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#24 The New Testament In Its World

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

In a one-year anniversary special of the show, Justin and Tom are joined by Australian Bible scholar Mike Bird to talk about their major new collaborative book 'The New Testament in its World: An introduction to the history, literature and theology of the first Christians'.

For the book and tour dates: www.newtestamentworld.com

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Transcript

www.askntwrighttothing.com Hello and thanks for joining us at another edition of the show that brings you the thought and theology of Tom Wright with me, Justin Briley, theology and apologetics editor for Premier Christian Radio. The show is also brought to you in association with SBCK and NT Wright Online. And we'll be asking more of your questions to NT Wright in today's edition of the program, but a bit of a special one because we've got a special guest joining us, Mike Bird, who's been working on a new book with Tom that's just been released, The New Testament In Its World I'll introduce both of them very shortly.

Just a reminder that Tom himself has been in transition now settled in Oxford where he's taken up his new position as senior research fellow at Wickliffe Hall. Good news, this is around the one-year anniversary of the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast that's gone by quickly hasn't it? And we've had in that time over 550,000 downloads of the show. So thank you everyone who has made this podcast part of their regular listening routine.

I can tell you our most popular show over the last year was number 13. Can you guess what it was on? Christian sexual ethics, homosexuality and transgender, possibly you could have predicted that one. But it's closely followed actually by show number eight,

which was on the Resurrection, Hell, Universalism, Dispensationalism and much more.

Tom is going to be in the USA over the next couple of weeks starting from about the 14th of November I believe. And it's a special book tour along with Michael Bird about this new book of *The New Testament In Its World*. You can find out where he's speaking in New York, Wheaton, Chicago, San Diego and elsewhere over at the website for that NewTestamentWorld.com. There's also exciting news of another major book that Tom has recently published, *History and Escatology, Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*.

It's really the book version of Tom's Gifford Lectures, which he delivered at the start of 2018. So another major work. And we'll talk about that on the next episode of the show as well as taking another whole bunch of questions.

Well done also to winners of the Bible for everyone, those signed editions of Tom's Translation of the Bible along with John Goldingay, Mark Fogelman, Bruce Gaylord and Cody Deeson. You were all selected at random from the Ask NT Right subscriber list. So do be subscribed yourself to make sure you don't miss out on being drawn in the regular competitions that we run here on the podcast and of course for the bonus content and the regular newsletter too.

And I wonder, did you catch recently the video we released of Tom explaining why he believes women should be church leaders and preachers. That went far and wide on YouTube and social media when we put it out recently. It was in the wake of John MacArthur and his comments about Beth Moore go home were the two words he gave in response to a question about her.

And so Tom's comments on why he believes women should be church leaders and preachers were shared widely in the wake of that. But for now as ever, if you want to ask your own questions, sign up to the newsletter, get all that bonus content and the chance to be entered for competitions, do sign up at the website, it's [ask NT Right dot com](http://askNTRight.com) and you can find of course links to the podcast there as well. So thanks again for listening at the one year anniversary.

And here's today's program. Well, welcome back to the podcast and a bit of a different one today because I'm joined by as usual Tom Wright here in the studio, but also joined on the line today by Mike Bird, who has co-authored a book with Tom, *The New Testament in its world*. It's an introduction to the history, literature and theology of the first Christians.

So first of all, welcome back, Tom to the studio. Great to have you with you. Good to be with you.

And welcome for the first time to the we never had a guest actually on the ask NT Right

Anything podcast. So this is a first for us as well, Mike, but good to have you joining us today. All the way from Melbourne, I think.

Yep, good day from Melbourne and condolences to all my English friends for how the rugby team is too bad, isn't it? But at least we got rid of you Australians in the early around. Yeah, we managed to sort out the men from the boys early on, didn't we? Anyway, yeah, without any further rugby references, because I'm not sure rugby existed in first century. But we're going to be talking about the New Testament in its world.

Thank you very much for coming on the line to join us for this edition of the show, Mike. Just just how long have you guys known each other is my first question? Tom, do you remember? That's a good question. Mike may have a better memory than me, but I would say 10 or 15 years.

Is that right, Mike? I think it'd be like between 10 and 15 years. I remember I wrote in 2007, I wrote a little book on Paul called Paul and the Saving Righteousness of God, which had an excursors at the end, trying to defend Tom against some of his more animated, reformed critics. And I think I send it to Tom and Tom wrote to me back and said how much he appreciated that.

We've had it a few times at conferences and academic places in Scotland. And then of course, it was this book project that also brought us together. I mean, you've been involved in New Testament studies for quite a long time yourself, Mike.

In fact, at one time you were based here in the UK and I had your my unbelievable show a couple of times during that time. That's right. I taught at the Highland Theological College for five wonderful years.

Yeah. Well, by the wonders of modern technology, you can join us nevertheless today. And this book, I hadn't quite realized because I'd been sent the sampler version, which is about 160 pages.

Tom, today is brought in the actual volume and it is a large volume. This is a big book. What are you trying to do then? Where did this come from? Who suggested putting all of this material together and what can people expect? I'll begin with you on that front, Mike.

Well, I was sitting in a bar with Philip Law, who's an SPCK editor. And he said to me, Mike, do you have any books you'd like to pitch to us? And I said, I'm pretty busy at the present time, but I've got an idea for you. You should get someone to work with Tom Wright and take his lifetime of work and try condense it down into one volume in the genre of a New Testament introduction.

Because I think that would go very well. It would be brilliant. It would give Tom's whole corpus a wonderful entry point.

And when Philip heard, they think, that's a great idea. And he said, why don't you do it with Tom? I said, well, Tom might have his own person in mind or something. But as far as I know, they took the idea to Tom and Tom said, yeah, that sounds like a pretty good guy.

I think I could work with an Australian. That would be a wonderful creative collaboration. And then over the next nine, 10 years, we got to work on this.

And the final product has just come out and released us on the 19th of November. There you go. So this has obviously been a collaborative project in this case.

It's been an interesting collaboration because it was pitched to me originally. And I will remember we had a dinner at the SBL conference in San Diego. I don't know when that was my Kate or nine years ago or something.

And the pitch to me was basically, you've written all your stuff. What Mike is going to do is swallow it all whole and regurgitate it in a straightforward one volume format. And you won't have to do anything except sign it off at the end.

I'm not sure they actually said that, but that was roughly what was communicated. So naturally, I said, yes, now of course no collaboration actually works like that. But I have to say, I mean, when the great manuscript arrived, I was astonished just how much Mike had managed to boil down what I'd been saying for many years.

And he's taken many, many passages and has quietly condensed them. But of course, I haven't in my lifetime written on absolutely everything we needed to cover. So there are several bits here, which are original bird, and which I sort of heave a sigh of relief.

Oh, few, Mike's done that bit. And then of course, there were some bits where Mike had edited with a few joining phrases here and there. And just occasionally there were little Australianisms which I thought, do you know what? This has got both our names on the cover.

Somebody is going to say, as Nt writes says, and then they will quote this thing. So I had an interesting few weeks, some of before last, working right through and checking. I think there was only one whole section that I rewrote, Mike.

Was that right? But it was fascinating. And I'm just thrilled and very, very grateful to Mike for an amazing amount of work. I should say the other thing, which Mike did entirely without my help and it's terrific, is that every other page almost, there are photographs, there are pictures, there are color illustrations, there are maps, there are charts, there are diagrams.

And if I was a first year student trying to think, oh, my goodness, how do I get into this stuff? This is exactly the sort of thing that one would want. This is just a marvellous

book, as I say, partly because it is all color photos and charts and diagrams and everything. And as you say, very much aimed probably at the first year theological student, that sort of thing.

So I see this very much becoming a staple part of, you know, theological libraries and that sort of thing. As you say, a lot has been condensed into this book, Mike. I'm just going to read out the different sections that make up the book part one, reading the New Testament, part two, the world of Jesus in the early church, part three, Jesus and the victory of God, part four, the resurrection of the Son of God, part five, Paul and the faithfulness of God, part six, the gospels and the story of God, part seven, the early Christians and the mission of God, part eight, the making of the New Testament, part nine, living the story of the New Testament.

I mean, you can see why the book is so long, but in a sense, it's also very short given the amount of ground you're covering there. So how did you even begin on a project like this, Mike, I suppose? Well, it was quite a challenge working through Tom's materials. Which bit do you cut and paste? Which bit do you summarize? What sort of thing gaps do you have to fill in along the way? And there was a number of points to think like, yeah, Paul and the faithfulness of God, how do you condense that down roughly to about two chapters, one on history and one of theology? So I won't deny it was a challenging volume, but it was also kind of fun.

It's kind of like going through your favorite DVD collection and picking out all the greatest hits. So I got to work through the entire Christian origins and the question of God, the New Testament for everyone and all these miscellaneous writings from from Tom and kind of pick out all the bits I liked and find a way to make them connect and line up and try to keep a similar tone. And basically, working out so we're telling one story about the New Testament.

And that is why did Christianity emerge? Why did it take the shape that it did and why was Jesus at the central of it? And to that end, working with Thomas materials was a sheer delight. Oh, you're very kind. I've got a question here because I thought it might be fun to try and sneak in a few listener questions as we normally do on the podcast.

I mean, Carol, funny enough in Australia, Mike, where you are, there's thanks for the podcast. Could you recommend a basic book for a layperson about the ancient world that would help in understanding the context of the New Testament? Now, obviously, we can recommend the one we're talking about today, the New Testament in its world. In a sense, did you feel like this will become the standard text or other other texts that I don't know if they didn't want to love this one or I would I would hope it will become a standard text for all the reasons that you just gave.

But it's a standard text which does much more than what Carol was wanting. Because this does the world of the New Testament, but then also the New Testament itself and

Jesus himself and the Christians themselves, etc. And I have to say, I could ask that question quite a lot.

And I think Mike and I have mentioned it before to one another, that actually there is still room for a kind of a 200 page book on the world of Jesus day. Because I mean, it's interesting, I've just moved houses, you know, and one of the things you do if you're a scholar, when you move houses, you look at a room full of unsorted books and you think, how on earth am I going to sort this lot out? And the first two things that I've done, I've sorted out all the classical stuff, and I've sorted out all the Judaic stuff. And there they are on the wall.

And I've gone right through those books. And at no point have I said to myself, this is the book that I would want to put into the hand of somebody asking exactly that question. Now, it's interesting because 200 years ago, no 150 years ago, there was a guy called Alfred Adishheim who wrote a book called The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.

When I was a boy, every elderly clergyman that I knew had that book on his shelves. And it kind of oriented them to what were the Romans doing? Who were the Sadducees, all of that sort of stuff? Which if you don't know, there are going to be many bits of the New Testament, which will just be completely opaque to you. And somebody needs to do that kind of primer, that kind of basic thing.

And it's possible that we could develop the relevant section of this into something like that. But what I say to people, actually, when they ask me that question is just get the penguin classic of Josephus's The Jewish War and read it as a novel. Make sure you read it on a sunny day when you're feeling happy, because it's one of the most miserable stories ever written, because the destruction of Jerusalem and thousands of young Jews getting crucified, etc.

But Josephus was an odd guy, but he was there. He knew what it was like. He knew the Jews.

He knew the Romans. He tells you incidentally en route to telling his story, lots and lots of things about just what life was like. And that's a great way and a primary source, which is accessible, get it in an English translation.

But there is still plenty of room for fresh work. And I'd be intrigued to know what Mike gives to his students when they ask that question. Yeah, what would be your sort of or equally to someone in a church context as well, Mike, who wants to just get a bit more knowledge on these areas? Yeah, I'd echo Tom's thoughts.

One thing you can simply do is just read the classics. I remember James Charlesworth, a famous Princeton scholar, saying he's inherited six libraries from pastors who have passed away or retired. Every single one of them had a copy of the complete works of

Josephus in English.

So our forefathers and foremothers in the faith knew the value of working through history. And what I try to do these days is I'm always reading, but I try to make sure every second book I read is some original source text or some ancient text. At the moment, I'm currently rereading the histories of Herodotus.

And after that, I'm going to probably head off to Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War. So one thing is just to read the primary text for yourself. You can pick up Tom's and you can pick up Josephus's *The War of the Jews*.

You can pick up a copy of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the numerous translations that are very easily. And if you wanted a little book, there was actually a very good little book written by George Caird called *Apostolic Christianity*. And that's a very small, a very slim volume, but I found that very helpful as a young seminary student trying to get a grip on the historical context of the Old Testament.

I think in England, it was published as the *Apostolic Age* or something like that. Okay. Yeah.

But yes, Caird had this, who was my teacher, of course, he had this extraordinary knack of being able to say in one sentence what others would take a paragraph to say in your manner. And it's very, it is very readable, very helpful. But that's, it's a bit out of date now.

50, 60 years ago. Some of the, yeah, I mean, obviously, this is bang up to date, the new book, *New Testament, the New Testament in its world*. I mean, someone who reads this mic is clearly, by the end, by the time they get to the end of it, going to know an awful lot more about the context of the emergence of early Christianity, Paul, Jesus, the early church, the Roman historical context within it.

And for many people, myself included, that has been an enormous eye open, it helps them to get behind the text, understand some of the issues going on, reframes things that very often we've, we've, you know, assumed. Now, Thomas, who says he's at the edge of the Ozark plateau, writing hints has this question, I love hearing about the historical background of the early Christian writings. But it makes me realize how much I assume when I read the Bible.

And it feels like I need a doctorate to understand the Bible correctly. Where is the balance between just picking up the Bible and reading it and studying ancient languages and cultures to make sure I've interpreted scripture appropriately. So what do you say to that sort of, I suppose it's a pastoral question as much as anything.

Mike, Thomas says, do we have to know everything in order to understand the Bible? Can we simply read it and get something from it? Yeah, I understand the concern that

unless you've got a PhD in second temple Judaism and an undergraduate degree in classics, that understanding the Bible is reduced to the, the sort of a magisterium of scholars up in their tower. Now reading the Bible on your own, just, you know, following the dynamics of the arguments being attentive to the story, you can get a basic and adequate grasp of what the New Testament is about. The Protestants had a word for that, they called that the clarity of scripture.

But not everything in the Bible is equally clear. That's why you need a Philip to run beside your chariot and to explain to you what you are reading. And that's why we need teachers.

We need people who have, you know, gone back and studied the meaning of Greek words, who, you know, people who have immersed themselves in the ancient world. Because there's a difference between having a adequate understanding of the New Testament compared to having a historically informed, nuanced and contextually sensitive. And the difference between having a basic grasp of the New Testament and knowing some background is like the difference between watching something in black and white and watching something in 3D in color.

There's just levels of depth and there's dimensions that you don't necessarily see when you're operating without that kind of knowledge. Yes. Could I say as well, I mean, it's really, as you said, just in a pastoral point, that God is not bound by our knowledge limitations, which is just as well, because none of us, the greatest God that ever lived, is still not completely on top of everything that is there.

And the Holy Spirit can leap across the gaps in our understanding. And like an electric charge or like a bolt of lightning can take a text that we actually haven't got all the footnotes for and nevertheless make it very real and personal and apply it directly to our hearts and minds and lives. That happens often.

It happened again and again to me as a boy starting to read the Bible and as a teenager. And it was in the light of those experiences that I realized I wanted to spend my life studying this more. So it isn't the case that God can't speak until you've got the PhD far from it.

And sometimes tragically, the PhD can actually obscure things and people can use their knowledge to blind themselves with their own science. Now, so what I hear in the question is just the slight niggles of a kind of anti-elitism thing, which I very much share. I mean, you know, I've inhabited the world of scholarship, but I know only too well that some of the silliest people I know are various seasons scholars.

And some of the most mature and developed Christians are people who've never got an A level or a degree. So I'm not trying to say you need the PhD. However, however, again and again and again in church history, as Mike says, there's the Ministry of Teaching.

In the New Testament, it's very interesting. Paul talks about Apostles' Prophets Teachers. And we need to think, what are these teachers teaching? And the first thing they're teaching in the early church, I think to a lot of people is how to read, because a lot of people were functionally illiterate.

And then for many of them in worlds where they would speak a demotic language, not Koine Greek, they would have to learn enough Greek to start to read. And then they would be taught to read the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, because Gentile convert coming in didn't know who Isaiah was, didn't know who Abraham was, knew nothing, or not much about Moses. And so Christianity has always been about education.

And that's why in the church, we're not a bunch of isolated individuals left lonely with our Bibles. We are part of the body of Christ, and one of the great ministries in the body of Christ is the mutual teaching, because actually the newest convert has still got something to teach the most seasoned teacher. But there is this teaching ministry, which is absolutely vital.

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Well, now you can learn how reading the Bible out loud together can revolutionize your faith. Again, reading Scripture in Public taught by Tom Right on video is available free to podcast listeners. Just go to NTRightOnline.org/AskNTRight. In my opinion, Mike, I think often the difficulty sometimes for Christians who embrace and start to engage with looking into the history and contextual side of scriptures is that what they've grown up with very often is the Bible as a devotional thing.

So that is the way they will have read it and been taught it, especially in church often. And do you ever find with your students, particularly, I suppose, Mike, that there is a difficulty then starting to, as it were, analyze the Bible and do something that's more methodical and critical with it. And does that, in a way, cause any problems faith-wise sometimes when people start to have to look at the Bible in a very different way to perhaps how they've always looked at it? Yeah, I think that can be the case.

You get it on two fronts. You get, on the one hand, people who see the Scripture as just a kind of timeless source of spiritual truths, providing a type of comfort and assurance to them, in various phases of their life. And then you get others who certainly just regard the Bible as simply the organic material from which you construct a system, or an entire

cathedral, of Christian thought and theology.

What they lose out on both accounts is that the New Testament is part of a story. It's about what God has done in the world through Christ, in the Spirit, and how that then plays out through the various struggles and challenges that the early church had to negotiate as they spread throughout the world. And lo and behold, some of the challenges they faced are very similar to the challenges we face.

You know, just look at something like the Corinthian letters where you're dealing with the problem of sex, money, divisions, civil authorities, the banks over worship. This is all immensely practical and of relevance. And it's not because the Bible is simply the source book for systematics or something you can randomly open to get a really good nugget of encouragement for the day.

And I guess that's why one thing in this book we want to do is not simply tell people more information about the New Testament, but we want to change the way people read the New Testament. We want them to understand it as history, you know, things that happen in a context, a set time. We want them to understand it as a type of theology, a type of discourse about God, making claims about God and how God relates to us.

And also literature with its own distinctive genres and genres work in certain ways. And there's a certain way of apprehending and leaving out meaning. Yeah, I think that there's a couple of things there.

I totally agree with what Mike just said, but the problem that we face when people start to get into this stuff is very similar to what I've often seen when students start to study music, and somebody's been in love with Beethoven or Brahms or whatever, since an early age, and they've learned to play the piano or the violin or something, then they go to college. And here is this guy taking apart their favorite symphony before their eyes and showing about how the themes and the development work. And it looks as though you're left with a bunch of crotchets and quavers all over the floor.

And you say, "Where has my blissful music gone?" And the answer is, no, you've got to do that in order to get down to its heart. You hoot in menuin, the great, one of the greatest violins ever lived. In his autobiography, he describes how as a young man, he played all the concerti that there are by the time he was, I don't know, 14 or something, and got bored.

And so then he said to himself, "I'm not going to play these again until I have figured out why every note is what it is." And he describes how he started with the Beethoven concerto and analyzed for himself how the main theme worked and how it was developed. And then he personally would put it all together. And it gave to his playing that three-dimensionality.

And that's the thing which has to happen. Now, for that to happen, the other illustration that I naturally go to is a sporting one that I've never learned to play tennis properly. But as a kid, I would hit a ball around in the park with my sister and so on.

But if I was then going to have some lessons, the instructor would say, "You're doing this quite wrong. You're doing the... your elbow in the wrong position, your wrist." And to begin with, that feels very awkward. But actually, if you want to get better, there's things you have to unlearn in order then to learn properly.

And I would say front and center in the New Testament, a lot of Western Christians need to unlearn one thing in particular. It's the meaning of the Kingdom of God. The I grew up thinking the Kingdom of God meant going to heaven when you die.

And it's one of the biggest transitions that we all have to do is to realize Jesus taught us to play thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven. It's not rocket science, but my goodness, it's a massive shift of perspective. I was going to ask you as well, Mike, I'm throwing this one out, you're blind.

But can you recall anything, you know, as you were starting to yourself as a student of the Bible, uncover some of these historical aspects and the context and so on, where suddenly the scales fell from your eyes and you saw something completely differently because you understood its background, its context and so on. Is there any example you could give and maybe one that crops up in the book as well? Oh, well, this for me, this is a very obvious one. When I was in seminary, I read a book called "Jesus and the Victory of God." And I got... I never heard of it.

I got to about page 14 where this author, Enthei Wright, said, you know, the way a lot of Christians read the Bible is that long as Jesus had a sinless birth and a sin-bearing death, the rest of his life doesn't really matter much. I mean, all he needed to do was, you know, teach a few good Sunday school sermons, but as long as he died on the cross, we're all good. And that shocked me because that was precisely how I read the Bible.

I didn't really have a purpose for Jesus' life and career and certainly not in its historical context, the first century Judea. And it was then reading about Jesus, reading about him in his context, reading about his debates with the Pharisees, not his debates about grace versus legalism, but reading about them as two competing Judean movements about who spoke for God and whose program for Israel should carry the day, coming across that completely revolutionized the way I understood the New Testament, the way I understood my church and my very own faith. So, you know, that for me is the moment where I tell people I left the matrix and entered a brand new way of looking at reality, the church and reading the Bible.

So you do get a few epiphanies like that along the way. And hopefully this book will give some people their own epiphanies of the same order. I'm going to mention shortly, just

as our time is starting to draw to a close, where people can find you both on a tour you're doing in the US soon from the 14th of November.

I'll make sure to mention that at the end of the podcast. I got another question though before we get to the end here, and Tom, I'd be interested in your response to this Barbara in Texas. Funny enough, mentions the book Mike just mentioned, I just finished reading Jesus and the victory of God, which I very much enjoyed.

However, I'm struggling to reconcile the historical Jesus whose focus was on his contemporaries and the impending destruction of the temple with the idea that he died for me. While I loved the book, I left it feeling that part of its message was that Jesus didn't have me personally in mind. And I thought the Christian message was that Jesus died for each of us personally.

And she finishes by saying, thanks so much, your gifts and deeply grateful your thoughts and talents. But obviously, again, there's a pastoral dimension to that question, Tom. There really is.

And I remember living with that question for about a year in the early 1980s when I was plunged into serious historical Jesus research in the course of my own teaching, I was in Montreal at the time. And I was fascinated by the world of the first century, I always had been. And the more I read the gospels within their first century context, the more sense they were making, but precisely as this is Jesus' message to his contemporaries, warning them about what was going to happen if they didn't repent soon from their violent plunge into national revolution, et cetera.

And assuring them that God was bringing in his kingdom, even though it wouldn't look like they thought it would. And that does seem to distance Jesus from all later moments because it's a very time specific message. What really helped me, and I was preaching regularly at the time, and I was facing this Sunday by Sunday, here's this gospel I'm supposed to be preaching on.

What are you going to say about it? Granted that. What really helped me was the line in John 20 when Jesus says to his, the risen Jesus says to his disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit, as the Father sent me, so I send you." In other words, Jesus' mission to Israel is the foundation and the template for the church's mission to the world, but the church's mission to the world is not something other than what Jesus is doing for the world because it's Jesus' own spirit who is commissioning them for the world. That's one thing.

The other thing goes like this, that God chose Abraham and his family to be the means of blessing the world, of restoring the world, of being the saving, healing, worshipping presence of God in the world. And Jesus is the climax of that purpose. In other words, right through the Jewish texts, though this is sometimes not as obvious as at other places, but you see it particularly in Isaiah and the Psalms, what God is going to do for

Israel is the means by which God is going to bless the whole world.

So there's that narrative again that it's precisely because he's doing it for Israel, this is what has to be done for the world. Behind that and suffusing it all around is this extraordinary sense which we modern Christians take for granted, but actually was just explosive in the first century, that this human being, Jesus embodies Israel's God himself and it's Israel's God himself who as the creator loves everyone and everything that he has made. And so that love is concentrated densely, like a sort of atomically charged presence in the person of Jesus.

And it's only when you tell that whole story that you can see simultaneously how this is what Jesus had to do for Israel and therefore for the world, and that this embodies the love of God for each one of us. And in a way, Mike, that comes back to the point you made about getting to the idea across, which some people is a bit of a revelation that this isn't just about my personal salvation, it's about being part of a much bigger story in that sense. And in a way, understanding how the story began helps us to see ourselves as the continuation of that movement in that way.

That's exactly right. And you can't jump from Genesis 3 to Matthew 1 and continue on as if nothing else happened. There is a story going on.

And if you read the prophets, nothing more than the prophets, you'll see that in God's plan, it was always to be that a transformed Israel would transform the world, which is why Christ, Jesus came to Israel and it would be to and through Israel that God's plan to reach the world would happen. And this is also what you get at the end of Romans where Paul says Christ became a servant to the circumcision, to the Jews, in order to fill the promises that God made to the patriarchs about having a multi-ethnic family from drawn from many nations. So if you understand how the story of Israel intersects or interlocks with the story of the nations and God's purpose for both, I mean, so Romans 9 to 11 is all about as well, what do you understand that aspect, the historical contingency of Jesus coming to Israel, dying for the sins of the people, suddenly I think makes a lot more sense.

Well, I hope that's helped in some way, Barbara in Texas and thanks to the other questions that we would be able to fit in as well. So just a reminder, firstly about the book, the New Testament in its world, an introduction to the history, literature and theology of the first Christians, you'll basically find about five or six of Tom's books squeezed in by Michael Bird. It's a collaborative project between them both.

I believe here in the UK published by SBCK in the US by Zondervan and I'll make sure there are links from the information alongside today's podcast. But also, if you want to see either Tom or Mike in person and occasionally both of them at the same time, there is going to be a book tour. It's happening in the States from the 14th and November, I think kicks off in New York with Tom speaking there, but then travels on to Wheaton,

Illinois, Chicago, San Diego, I think you're going to be in Dallas as well, Mike, and all of the dates and places and details available from the website of the book, which is NewTestamentWorld.com. So if you want to, and I'm glad to say this podcast is going out in time for you to be able to make some of these dates, NewTestamentWorld.com for the book tour, both Tom and Mike are going to be involved in.

But for the moment, thank you so much. This was really fun to do a guest special. That's great.

Thanks very much, Justin and Mike. Thank you again one more time and see you soon. Thank you very much.

See you in the States. Yes, indeed. Well, the info accompanying today's podcast will have that website as well for you to find out more about the New Testament in its world and that forthcoming book tour.

For the moment, thank you very much for being with us on today's show. Next time, we're going to be talking about what it means to be a Christian and what it means when people fall away from faith. That's in light of some of those big stories over the summer of leading Christians who say they've renounced their faith.

And if you're not already, do get yourself subscribed to the Ask N T right anything newsletter. Well, we'll keep you updated and you'll get the chance for the bonus content, prize draws, and much more besides. For now, thanks for being with us.

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