's promise that he will one day come back visibly in person to dwell in the temple, to rescue his people, to do what has to be done, etc, etc.

And those promises are kind of shimmering in the background, and some people in the Jewish world, like the author of the book we call Ben-Sira or Ecclesiasticus, seems to think that this sort of has happened because wisdom has come to dwell in the temple in the form of the teaching of Torrona. Most Jews in Paul's day had only believed that. They still thought there was something major yet to happen.

And it is as though, with Paul ended with the Gospels, it isn't just that they are telling Jesus' stories and somehow saying, by the way, there's another dimension to this. They are telling the story, which was Israel's story about God coming back, but the only way they can tell it is by talking about Jesus. So it's not just a Jesus story with a God dimension, it's actually the God story with a Jesus focus.

And it's hard for us to realize that because the last 200 years philosophically theologically, we haven't been there. So when I then look at how Paul is handling Isaiah, how he's handling the passages about the new Exodus with the pillar of cloud and fire coming only now it's Jesus and the Spirit, you see, he's drawing on Jewish traditions about the presence and saving power of God. And then of course they all get focused, not least on that middle chunk of Isaiah, where you get the so-called suffering servant.

And the suffering servant seems to be God saying, "Actually, when you look to see what it's like when I come back to rescue you, oh my goodness, it's going to be like this." And we see Jewish exegetes at the time struggling with Isaiah 53. Some of them thinking, "It's a Messiah, but actually the suffering is what he inflicts on other people." And other people thinking, "No, it's his real suffering, but it's the martyrs, it's not the Messiah." And Jesus and then Paul picking this up seemed to have fused these two together with this extraordinary notion of a suffering Messiah who turns out to be the personal embodiment of Israel's God. And then we see this already by early on in Paul woven into fresh preings of central Jewish prayers, the famous one in 1 Corinthians 8, where it's "Hero Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one." And in the Greek "kirioso theosemon kirios" he says to him, and Paul astonishingly finds Jesus inside that.

So he says, "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things we to him."

And one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things of it. So you've got "He's theoska, he's kirioso," but it's God and Jesus. So at the heart of Jewish monotheism Paul finds this bifurcation.

And in a sense that's a massive transformation, but at the same time somehow for Paul it is a fulfillment. It's a fulfillment. It's a final revelation because he then obviously looks back and says, "Oh my goodness, we now read the Scriptures with this in mind.

He is the image of the invisible God." So when humans were made in God's image, he is the image in whom we were made and so on.

[Music] We'll continue this conversation between Enthi Wright and Tom Holland. Same time next week, just a reminder you can find the video link with today's show.

And I hope you can come back for the continuation of it. It was a great discussion. It took place in 2018 at the time of the publication of Paul Abography by Enthi Wright.

If you want more from the show, then do go to our new website that's premierunbelievable.com. You can also find links there to our upcoming big conversation live event. Michaela Peterson and John McCray asking, "Are millennials and Gen Z ready to believe in God?" You can be part of that live audience on the night. Just register.

It's absolutely free to be part of that online. Again, premierunbelievable.com or go to the links with today's show. Thanks for being with us and see you next time.

[Music] [Silence]