

# H2R P19: Metaphor E1

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## Metaphor & Our Imagination

(59:05)

Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

Jon: You don't have to read much biblical poetry until you find yourself surrounded by metaphors. "The LORD is my shepherd. I am the clay. God is the potter. Jesus is the bread of life. The LORD is my rock."

Tim: Metaphors can be a way an author or poet crafts a unique way of talking about something.

Jon: A metaphor is taking one idea, usually something very tangible, something easy to understand and mapping that idea unto a more abstract experience. So I know what a rock is like. It's sturdy. I've held a rock in my hand, I've had the experience of trying to move a large rock across the field, I've stood on a tall pillar and felt its strength below me.

Now, I have this other experience that's a lot more abstract. And my abstract experience is feeling that God is ultimately dependable. Map these two experiences on to each other and you get the metaphor, God is my rock. And while most biblical metaphors are easy enough to understand like that one, we have to remember that every culture develops its own various types of metaphors that will seem strange to another culture. And this is true for those who wrote the bible.

A great example of this is how biblical authors constantly use the image of tumultuous waters to describe the experience of danger. Whether it be the unknown, dangerous people, dangerous situations, and even enemy nations.

Tim: Why is somebody thinking like this? What does it take to produce a poetic imagination that thinks in terms of these images instead of other images?

Jon: This episode is Part One of a three-part conversation on biblical metaphors that we should be familiar with. But first, we need to have a conversation simply about what metaphors are, how they work, and how you are more saturated with metaphors than you ever imagined. Even how—

Tim: Our very understanding of reality is itself a metaphor.

Jon: This is the Bible Project Podcast, here we go.

So we have a series of videos on how to read the Bible.

- Tim: Yes. We had one whole conversation about the art of Biblical poetry.
- Jon: Art of biblical poetry.
- Tim: The unique styles, techniques, conventions of Ancient Hebrew poetry, and we saved for its own topic just because it's so fascinating and rich. And to me, eye-opening which is how imagery and metaphor works in biblical poetry, which is similar to most poetry is image-driven language. But at least as we'll see, the biblical imagination, pun intended of imagination the...
- Jon: How's that a pun?
- Tim: Well, sorry, it's a nerd pun. We're talking about imagery. The biblical...
- Jon: Image-ination.
- Tim: Image-ination.
- Jon: Image-ination. To image things for.
- Tim: Yeah, yeah. Biblical imagery, the biblical imagination has its own encyclopedia that you need to learn how to fill and then draw upon as you're reading.
- Jon: That's interesting.
- Tim: I have found over the years of teaching that teaching people what the meaning of these basic images are in the Bible because they are not images that are common to modern reader.
- Jon: I almost feel like we need to stop at this point just to talk about what does that mean for metaphors to be basic to our understanding.
- Tim: Yes. Oh, yeah, we will.
- Jon: We will talk about that.
- Tim: Totally. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think the conversation should first go to what our metaphor is and how do they work, and then getting into a unique way – biblical...
- Jon: Because when you say that the biblical portfolio of metaphors is something that we can become aware but are not aware of necessarily, but in every day of our life, we do have our own

handbag of metaphors that we're very aware of and may not even be aware that are metaphors.

Tim: That's right, yeah. We're born into a metaphor called imagination that we aren't even aware of for the most part until someone draws attention to it. I'm excited about this video and this conversation. I thought, however, as we've been doing with these conversations is beginning with a reading of a biblical poem...

Jon: Cool.

Tim: ...that I think will be a perfect segue - It gives us all the raw materials to work with.

Jon: Sweet. A reading. Great.

Tim: Yeah?

Jon: Psalm 46. "God is our refuge and protection, found to be a great help in times of distress, therefore we won't be afraid when the land shifts, when the mountains totter into the heart of the seas; its waters roar, they churn, mountains quake at its swelling. Selah."

Jon: Which means?

Tim: Nobody knows what it means.

Jon: Selah.

Tim: Selah. It's a Hebrew word spelled in English letters. It usually indicates some kind of pause. In this case, there are three Selahs that break the poem in the three stanzas. That was just the first one.

Stanza two. "A river whose streams make glad the city of God, The holy dwelling places of the Most High God, God is in its midst, it will not totter; God will help it when morning dawns. The nations roar, the kingdoms totter; He raised His voice, the land melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our tall fortress. Selah."

Jon: Selah. It's a common response thing.

Tim: Final stanza. "Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has wrought desolations in the land. He makes wars to cease to the end of the land; He breaks the bow, He cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will

be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the land." The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our tall fortress. Selah"

Jon: Psalm 46.

Tim: That's Psalm 46. So let's just be coming out of this conversation cold. So I've been thinking about Psalm 46 for a long time and then I'm prepping for this conversation, so I have a bunch of stuff on my mind. But I'm curious when someone comes at Psalm 46 fresh.

Jon: I have this experience when I read most Psalms, which is, this would be a really thrilling poem if I lived in a time where this kind of word mattered to me.

Tim: Like what?

Jon: I don't know. Actually, maybe I'm just not using my imagination well enough.

Tim: Like war? Battles?

Jon: Yeah. Well, yeah. Yeah, I mean, well, there's earthquakes.

Tim: Okay, all right.

Jon: There's still that stuff.

Tim: Earthquake.

Jon: There's still nations who are roaring.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: Yeah. So interesting. I'm going to take that back. I'm was not thinking. I'm using enough contextualization in my own mind.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: Yeah. There's a lot of very violent images. Feels very catastrophic.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Nations on the brink of melting down or tottering as it says, nations roaring, lands shifting, mountain quaking. Violent imagery.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, totally. I mean, in each of the three stanzas, there's a core action taking place of quaking, earth quaking. In the first stanza, it's mountains crumbling into the sea while the pounding

surf, roaring and churns and eats away. It's sort of like a stormy surf pounding on the rocks, and eroding the hillside.

Jon: Right. It's pretty powerful.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. So there's that. The second stanza it's not the waters roaring.

Jon: And he's saying, he won't be afraid when there's that kind of crazy...

Tim: Yeah, that's right. When the waters...

Jon: ...intensity.

Tim: ...are pounding at the rock, we're not afraid because who is our refuge and protection? God is. For the whole first stanza is the poet depicting standing on a big piece of rock surrounded by...

Jon: Just the churning ocean.

Tim: ...churning waters that are eroding and crumbling into pieces.

Jon: Yeah.

Time: And he's not freaking out. The poet's not afraid.

Tim: Why is that? Well, let's consider more. In the second stanza, instead of waters pounding, and roaring, and causing erosion, it's the nation's roaring. But the nations that are roaring like the ocean waters are themselves, the thing that are tottering. Not the land anymore. And what is the sturdy thing in the second stanza, it's not just a rock now, it's the temple. The holy dwelling places of God Most High it's where God is, right? God is in its midst. And notice what is coming out?

[10:00]

Jon: Why is it plural, dwelling places?

Tim: Yeah, I know. Yeah, it's called the City of God, the dwelling places, and then God is in its midst. The city that has the dwelling places of God.

Jon: Isn't there one dwelling place?

- Tim: Well it's one building, the central building. But then there's the courts and all those rooms around it - the large courtyard, the precincts.
- Jon: Is this one of those plural like heavens?
- Tim: Oh yeah, plural complexity?
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: Yeah. One thing that has all kinds of different components to it. It could be what's going on here. I didn't look up the detail. Notice how the two stanzas actually overlap with each other. The first one is...
- Jon: Yeah, I did notice that.
- Tim: ...the poet standing on the rock that is God while the pounding surf erodes the rock. Now, you realize this overlapped with that is the image of the nations...
- Jon: Pounding against...
- Tim: Pounding on...
- Jon: ...the land.
- Tim: ...Jerusalem where the temple is. But instead of the rock crumbling, it's the kingdoms crumbling when God raises His voice and the land melts. And then there's refrain midway through the poem here. "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress."
- Jon: What do you mean a refrain? Oh, because it's said twice?
- Tim: Yeah. Verse 7, "The Lord of Host is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress," is the middle line and the final line of the poem. The third stanza leaves the water and rock imagery and it's, "Behold the works of the Lord who brings an end to all wars by breaking the bow, cutting the spear, overcoming the chariots."
- Jon: What does the word wrought mean? You wrought.
- Tim: I know. It's literally the word do or make
- Jon: Okay.
- Tim: But in English, I just liked it. I think it's the King James, very poetic King James.

- Jon: It does sound poetic.
- Tim: Yeah. The ideas of the Lord as a worrier who brings the end to all wars. So He overcomes the threat of the pounding waters and the nations and He doesn't end to all of their implements of war. And then God speaks in the culmination of the poem. "Be still, know that I am God." "I will be exalted among the nations, exalted in the land," and then the refrain again, "the Lord is with us, God of Jacob is our fortress."
- Jon: When you first read the burning of the chariots and the breaking of the bows and cutting spears in two, I didn't read that in context of ending war. I kind of just saw it. I just was like, 'Yeah, He's going to fight back or He's fighting.' But it's like for the purpose of ending the chaos.
- Tim: Yes.
- Jon: And then "be still." And you can imagine what's the stillness of the water after that.
- Tim: Yes. Exactly, of the water or of the battlefield.
- Jon: Right.
- Tim: Because the stillness comes after He makes war cease throughout the land.
- Jon: Yeah, right.
- Tim: But in the developing imagery of the poem, the nations are the waters.
- Jon: Right. Yeah, the chaotic waters is the battlefield.
- Tim: Yeah. So notice you have three stanzas and think of each of them as a little transparent piece of plastic or something.
- Jon: Yeah. It's like how Disney used to animate.
- Tim: Yeah, totally. Yeah. So the first piece of transparency is like a small island rock.
- Jon: Getting pounded by the surf.
- Tim: With the poet standing up there and God is his fortress, but he's freaking out. He's trying not to be afraid because of the pounding waves are eroding the rock. And then lay on top of that a picture



of Jerusalem where the nations are attacking Jerusalem but the temple is there, and God is in the midst of this temple and the nations attack, but then melt and totter like waves recede after attacking.

And then on top of that is an image of God is the one who brings about the tottering of the violent nations so that the calming of the storm, like the calm after a storm on the beach and the still battlefield after victory's been won, is the image of God victorious over human violence and over creation's violence. And then the poem ends.

[15:20]

Tim: So core images in this poem, God is a rock.

Jon: Yeah, I'm familiar with that one.

Tim: Yeah, it's a pretty standard one.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Read the Psalm.

Jon: You've read any or sung any hymn in the church?

Tim: Yeah, God is a rock.

Jon: On Christ the solid rock I stand.

Tim: Yeah. And that's pretty intuitive universal. Rocks are strong, they've been around for the whole time.

Jon: Yeah, build the house on the rock.

Tim: All that kind of stuff.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, they're sturdy.

Jon: Sturdy.

Tim: Stable. So that's a pretty intuitive image to make sense of. But all this stuff about—

Jon: That one's in my handbag of metaphors.

Tim: Yeah, you've got that one ready. But what about the rock being assaulted by the waters?

Jon: Well, you know, that's interesting because what I have picked up throughout the years of reading the bible, is understanding how important the waters were as a metaphor, which it took a long time to begin to see that. And actually, after the first time, it was brought up to me was I was really tripping about why isn't there going to be any sea in heaven?

Tim: Yes, that little line in the book of revelation.

Jon: Yeah. And there's no more sea.

Tim: There was no more sea.

Jon: I remember I have friends who are surfers and they're like, "Really? No sea in heaven? Come on."

Tim: Totally.

Jon: And then someone brought up like, "Well, look, the sea represents chaos. That's the first time I ever heard that. Then you start reading through the Bible and seeing that that's one of those metaphors..."

Tim: That's right.

Jon: ...that we just don't have in our metaphor briefcase.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: You know, it's like keep changing the metaphor for that.

Tim: Your handbag or your briefcase? Well, it depends on what job you're on to do that.

Jon: Right. Like satchel. My metaphor is satchel.

Tim: That's right. See, yeah, you got rock, you got waters, you have some holy dwelling place in a mountain with a stream running out of it, in center of this poem.

Jon: Yeah. That's a metaphor or is that just—

Tim: Well, that's a good point. Sorry, it's an image.

- Jon: It's an image.
- Tim: It's an image here. We're going to need to figure out what to call this video. Is it just metaphor or is it imagery in biblical poetry, or it is imagery and metaphor in biblical poetry? Because they're a bit different but they kind of illuminate each other.
- Jon: We'll go into it.
- Tim: Yeah, we'll look into that. Then the last thing is this image of the battle, the still battlefield where God is victorious over the nations. And then God as a fortress. So there's all these overlapping images. Some of them sound Bible-ish, God as a rock. There's a temple involved, but this whole thing of the waters exalting the rock and the rock is connected to the temple and there's a battle ongoing in the nation.
- Jon: And the waters represent the nations.
- Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You got to read through the poem a couple of times to realize the pounding surf is equivalent to the pounding nations - The roaring surf.
- Jon: That would have been a typical kind of metaphor to have used back then when the nations were like chaos waters.
- Tim: Yes, correct. I think we're going to see. That's a really core biblical image. So here's the thing, anybody can read this poem in any translation and be like, "Oh, the world's crazy. Chaotic waters, nations, God's in control. He's going to bring peace. Be still and know that I am God." I'm thinking I'll write a song about that.
- Jon: Yeah, the powerful line.
- Tim: You get it, you know. You can get it. So the question is not about the basic first reading. The question is about, why did this poet bring together these images in this way? And what significance is there, this connection of the rock, and the waves and the temple and the nations? Why is somebody thinking like this? What did it take to produce a poetic imagination that thinks of these images instead of some other images?
- Jon: Like if you were to write a poem right now about how you find refuge in God amidst of chaos, like what images would you use?
- Tim: That's a great question.

Jon: And it probably wouldn't—I mean maybe it would be a stormy coast.

Tim: Yeah. If we lived in that stormy coast

Jon: Lived in that coast.

Tim: To be honest, living, having grown up, you know, right in the heart of Portland and remember the years that I have lived in Madison, Wisconsin, going to graduate school, it was a much smaller town and it was quiet. It was just quiet.

Jon: Madison is?

Tim: Hmm-mm.

Jon: Oh, I didn't imagine that. It's a college town.

Tim: It is a college town, I mean, if you go right to the heart of downtown, but it's not a huge city. I just remembered it's just quiet.

[20:00]

And when I moved back to Portland, the contrast was [stuck to me? 00:20:03]. It's always you're hearing sirens, you're hearing the trains down in the industrial district, the airports - you know, all the planes of Orlando and Portland are flying...

Jon: Right over you.

Tim: ...Over East Portland. And traffic and it's just—

Jon: The background noise.

Tim: So I'm just saying, in my formative imagination, silence, one of the main things where my mind goes when I think of stillness and peace isn't about earthquakes, and rocks, and waves. It's that noise, it's silence and solitude. And I think that's just because as a little kid growing up here, there was a constant city background of noise that I wasn't even aware of...

Jon: Until you got out of there.

Tim: ...until I moved away in my 20s. That's an example. Your formative imagery for conceiving of the universe, how can it be otherwise, right?

- Jon: Right.
- Tim: Your brain's, our minds are shaped by our environments and they give us the categories to think in - the frame of reference. So there was a professor literary theory, I don't know if he's famous or not, his name is Umberto Eco.
- Jon: That's a cool name.
- Tim: He's Italian. He wrote, "The Name of the Rose" which is his most famous novel made into a movie. Anyway, yeah, profound and obscure. He developed this phrase though called every literature, whether it's a poet or an author is working out of what he called an encyclopedia of production.
- Jon: That's the phrase, encyclopedia of production?
- Tim: That's the phrase, yeah. And actually every human, but usually human sort of try and express themselves through words are drawing upon what he called an encyclopedia of production. And I like encyclopedia even though almost none of us even have them.
- Jon: A Wikipedia.
- Tim: Yeah, we have the virtual encyclopedias. But the point is, it's this big, collected body of reference knowledge that you draw upon to make sense of your world. And our brains are constantly stocking, creating an encyclopedia. His whole point was that human do this individually from the moment you are out of the womb. You're collecting sense data, and having multiple experiences about what's soft, what's hard. You're forming your encyclopedia. And then individual humans to this and then communities do this, and then how cultures do this and so every culture when literature is created, draws from its own unique encyclopedia of production.
- Jon: And then he calls this encyclopedia of production because it's the encyclopedia by which you produce ideas out of?
- Tim: Correct, yeah. That's right. So anytime a work of communication is produced, you're drawing upon...
- Jon: You're drawing from the encyclopedia.
- Tim: ...it's cultural encyclopedia. I don't know why I like—it's a metaphor. But I kind of like it. It's just helpful to think every culture

has its own. And many cultures overlap certain entries in their encyclopedia like sun and water.

Jon: Right, right, right.

Tim: And light and dark, and life and death. But many encyclopedias are full of unique entries based on whether you live in the city or the country. Whether you...that kind of thing. So the question is, first of all, how does a culture in individual's encyclopedia of imagery get stocked? How does that get stocked and how do those images—

Jon: Which is that another great metaphor?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Jon: Immediately, it made me think of stocking trout in a lake.

Tim: Yeah, totally. How does it get filled and how do our brains draw upon encyclopedias as we are making sense of the world? What role does imagery and metaphor serve in how we make sense of the world? Which is kind of the big question you were asking at first.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Is it just the way we dress up and make our language sound pretty?

Jon: Yeah. Is it just something we use every once in a while to really drive home a point or is it something more deeply rooted in our psyche?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah. So that's an interesting topic to talk about, and I think—so let's talk about that. And then second, in light of that conversation, what is the uniquely Israelite, Jewish, Biblical, cultural encyclopedia that the biblical poets are constantly drawing upon and writing their poetry out of?

Jon: Yeah, cool. I think a lot about consciousness in the mind and the one thing that becomes very apparent is how our metaphor for how we even imagine our mind working has changed over the years.

Tim: Oh, man, yes. The thing about this conversation, I thought about that too.

[25:02]

Jon: Yeah?

Tim: Yeah. You go on. But...

Jon: I know, you know, when steam became a new invention and was revolutionizing industry, it became a metaphor for how we started thinking about things. Pressure and valves and all these things.

Tim: The gears are turning.

Jon: The gears, yeah. So we started thinking on a metaphor about steam and gears as to how our psyche works. Yeah, you just use the phrase like "my gears are turning" or "let me turn on that." Or hotheaded, maybe even comes from that. I don't even know.

Tim: That's interesting.

Jon: But then when computers came out, it became a new metaphor and we started thinking about computation and our brains work in processing.

Tim: Processing.

Jon: Yeah, let me process that. And so the way we think about our own rationale has changed over the years based on the technology.

Tim: That's right. Conceptions of the universe and how it works, you know, in terms of the universe as a machine, operating with gears by laws. And again, I'm not a science nerd, but I know enough to know that once quantum physics got involved, that straightforward gear model of the universe—

Jon: The closer you look, the more it started falling apart.

Tim: Yeah. just you need a totally different way of explaining it that's way more organic and whatever quantum physics is. So it's mathematical but it's not gears. It doesn't work like gears. So yeah, those are good examples. The steam engine machine brain versus the computer brain, those come from two different—even from the same culture, just at two different time periods.

Jon: Yeah, a century later.

Tim: That creates a different encyclopedia of production. And so when somebody writes a poem about how the mind works—

Jon: They're drawing from that.

Tim: They going to draw from two different types of encyclopedias. Two different types of poem imagery.

Jon: Those aren't the only two. I'm just kind of spacing as to what they would have been otherwise.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: So that's totally true. So this should be the time to bring up Lakoff.

Tim: Yes, that's right. So first, this is interesting. The word metaphor it's a Greek word spelled with English letters.

Jon: Oh, is it? I never knew that.

Tim: Hmm-mm. Metaphora. So meta is...

Jon: Yeah, beyond.

Tim: ...with or coming across.

Jon: Oh, across?

Tim: Hmm-mm. In some senses depending on the context. And then phora is from a Greek word phero, to carry. So to transfer.

Jon: Oh, cool.

Tim: Of course, I to transfer, to carry across the associations of one thing and carry them to another thing. That's the basic idea. You're talking about one thing as if it's another thing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To carry the association's, the ideas usually connected with machines and you're applying them to the brain. So that's it. You're talking about one thing in terms of another thing. So just, actually, so we can have clarity in our conversations, this is in the notes here. Metaphor is actually just one kind of a larger category of...You can call them figures of speech.

Jon: All right.



- Tim: Or non-literal language, though the meaning of literal language is debated.
- Jon: It's like quantum mechanics. You start looking closer enough.
- Tim: Until it falls apart. Yeah, that's right. So metaphor is talking about one thing as if it were another. "My wife's a ball of fire." Whereas the moment I explicitly draw attention to the comparison, "My wife is like a ball of fire," then that's called, in literally terms, a simile.
- Jon: Yeah, that always seemed kind of a weird distinction. Like what's so important in throwing in the word like?
- Tim: Well, it's as if in the simile, "my wife is like a ball of fire," kind of like I'm backing away.
- Jon: Yeah, you're hedging a little bit more.
- Tim: Yeah. So what I'm saying is...
- Jon: Metaphor really embraces it.
- Tim: That's right, yeah. It's almost like you're committing to the image more.
- Jon: It tells you to suspend your reality - we're going in.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right.
- Jon: Simile is like, yeah, we're going in but don't worry.
- Tim: Yes. When I say, "My wife's like a ball of fire," I'm saying there are some things that my wife and fire have in common.

[30:02]

- Tim: Not everything but some things. When I say, "My wife is a ball of fire," I'm forcing you to go through the thought process of being like, you can't actually mean that." But there are some really important ways that his wife is like fire. What are they? What could they be? It's like you're pitching the ball in to the listener's court.
- Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So... other types of speech that are kind of like this is - we talked about these before - metonymy.

Jon: Yeah, we have. And synecdoche.

Tim: It's synecdoche

Jon: Synecdoche. We have a whole pack of episode where I mispronounced this word more and more. That's right, I forgot about that.

Tim: So metonymy is you refer to something not by it, but by something it's associated with. So, Hollywood produces lots of great films. So Hollywood's a place associated with...

Jon: Or can I use your wheels? Oh, no, that's the other one.

Tim: Oh yeah, wheels is Synecdoche. You're using part of the thing...

Jon: A part of the thing.

Tim: ...to refer to the whole thing. But also in synecdoche, you can use the whole thing to refer to part of it. So you would say like, "The US won a gold medal in the Olympics."

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Something like that. So what you mean is that by the whole of US is one particular US citizen.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So, part for whole, whole for part. That's synecdoche. Metonymy is association.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: The pen is mightier than the sword.

Jon: So you're not talking about the pen and the sword. You're talking about war and communication.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. War versus communication.

Jon: Yeah, cool.

Tim: So these are all types of figures of speech and in all of them, usually you're drawing upon images. Verbal pictures. Which is why a more basic way to talk about what I really want this video to be

about is actually imagery in biblical poetry. And metaphor is one particular...it's one way to use images, but it's not the only way.

Jon: Let's solve that then. You said earlier you weren't sure.

Tim: But metaphor is also a common enough word that—it just sounds, I don't know, which sounds more interesting. Which video you'd be more interested in? Imagery in biblical poetry or metaphor?

Jon: I would probably click on metaphor first but—

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: But if I click on metaphor and then it was—metaphor was just part of it and it was really about imagery, I might get confused.

Tim: And that's what I wondered like from—I think in our culture; metaphor has come to have a broader meaning. To just mean using images and word pictures and figure of speech metaphorically.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: None literal speech is metaphorical speech. Namely—

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: Using images instead of –

Jon: Well, that's fascinating.

Tim: I have certainly come across that in terms of classrooms.

Jon: That's how people tend to mean it.

Tim: Yeah. It's metaphorical. Is that literal or metaphorical?

Jon: Got you. And they don't say literal or symbolic. They say...

Tim: Yeah, symbolic might be used sometimes. So just keep that on the brain as we're talking in terms of what will be the appropriate title.

Jon: Literally, keep it in my brain.

Tim: Okay. So you and I both are interested in the ways that brain science interacts with literature studies here.

Jon: Right.

Tim: And the way poetry and metaphor isn't just—

Jon: It's doing something to your brain.

Tim: Correct. Or it's expressing something that our brains already doing.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Yeah, in other words, metaphor can be a way that an author or poet, crafts a unique way of talking about something. So like, instead of saying, "I'm having a hard day and I don't understand what's going on in the politics of our age," I write a poem about standing on a rocky island that's being pounded by chaotic surf or something.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So that's creating a metaphor. But the question is, that poem was created by a human. In this case, a human who we believe that's inspired by the Spirit of God to write this poem, and what does that tell us about how that poet that sees and makes sense of his world.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Not just how he wants to talk pretty about it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But how does that poet make sense of his world and that our very understanding of reality is it itself metaphor. That's the basic idea here. So yeah, you've read the most accessible and popular authors on this, how the brain makes sense of the reality is through metaphor is a couple of guys, George Lakoff and Mark Turner.

[35:04]

Tim: So when did you come across their work?

Jon: Is it Turner? The book I've read is "Metaphors We Live By." It's Lakoff and Johnson.

Tim: Oh, and Johnson. Okay got it. Then the other one which is a little more academic is "More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to

Poetic Metaphor." That's George Lakoff and Mark Turner. So George Lakoff, literary—

Jon: Literary guy

Tim: Literary, cognitive theorist. Something like that.

Jon: How did I run into it? I don't know. I think I just saw it on a shelf, and I was like, "That's a cool title."

Tim: Yeah. "Metaphors We Live By."

Jon: "Metaphors We Live By."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. And then I read it and I was blown away.

Tim: Me too.

Jon: Blown away.

Tim: Yeah, me too. It's like having somebody point out to you that you're wearing glasses.

Jon: For the first time.

Tim: For the first time, and you had no idea you were ever wearing glasses.

Jon: Exactly.

Tim: That's what it was like for me.

Jon: Yeah. Oh, man. Yeah. Highly recommend reading that book.

Tim: Oh, totally. Really. Their basic point is a poet can talk about one thing in terms of another and we call it metaphor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: My wife's a fireball. But what their whole case is, is that our brains are making sense of complex, unfamiliar experience data, constantly. And what they're doing is using pre-existing categories from past experience.

Jon: That are usually more concrete.

- Tim: They're usually more concrete and familiar, and then as if we project our experience of the past on to this present unfamiliar thing.
- Jon: I think everyone would say, "Yeah, okay, of course, I do that," But then they start showing how embedded it is in everything.
- Tim: In consumption of reality. Yeah, that's right.
- Jon: They start unpacking it and you realize like, "Holy cow, I didn't realize all the metaphors I was using to explain things."
- Tim: Yes. It's pretty simple. It's kind of a way to break down what our brains are doing. They talk about two categories of how we process metaphors and think in metaphors. They use a word a source domain and a target domain.
- Jon: Yeah. This is geeky. It's so funny, I would never explain it this way.
- Tim: You wouldn't?
- Jon: This is the nerdy way to explain it. Maybe I would. I don't know.
- Tim: Oh, interesting. Got it.
- Jon: This is probably the best way to explain it.
- Tim: This is trying to break down—none of us are aware that this is happening.
- Jon: Yeah, you have to really...
- Tim: But they're trying to recreate what our brains are doing.
- Jon: Yeah, I love it.
- Tim: It's really fascinating.
- Jon: Your source domain and your target domain.
- Tim: Source domain and target domain. So this is a quote from "More than Cool Reason." We use a metaphor to map certain aspects of a source domain on to a target domain, producing a new understanding of that target domain. This is where for me, the word map as a verb entered my encyclopedia.
- Jon: Oh, really?

- Tim: Yeah, it was through their work, and it was very helpful. To think in terms of like on our smartphones, we can do this.
- Jon: We can map something.
- Tim: Yeah, yeah. You can either turn off certain features of your map or turn them on and so if you turn on a certain feature, it's like a layer laying on top of your map that all of a sudden you can show like a grid of Portland but then you can turn on the layer that turns on...
- Jon: The satellite images.
- Tim: Yeah, like the satellite images.
- Jon: Or bakeries nearby.
- Tim: Or on Google Earth, you know, you can turn on street names or you can turn them off.
- Jon: Right.
- Tim: So you use mapping. It's like our brains have already mapped previous experiences and then we take that map and lay it on to a new experience. So they use this metaphor of time as a thief. In the metaphor "time is a thief," part of the mapping is superimposing.
- Jon: Our idea of what a thief is.
- Tim: Yeah. Actually a metaphorical understanding of time as a possession.
- Jon: Oh, right, that would be more basic.
- Tim: Yes.
- Jon: Time is something you can own.
- Tim: Time is a possession. And then what we do is carry all of the feelings that we have about our possessions...
- Jon: They can be stolen.
- Tim: ...And we map them on to our experience of time. So when I say the word, time is a thief, what their point is, there's actually a deeper conceptual metaphor underneath. It's a metaphor—
- Jon: Wait, wait. What?

Tim: When I use the phrase "time is a thief"...

Jon: Which one is more basic. Possession is the most basic.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Underneath saying, "time is a thief," which is an interesting figure of speech. Underneath that is a conceptual metaphor that time is a thing you can possess, and we carry all of our emotions and feelings about our personal possession and we map those on to our experience of time. Just think of all these phrases. "I lost time yesterday." "I gained some time by getting to work early."

[40:00]

Tim: "Man, he took up so much of my time yesterday."

Jon: "That experience stole years from me."

Tim: Yeah, totally. "I've got time to spare today."

Jon: "I got some spare time."

Tim: "I got some spare time." Just like "I have spare change or spare cash."

Jon: So the source domain is possessions?

Tim: Yeah, my stuff.

Jon: And the target domain is my experience of time.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And time is such an abstract thing, how do we talk about it? Oh, let's talk about it like a possession.

Tim: Yes, yeah.

Jon: Even though, if you really start to think about it, you don't own time.

Tim: You don't. It's not your possession at all.

Jon: Although you do. I mean...



Tim: But in a way, you have certain control.

Jon: You have an allotment of it. You have an allotment of it.

Tim: Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: And so when it's gone, it's gone. So what's the closest thing to that? Well, I have an allotment of cash or an allotment of things and when it's gone it's gone.

Tim: Yeah, that's true. The difference is that, there are some possessions that if you choose to, you don't have to give them away, whereas time you always have to lose it or give it or spend it. Time has to be spent.

Jon: Time has to be spent. Yeah.

Tim: Time is money.

Jon: Yeah. You could write a poem about that. It's a very interesting insight. You have to spend your time. You can't save time like you save money.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So here's an interesting question, is this economic, money, possession, metaphorical conception of time, is this universal to the human experience?

Jon: Right.

Tim: Did the ancient Israelites talk this way?

Jon: Right.

Tim: It turns out that they didn't. Like you won't find these ways of talking about time in the Bible. You won't find them in all kinds of cultures around the world, but you find them in our culture at least. So I'm not an expert on this metaphor, but it's very interesting. So that's a good example.

Jon: How would the Bible talk about time?

Tim: Oh, just differently. Gosh, that's a whole theme video.

Jon: Yeah, seriously.

Tim: The Bible's conception of time. Pretty simple to grasp. You take your experience and all of the feelings associated with one core thing and you map them on to some other experience.

- Jon: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. There's five metaphors I was thinking should be reimagined.
- Tim: Oh, yeah. Good.
- Jon: One is, I call it Love is a trap. It's probably a better way to think about it. But people talk about falling in love.
- Tim: It's something that happens to you.
- Jon: It happens to you, and you...
- Tim: And passive.
- Jon: Yeah, it's very passive. You become captivated with someone. Captivated with someone. Like you're a captive. Well, I saw a dark side of this and it made me think like, "Oh, this needs to be reimagined." We just talked about time as a possession, time as currency, "I'm wasting time," "my mind as a computer," I think that needs to be reprocessed. Emotions as a disease. "My emotions flared up" or my...And then my body as a battery, "I need to be charged." You know what? Maybe that's a good one, I don't know.
- Tim: Yes.
- Jon: Because we are very—
- Tim: Okay. So here's the interesting...you can do these little mental detective stories then where—so those are little phrases, metaphorical phrases but the—to apply Lakoff and Turner's
- Jon: It has to really—
- Tim: Yeah. There are actually some deeper core metaphor that that phrase is just one expression of. Like "time is my possession" can manifest itself in all of these different ways. "I lost time," "I gained time." "He took my time." "I spend time." Those are all ways of talking about one core space in my brain. Time as a possession. So question is, when I use any given figure of speech, is there actually a deeper conceptual set of glasses that I'm wearing that I'm not even aware of?
- Jon: Because it weaves together to create this tapestry which is your underlying metaphor.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: He brings up some really classic ones like time. And then you have one down here, "life is a journey." That's a good one.

Tim: Yeah, okay. So that's the first point is that how our brains work is mapping from one set of experiences on to another experience. Second is they want to make a distinction between these, they call it, basic conceptual metaphors. These deep underlying metaphors that we're not even aware of, they wanted to distinguish those from poetic metaphors.

Jon: Got it. Because those are the ones that are generating the poetic metaphors.

Tim: Correct. Yeah. The basic idea is, think of it like...To use a metaphor image. Think of it like a well that's connected to a deep whatever.

[45:03]

Jon: Underground spring.

Tim: Underground spring. You know, someone can draw a bucket down the crack of the well and then bring it up and then do something with that water. And the water comes from the underground spring, but they're different

Jon: Yeah. Then they can make some Gatorade with it.

Tim: But then you make Gatorade with it. You know it's something nobody ever thought of. That's the basic idea. There are basic deep metaphors that we're not aware of.

Jon: The basic ingredient.

Tim: Yeah. And what we come across in poetry are like surface manifestations of deeper underlying metaphor. So they talk about basic conceptual metaphor. Life is a journey. Think about how many unique poetic expressions you can come up with that live off that core idea. You can talk about people being lost. You can literally be lost or you can speak about being lost as in terms of not knowing your vocational direction.

Jon: How to make the next decision in life.

Tim: How to make the next decision.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: When you talk about figuring out the right decision to make, we talk about finding my way. Jesus and wisdom letters in the Bible uses these two paths or two roads images all the time of like the right path and the wrong path. Narrow is the gate, broader is the road type of thing. The famous Robert Frost Poem, "two roads diverged in a wood."

Jon: Wait. He isn't talking about hiking?

Tim: So yeah, all these biblical proverbs. "The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." So life is a journey. So the deep underlying metaphor that our brains are constantly drawing upon to make sense of day to day experience that gives meaning to our choices. We talk about "fork in the road" moment. "I met a fork in the road." That's a good example. It brings...

Jon: Life as a journey is a basic one and it manifests in all these different...

Tim: All these different ways.

Jon: ...tons of phrases, poetic expressions.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. They talk about people are plants.

Jon: People as plants. I've never heard of this one.

Tim: Of humans, the way we talk about each other is so much with plant language.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We talk about kids sprouting. Actually, a more common one is like, "She went to college, man, she blossomed. She's blossomed." Offspring, or in the Bible, the Hebrew word for children is seed. Human children.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: Is the same as—

Jon: The name of what plants grow.

Tim: Correct, yeah. Seed. Yeah, you look upon your seed. Meaning you look upon your children.

Jon: Yeah. That's always a weird one when you read in the Bible.

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: The seed. Please don't use that.

Tim: That's right. Unless you grew up in a farm.

Jon: You called kids seed in farmland?

Tim: Well, that's a good point. So people are plants. Some of them have to do with just experience in the human body. So, up is good and down is bad. I mean, it's just everything. Whatever. "I'm feeling down." "I'm flying high." We use special figures of speech constantly to talk about a good versus bad.

Jon: Even the word depressed.

Tim: Depressed. Yeah, correct.

Jon: Pressed down. I'm on the top of the word.

Tim: On top of the world. Yeah, I got a leg up on this situation and—

Jon: A leg up. That must come from something. Where does the come from? A leg up. Like a rock climbing metaphor?

Tim: I don't know. That's a good question.

Jon: I think one really interesting one is, argument is war. Did you read that one in Lakoff's?

Tim: That was in "Metaphors We Live By."

Jon: Okay, that's "Metaphors We Live By." So your claims are indefensible or he attacked your weak points or his criticism is right on target. The most argument won the argument. You're talking about all these war metaphors.

Tim: Man. Okay, that's a good example. Also, it's a good example of what does it mean to reimagine.

Jon: Yes. And so I thought about that...

[crosstalk 00:49:13]

Jon: Yeah, and I thought, "What can you imagine it to?" And the one I came up with is, argument as journey go to life as journey. Argument as a journey.

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: I don't know what the phrases would be but like together we're walking side by side; we're clearing a path. That's the metaphor. And if that's the metaphor, you're not fighting each other, you're journeying together. I don't know if that will work, but—

Tim: Yeah, that's interesting. I think the main obstacle to your argument is this.

Jon: Right. So we might have to clear the path this way.

Tim: If the logic of your argument works, then it brings you to this goal.

Jon: Yeah. Where that argument is heading, is a place I wouldn't want to go.

Tim: You took a turn right there in your logic that—

Jon: Yeah. And I guess we do use that sometimes. We use that language.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. But the point is that the moment you have on argument as war instead of glasses, then you're not aware...

[50:09]

Jon: You're trying to demolish and fight back. You're trying to hold your ground.

Tim: Correct. It predisposes you towards a more aggressive style of argumentation.

Jon: And that's the most fascinating to me about "Metaphors We Live By" is not only are they the glasses that we see the world through, but then they change the way we live in the world because we're looking at things in a certain way.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Which then speaks at how powerful having a new poetic imagination can be.

Tim: You know, gosh, I was thinking about this. I was in a conversation with somebody. They were pointing out to me the way that digital capitalism, online commerce is reshaping the way that generations

growing up with eBay and Etsy, it reshapes how they view possessions.

Jon: Oh, okay. You can get anything in your house in two days.

Tim: You can get anything and anything in your room can be sold on Craigslist in a matter of minutes. And so they're talking about how the Craigslist, whatever, eBay's - I don't know how prominent eBay is anymore - but it is the mentality towards your things that's different. And then it begins to shape...

Jon: It's a transient kind of mentality.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Your possessions are more transient. And then it has the potential. I don't know how, but it remains to be seen how we will reshape our language about possessions when you view them as—

Jon: You don't buy things. You're leasing things.

Tim: Yeah, totally. You purchase things to use them for a while until more to your advantage. That's the example of a set of metaphors towards our possessions that's been waiting to be developed.

Jon: Yeah. That happens where if our culture changes enough, we start to live in a different reality in which we don't have a good way to talk about it until we do.

Tim: Oh, yes. Okay,

Jon: You know, and it will materialize.

Tim: Yes. I have an example of this in the notes, but I'll just relay it because it was really interesting. This was about the development of the concept of force fields in modern science.

Jon: Oh, right. Okay.

Tim: And really it's the use of the word field.

Jon: Okay, right. I think you mentioned this to me.

Tim: It was a physicist, Faraday. Michael Faraday? Daniel Faraday? It's a really important physicist.

Jon: I know the last name, Faraday.

Tim: Michael Faraday. Yeah, Michael Faraday. This whole institute, you know, physics dedicated to carrying on his legacy. This is mid-

1800s. He's like pioneering physicists. So he developed the concept of the magnetic field. So what we're talking about is, when a magnet...

Jon: The effect that a magnet has.

Tim: Totally. You know, the classic thing. If you threw a magnet on the table with little pieces of iron around it, it exerts a force. Or a force in a traction brings certain of those little pieces of iron they just stick to it.

Jon: And there's a real space around it which it works.

Tim: Correct. There is a space around it where the attraction is strong enough to actually move it. So the whole point was about, what do we call that?

Jon: Yeah, what do we call that space.

Tim: So he developed the metaphor, field, which was used, according to Oxford English dictionary at the time, to use an actual—

Jon: Plot of land.

Tim: Plot of land where everything in it is the same thing. It's a cornfield. It's a wheat field. So, it's a field dedicated to a certain thing and everything in it is the same. And then you can have field as a metaphor of steady. So a field of research, field of whatever, quantum mechanics.

Jon: So yeah, that was always a metaphor at some point. Faraday was like, "There's something we need to talk about, but we haven't the language for it yet."

Tim: Correct. So he adapted the English word, field and it actually changed its meaning. Because magnetic field is not like a wheat field because a wheat field doesn't have more wheat in the middle and less wheat on the outer rings.

Jon: What I love is that almost all language is that way.

Tim: Correct. That's right.

Jon: And that's why I'm always fascinated by etymology is because if you look into it, you'll usually find the basic metaphor behind the word you're using.

Tim: Correct.



Jon: We can play a little game right now just to find metaphors to cool words.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, totally. You can do this all day. That's why I'm reading Lakoff and Turner. But for some reason, I like this one where it was like he introduced...

Jon: That's a great one.

Tim: ...the word field and the world actually underwent transformation. And now we use the word force field or magnetic field as if it is a thing. And the whole point in this book that I was reading about metaphor was, it's not a thing. It's just there's a space around magnet

Jon: It's the effect that's...

[55:00]

Tim: ...that you can describe mathematically why there's this attraction between those and not the other pieces of iron.

Jon: So what is the thing?

Tim: What we're using, we're using the metaphor field to describe...

Jon: A phenomenon

Tim: ...a phenomenon

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. That happens within a certain degree of space and we use a metaphor, a field to talk about that space.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: And it reforms the meaning of the word.

Jon: I think of myself as an explainer is the term I like to use. What am I? What do I do with my life? I like to explain things. I'm an explainer. But the word explain has a cool metaphor behind it.

Tim: Oh, I don't know what it is.

Jon: Ex, out, planare...it's Latin. Explanare. And planare is plain. It actually before it came to me to explain something what we think of it, it meant to basically just like iron out or smooth out like a fabric or anything else. Explore it like explanare. Or it was also used to explain the blossoming of a flower. So you've all these plains that unfold - fold out. So it's an unfolding. It really means unfold. I remember being in Multnomah, where we both went to school, and there was this brand new metaphor everyone was using where they would sing in class, let's unpack that. First time I ever heard that.

Tim: Oh, really?

Jon: Let's unpack that idea. And everyone...

Tim: Yeah, sure. Like it's a piece of baggage.

Jon: Yeah. Like we had this box in front of us and we now got to open it up and pull things out. And I'd never heard that before, but I noticed all the smart people used it. So like, "This is an important metaphor."

Tim: Totally. Yeah.

Jon: And I think that's the idea of explaining is you're unpacking, you're unfolding things, seeing like how it all works because we do have ideas, well, packages of ideas I'll give to you. You know, like every one of our videos is like a package of an ideas.

Tim: That can be unpacked for—

Jon: But then you can unpack it more. And that's the role of an explainer.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Unpacking it in such a way that you go, "Oh, that's everything in there. Cool. Let's pack it back up," and now I have that thing.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, that's good. And what are we referring to? We're referring to an idea. We're referring to the concept...

Jon: Abstract ideas

Tim: ...in our brains.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But that we both agree exist in the world can be unpacked in these ways. I just realized, we thought of one in the meeting this morning. Broadcast.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: Which I think in English, originated for scattering seed, a farmer scattering seed and then it got adopted as a metaphor for...

Jon: Radio.

Tim: Radio.

Jon: Television

Tim: Television. For broadcasting.

Jon: And also this morning we realized we're broadcasters.

Tim: Yeah, that's one way to describe The Bible Project. We are media broadcast.

Jon: It makes us sound really important

Tim: Bible Project Broadcast.

Jon: Broadcasting, not live.

Tim: Okay, so this is all pretty intuitive. But it's so intuitive we don't stop to think about it. Okay, so here's the next step.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode, The Bible Project podcast. This episode was edited and produced by Dan Gummel. We are a crowd-funded, non-profit. We make videos that you can find for free on our website, [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com) and on our YouTube Channel, [youtube.com/thebibleproject](https://youtube.com/thebibleproject). These podcast conversations are Tim and I getting prepared to write this scripts for the videos.

In the next two episodes, we're going to look at two biblical metaphors that are woven through the entire biblical narrative but are hard to see with our modern westernize. Looking forward to those conversations. That's for being a part of this with us.

[End of transcription 59:05]