

[10 Commandments E5 Transcript]

[Speakers in audio file: Jon Collins and Tim Mackie]

Jon: The 10 Commandments in the Bible are not introduced as commands. They're called the 10 Words. And that's because they're not a rule book or a simple checklist to follow. The 10 Words are 10 foundational ways for finding life.

Tim: God's commands will always point God's people towards embracing even more life than you're currently experiencing and avoiding the diminishment of your life.

Jon: And this idea of diminishing life connects us to what we'll talk about today—the second word. And it's about idolatry. In its simple form, it reads:

Tim: "You will not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in the skies above or on the land beneath or in the waters underneath the land."

Jon: Now, idols are statues, usually of familiar animals, and they're meant to represent God and give you access to God. And while this practice was normal in the ancient world, the creator God prohibited Israel from doing it.

Tim: The moment you image Yahweh by something in your mind first and then give a physical expression to that by something you make, you are reducing the incomprehensible, transcendent reality.

Jon: But interestingly, while God prohibits Israel from making an image of him, God made an image of himself. It's in Genesis 1, where humans are called "the image of God." And in Deuteronomy, Moses reminds Israel of this in a creative way.

Tim: "The Lord has taken you all, the Israelites, and brought you all out of the iron furnace." So Egypt is described as a furnace for melting down metal. And this, I think, is a very subtle reference to the fact that Israel is to imagine themselves as the molten image of God.

Jon: If humans are God's image, then don't make images. *Be* the image of God to each other.

Tim: If you want the closest representation that will get you closer than anything else, look into the eyes of your neighbor, your coworker, your family member, and you will see

a reflection of the mystery and purpose of God that you will never encounter in a bronze bull.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I explore the second word in the 10 Commandments. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Music break]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: We are reading through the 10 Commandments.

Tim: Yes, we are.

Jon: And we actually started reading them proper last week.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, with command number one.

Jon: We read the ... command number one, or part one of command number one.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Depending on how you look at it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So, we're going to continue reading the 10 Commandments.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Give us a little summary of the theme of the commands and then how we got to the 10 here in Exodus.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, the 10 Commands are some of the most famous verses in the Bible. I guess they fit that category of perhaps the most recognizable but not the most understood parts of the Bible.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: On one level, they're just 10 words from God of what humans should do or not do.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, in that sense, it feels straightforward, and it tends to feed into a perception that people have about the Bible as a divine rule book or behavior manual. So, what we started with was looking at the theme of God telling people what to do in the Bible, which goes back to ... in the Genesis scroll, the word "command" appears for the first time in the garden of Eden story. And it appears again in the story of Noah and the flood. It appears again with reference to the story of Abraham. And then you get to the story of Israel at Mount Sinai with the commands, 10 Commandments. So, we looked at those first three stories, and what we found was this pattern that God's commands are first and foremost directing God's human partners about how to enjoy and discover life.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: God's commands are for life. So, the first command for life is Adam and Eve: "Enjoy all the trees of the gardens. Eat! Eat of all the trees of the garden." That's God's first command.

Jon: It's a good one.

Tim: It's a great one. And then there's a second part to that command, which is, "Prolong your life by not eating from the one tree that will kill you. But it looks like all the others. So you've got to trust my word and follow my command." So that sets the pattern. And we looked at the story of Noah, who's a righteous man who follows God's commands, and it results in the preservation of life for his family and all the animals. And then we looked at Abraham, whose partial obedience to God's commands, sometimes he does it, sometimes he doesn't, and it creates a lot of messes when he half-obey. But on his best days, he does trust God and do what God says. And so God looks back on the whole life of Abraham and lets those best days count for all of his days. And Abraham's described as somebody who kept God's command and statutes and laws and instructions. So when we get to the story of Israel at Mount Sinai, God has enlisted a family from the descendants of Abraham to be the vehicle of God restoring the Eden blessing to all the families of the earth—if they will listen to God's voice and keep his covenant, which means doing what he says. And so all of those stories and the meaning of God's commands get uploaded in to God's commands to Israel. And the first 10 words of God to Israel at Mount Sinai are: the 10 Commands.

Jon: By calling them "words," you allow these to not just be a list of things to check off.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Uhm—like a rule book. But more like 10 ways to think about, “What does it mean to find life?”

Tim: Yes, 10 ways that God has given us a pointer to embrace life and avoid death. I’ll just throw this in here just because it’s cool—but something Moses says about God’s commands in the book of Deuteronomy, but it’s kind of actually a great summary point. It’s near the end of his life and near the end of the Torah, in Deuteronomy, and Moses puts it this way. He says to the Israelites—Deuteronomy chapter 30, sorry, verse 15: “Look, I am setting before you life and the good, death and the bad. What I’m commanding you today”—there’s the word, same word from garden of Eden, *tsavah* in the Hebrew—“what I’m commanding you today is to love Yahweh your God by going in his ways and keeping his commandments, his statutes, his regulations, and then you will have life.” Pretty simple math equation.

[Laughter]

Tim: Love Yahweh—which means, keep what he commands—you will have life. You’ll become numerous, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land you’re going. Sounds like the garden of Eden. Later on, in paragraph verse 19, he says, “I bring forward as a witness against y’all today the skies in the land. I’ve set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you can have life. You and your offspring by loving Yahweh and listening to your voice, clinging to him”—this is rad—“because he is your life. He is your length of days.” Such a great way to summarize that.

Jon: God is your life.

Tim: God is life, which rings true to the seven-day creation narrative and the Eden story. God is the source of life.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And so, while God’s commands will always—even if they don’t feel like it or seem like it in the moment—point God’s people towards embracing even more life than you’re currently experiencing and avoiding the diminishment of your life, that is death. There you go. It’s a great summary.

Jon: That actually also brings us into the first command.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah.

Jon: God is life.

Tim: Yes, he is your life.

Jon: He is your life. And so, worship God alone.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or what's ... how does the command say it?

Tim: Yeah. So now jumping right into the 10 Commands.

Jon: Yeah, let's jump in.

Tim: Okay. "I am Yahweh, your Elohim, the one who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. There will not be for you any other *'elohim* against my face, before my face. Before me."

Jon: "Before me."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "I am yours."

Tim: Mhm. "I am your Elohim," or in the words of Deuteronomy 30, "I am your life."
Yeah.

Jon: So don't put anything else in front of me, beside me, against me, instead of me.

Tim: No thing else is your life.

Jon: Nothing else can actually be your life.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's the first word.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. And in a way, that reflects back to the garden of Eden. God gives these trees as a gift—right?—of the vehicle of life. But then there's that one tree that is said, mysteriously, to convey eternal life, the tree of life. And you're like, "But only God has unending, infinite life." But this tree becomes, like, this vehicle of that infinite life. So the tree isn't your life. God is your life.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And right now, God's relating to you through the fruit of this tree.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, eat from that tree, and don't eat from the other tree that'll kill you. Anyway, God is your life.

Jon: Yeah. In that sense, the fruit of the tree becomes life and nourishment for you.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But what's really ultimate life in that situation?

Tim: Yeah. What's behind it? Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: It's God, and then it's expressed through his word—

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: —his command.

Tim: Yeah. Command.

Jon: That brings the true life.

Tim: Yeah. So not having any other *'elohim* means recognizing there are many ...

Jon: Other forms of life?

Tim: Yeah, and in this case, there are other spiritual beings to which ...

Jon: Yeah, powers.

Tim: Yeah, powers.

Jon: Principalities.

Tim: Real powers at work in God's world, which God created, to which God has delegated responsibility. Some of the primary ones—actually, we'll talk about them today—were the lights in the sky, have been viewed as some sort of transcendent, powerful being by most humans for most of human history. And for the biblical authors, they are really important delegates of God's power, but they are creatures, not creator, they are not your life. So, no other *'elohim*.

Jon: They are living beings; they are not your life.

Tim: Yeah. So that's the first command. Don't have any other *'elohim* before me. The second command just comes hot on the heels of number one. I mean, it's the next sentence, and that's what we're going to talk about today—closely related. So right

after, “There will not be for you any other *'elohim* before me. You will not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in the skies above or on the land beneath or in the waters underneath the land. You will not worship them. You will not serve them, because I, Yahweh your Elohim, am a passionate Elohim, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the threes and the fours for those who hate me but showing loyal love to thousands for those who love me and keep my commands.” So we’re looking at my translation, and the opening words of the 10 Commands are, “I am Yahweh your Elohim.” What’s interesting is these two commands are bundled together. “There will not be any other *'elohim*. You will not make for yourself an idol.” So, two negatives.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Then you get a list of what the idols might represent: Skies above, land beneath, waters under the land. Then you get two more negatives: “You will not worship them. You will not serve them.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Then you get: “Because I, Yahweh your Elohim, am a passionate Elohim.” And then you’re back to this description of Yahweh Elohim, and you’re like, “Oh, I’m looking at a symmetrical paragraph.”

Jon: I see.

Tim: And at the center are three lines describing what idols might represent: In the skies above, the land beneath, the waters under the land.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It’s what you call a symmetry or a chiasm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, part of the ... the reasoning for no other *'elohim* and no idols both comes at the beginning and the end.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “I’m Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. No other *'elohim* did that.” But then, also, Yahweh your Elohim is passionate, *qanna'*. And there are multigenerational consequences for giving your allegiance to an *'elohim* other than Yahweh.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Uh, what I want to do is actually put the discussion of the passion of God after we talk about idolatry a little more.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But no other *'elohim* and no idols are closely bound together. We talked about no other *'elohim* and what “having no other *'elohim* before me” means in the last conversation. So now we’re talking about: What is an idol? What’s the significance of idols, and why is it such a big deal? I think we should talk about that first.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Might seem self-evident to, maybe, different ones of us listening or thinking about it, for different reasons. But why is this such a big deal in the Bible? Idolatry. It’s a pretty big deal.

Jon: It is. Yeah.

Tim: One of the biggest deals, you could say.

Jon: Yeah. It’s the problem that keeps arising in Israel for the whole story: Idolatry.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, what do these things mean in their ancient context that might help us think about what it means for us in our context?

[Music break]

Tim: Okay, so first, a little vocabulary lesson on idolatry in the Bible. The word used right here, “Don’t make for yourself a ...,” and then the Hebrew word’s a noun—uhm—*pesel*. *Pesel*. It is used a little over 30 times in the Hebrew Bible. It’s a very common word. What’s great is that this noun, *pesel*, has a verb attached, *pasal*, which means to carve or to shape something.

Jon: Hmm. Okay. So, it’s the carved thing.

Tim: *Pesel* is the thing that you carved.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yep. Yep. Then it can be referred to something you've chiseled out of stone or something that you've carved out of wood.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, wood or ... or stone. So, a couple examples. Habakkuk—in a little poem where he's making fun of people who trust their lives to idols—in Habakkuk 2:18, he says, "What value is a *pesel* when its shaper is the one who *pasaled* it?" Because the one who shaped his shaped object trusts in it, but it's an idol that can't talk.

Jon: Yeah. It's an inanimate object.

Tim: Like, you made it. Why are you trusting in something that you made? Now, in a way, I trust in things that humans make all the time. In fact, I am right this moment.

Jon: You're talking about sitting in a chair?

Tim: Mhm. And talk—I'm talking into this, like, black cylinder object that I'm just trusting —

Jon: Is doing its job.

Tim: —carries sound waves and converts it into ones and zeros and—uh—right? And a computer and then I'm just trusting it all works.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, in that sense, it's fairly rational to trust in something that you made.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But I guess it would be irrational for me to trust in this chair if my house is burning down and to be like, "Chair, save me!" Like that's kind of more what Habakkuk's making fun of here. "Save me, oh chair!"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And this gets back to this idea of, "What gives you life?"

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Or what can sustain life?

Tim: What really is the source of your life? Yeah.

Jon: And it's not something you can make.

Tim: Mhm. So that's *pesel*.

Jon: Okay. Is that the most common way to refer to idol?

Tim: No.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: No, actually, a lot of these get used a lot, and we're going to see they work in combination.

Jon: But this is the one that just showed up?

Tim: This is the one in the 10 Commandments.

Jon: All right.

Tim: *Pesel*. Yep.

Jon: The carved thing.

Tim: Carved thing. Another very common word is *massekhhah*, used about 26 times in the Hebrew Bible. It's the thing poured out. It's literally from the verb, "to pour out." So it's referring to molten metal that you pour into a mold.

Jon: Okay. The molded thing.

Tim: So, yeah, the—a molded thing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, it's usually translated as "graven image."

Jon: Oh, that's where we get "graven."

Tim: Yeah, in the King James.

Jon: And engraved?

Tim: Yeah, it's interes—yeah, from engraved, but ... or, or molten. I guess, molten.

Jon: Yeah, where does that word come from? Graven.

Tim: Graven. Engraved. From—uhm—I'm sure, a Latin root for grave.

Jon: It's got to mean shaped in some way.

Tim: Yeah, and then ... or molten, like, poured out.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Molten. And I just think of molten lava.

Jon: Yeah, totally.

Tim: The only time I use the word "molten" is talking about molten lava. I don't even use that word very often. So.

Jon: It's a great word.

Tim: So, in the story of the golden calf, the first idol in Israel's history.

Jon: Oh, that's ... that's a molten one.

Tim: Molten, because he takes—Aaron takes gold rings.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: We're told that he "fashions them with a graving tool and makes it into a molten calf." So, at some point, he melted it down. We're not told when he did that. We're just told what he does with the material after he's poured it into a mold.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And he begins to shape that.

Jon: You gotta get really hot to like ...

Tim: Yeah. You need a hot fire to melt down metal.

Jon: That's a special furnace.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: That they constructed out there in the wilderness.

Tim: That's good. Good point. How'd that work?

Jon: Like they were, like, real intent to figure this out.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, or maybe they just heated it up so that it was moldable enough.

Jon: Moldable enough. That's true.

Tim: But I guess if you're turning rings—

Jon: That's true. Gold can get malleable pretty—

Tim: Just take a hundred rings and get them into a form of a calf. You got to melt those things.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So yeah. It's a good point. So, a *massekhhah*, a molten image or a graven image, is associated with metalsmiths.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: Mhm. Yep. Then—here's some more general terms, but this one's important—the word *tselem*, which comes from a verb *tsalam*, which means to, also, to carve or to cut.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, Ezekiel uses this word to describe carved images on, like, big walls. Wall carvings.

Jon: Wall engravings.

Tim: Mhm, wall engravings. Yeah. Often called relief images.

Jon: Oh, right, mhm.

Tim: Or something like that. This is the word used to describe human beings on page one—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —of Genesis. We'll come back to that.

Jon: The image of God in Genesis 1.

Tim: Yep. Yep.

Jon: Yep.

Tim: So, the ... *tselem* is used about 15 times in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The next two are—

Jon: Man, I had no idea there were so many.

Tim: Yeah, the next two are very common, and they're both trash talk.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: They're both, like, derogatory—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —words that have an insult built into them.

Jon: Love it.

Tim: So one is the Hebrew word *'elil*, which is also a pun, because the first two letters of *'elil* are the word *'el*.

Jon: Oh, which means “god.”

Tim: Which is a shortened form of *'elohim*, which means “deity.”

Jon: Mhm. Right.

Tim: So already you're taking the letters of the word “god,” and then you're adding two more letters, and you're making, uh, like, a joke out of it, because *'elil* means “useless” or “worth nothing,” related to a Semitic root from Akkadian, *ulalu*, which is, like, a nothingness or an insult. And actually, you can use this word *'elil* in Hebrew to describe many different things that are useless. So, Job, in the book of Job, once he realizes his three friends that presumably came to comfort him are just there to lecture him about God and his life—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —apparently they know more about his life than he does. So he calls them “useless doctors who have come to a man who’s sick.” So he—in Job 13—he calls them “physicians or doctors of *’elil*,” doctors of nothing, no value.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Valueless doctors.

Jon: Okay.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. It’s fighting words.

Tim: Totally. So back to Habakkuk 2:18, when it’s used to describe idols, he says, “What value is a *pese/* when its carver has *pasaed* it? A molten—there’s *massekhah*—a molten idol that teaches lies because the one who fashioned his creation trusts in it, even though it is a mute *’elil*.”

Jon: Hmm. A useless, voiceless—

Tim: Useless, can’t talk. Why are you trusting something that doesn’t even talk to save you?

Jon: Right. Hmm.

Tim: So this is used 20 times in the Hebrew Bible—

Jon: An *’elil*.

Tim: —to refer to idols.

Jon: And *’elilim* means it’s plural.

Tim: *’Elilim* there is plural, and it sounds like *’elohim*.

Jon: Oh, that’s interesting.

Tim: Yeah. So that’s first trash talk word for idols, which is just to call them useless.

Jon: Yeah. All right.

Tim: Useless things.

Jon: It's not a nice thing to say to someone.

Tim: Totally. This next one is my favorite.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Because, depending on how comfortable you are with profanity in the Bible—

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh! Okay. Well, let's say I'm comfortable.

Tim: —okay. So the Hebrew word is *gillul*. It's used—it's actually the most common word for idols in the Bible. It's used almost 50 times.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Almost 40 of those times is in the book of Ezekiel. This is the prophet Ezekiel's favorite word to refer to idols.

Jon: Alright.

Tim: *Gillul* essentially refers to turds or poop. Poop balls. Balls of poop.

Jon: Wait, balls?

Tim: So, fill in the profanity.

Jon: But why balls? Why balls? I mean, rabbits have like poop balls.

Tim: Okay, well, or rolls ... rolled up.

Jon: Rolled up?

Tim: Maybe cylinders.

Jon: Cylinders?

Tim: You know, I mean, poop has a cylinder shape.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: If-if it has—

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: If you've got some ... some form to it.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Whereas ...

[Laughter]

Tim: I'm sorry.

Jon: Why is it so funny to talk about poop?

Tim: I know. Yeah. It's like my kids. Okay. So, what's also great is Ezekiel didn't invent this word, but this is a hybrid word. So, the consonants of *gillul* are G-L-L or *gimel*, *lamed*, *lamed*. And that comes from a Hebrew verb, *galal*, which means to roll something up, like a roll form.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like cylinder or ball form.

Jon: All right.

Tim: But the vowels of *gillul*, *i*, *u*, come from the Hebrew word *shiqquts*.

Jon: Wait, the vowels come from a different word?

Tim: Yes. The vowels are the vowels of *i*, *u*.

Jon: How would we even know this?

Tim: Well, because Ezekiel combines the two words regularly.

Jon: Oh, okay. Ah, okay.

Tim: So *shiqquts* means something that is—

Jon: So he's making his own word?

Tim: —gross or disgusting. But Ezek—this appears the first time in Leviticus.

Jon: Okay. So this is a normal word that is kind of a combination of two words.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. So it's the vowels of the word for “disgusting,” and it's the consonants of the word for “poop.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Disgusting poop.

Jon: What a wonderful word.

Tim: It's like ... so we have the, like, “hangry.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: A hybrid word.

Jon: Okay. “Angry” and “hungry.”

Tim: Yeah. It's the word “hungry,” but with the vowels of “angry,” with the consonants kind of, you know, mixed together.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And we've invented a new word out of two separate words.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But once you combine them, it refers to something you're like, “Yeah, I get it.”

Jon: That word works so well.

Tim: Hangry.

Jon: I don't know when it showed up in the English language, but maybe a decade ago, I feel like.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, maybe the last decade.

Jon: And now it just feels so normal.

Tim: Mhm. Yes.

Jon: Everyone gets it.

Tim: I'm hangry.

Jon: I'm hangry.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. So, *gillul* is one of those words.

Jon: Disgusting balls of—

Tim: Poop.

Jon: Poop.

Tim: Poop balls. Or create your own new translation in your mind.

[Laughter]

Jon: Turd rolls.

Tim: Oh my. And actually, there are some times where *gillul* actually does refer to human poop. Famously, Ezekiel bread. In Ezekiel 4, Ezekiel is supposed to do this public sign act.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: Where he's supposed to make this bread out of—

Jon: Bake it on top of ...

Tim: —out of subpar ingredients that you have on hand if your flour mill's not working.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then he's told to cook it using dried human *gillul*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: As, like, the fuel for the fire.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then he's like, "Gross, I'm not going to do that." And God says, "Okay, use, uh, *gillul* from animals or cows," which is more normal.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Lots of people use ...

Jon: Not to cook with, no.

Tim: But as fuel for fire.

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: Yeah!

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: People do that?

Tim: Cow pies. Dried cow pies.

Jon: Oh, you can burn those?

Tim: Oh, yeah. Because it's just grass that's gone through a cow's digestive system.

Jon: I've never burned one.

Tim: Burn it. Yeah, I think it's, like, really normal source of fuel in many cultures.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. Anyway, *gillul*, disgusting poop ball, is—

Jon: —is what Ezekiel likes to call idols.

Tim: So that's pretty—he is judging.

Jon: It's very judgmental. Which is—

Tim: —it's a judgy thing to say.

Jon: It's ... yeah.

Tim: But what Ezekiel is reflecting is his passion—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —for the well-being of his people. And Ezekiel is filled with a kind of frustration about watching the leaders of his people no longer give their allegiance to Yahweh, who is their life. But instead begin to attribute the rain and the crops and their safety and their well-being to the statues that represent other *'elohim*. Mhm.

Jon: Toilet talk could sound really silly and childish.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: But there are turns of phrases that we have that are really cruel that refer to poop.

Tim: Yep. Yeah. Yes.

Jon: So on that spectrum, what's Ezekiel doing? Is he like ...

Tim: Yeah, I guess it's—

Jon: Is it playground potty talk or is it like a real adult kind of dig?

Tim: Yeah, it's more like that. I mean, it's ... he's ... Ezekiel, just as a communicator, often goes for shock factor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it's rhetoric. It's a rhetorical strategy.

Jon: No, no, I get that, in terms of shock value. I'm just trying to understand if Ezekiel came to my church service and preached.

Tim: Mmm. Mmm. Hmm.

Jon: What English word?

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Because you got like ... you got poop ball or you got, like, turd face.

[Laughter]

Jon: But then you got some, like, real zingers.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: That I'm just going to leave to your imagination.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. My hunch is it would be the second category.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That it would ... we would kind of be a little shocked.

Jon: We would—we would be a little shocked.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yep. And that's just because—

Jon: There would be some comment cards that Sunday.

Tim: Yeah. And that's just because there are multiple topics that Ezekiel addresses in this book where he chooses words and images that you're kind of like, "Whoa, that's super intense."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Related to the human body. So he was going—but also, he’s a refugee who was forcibly taken captive.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Like, when an army invaded his city, killed people that he knows and loves and hauled him off in chains into exile. He lives in a refugee camp, right? That’s his life experience. So he’s not going to have like a calm disposition as he thinks about the reasons for why something like that happened.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: He’s full of intense emotion. And I think that’s reflected in his poetry. And, and perhaps that’s part of why he uses such a derogatory word.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So these are our words. So we’ve mostly just noticed that most of them refer to the physical process or shape of the idol. Carving, molded image, shaped or cut. And then these last two refer to a value judgment.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: 'Elil is useless. Gillul is disgusting.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Waste.

Jon: Ah. There it is.

Tim: Waste.

Jon: Disgusting waste.

Tim: Disgusting waste. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this is the first of many times a command like this will be repeated. Idols are a big, big issue in the Bible because they were a big, prominent feature of ancient cultural life and religion for most cultures, for most of human history. So it gets repeated, I don’t know, dozens of times. I don’t even know what to say. The 10 Commandments is just the first of dozens.

[Music break]

Tim: “You will not make for yourself an idol.” So what’s interesting, you know, the first idol that is made in the story of the Bible, that we know the shape of it, is of a little cow, of a calf. And what’s interesting is—in terms of archaeology and what archaeology has surfaced in the land of Israel, Palestine, Egypt, ancient Babylon—little molten, molded calves or bulls are one of the most common ancient statues that have been dug up from towns and villages throughout the ancient Near East. So that’s interesting. And if you think, especially in cultures where animal domestication, cattle herding, breeding, raising was, like—basically that and goats or sheep—kind of your main thing. I guess if you’re going to choose between a symbol of power and fertility, having an idol of a goat or a sheep ... a little less impressive than, like, an ox.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Ox are a little more powerful.

Jon: And a calf is a baby ox?

Tim: Calf is a baby ox. Yeah. So, a symbol of power in its youngest form.

Jon: Mmm. Okay. That’s what Israel makes in the wilderness, is a golden calf.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: And that’s ... you’re showing me a 12th-century bronze bull from Samaria.

Tim: Samaria, like from northern—a northern Israelite town.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: And that would have been, uh, an idol? That’s an idol?

Tim: Yep. That’s right. Yep. So, this is kind of well-known. It was—it was dug up in the region near what was the ancient Samaria. And it’s a bronze bull. This is almost certainly the very thing in the mind of the story of the golden calf.

Jon: Okay. This doesn’t seem very big.

Tim: No, these are pretty small.

Jon: These are pretty small.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: I guess I always imagined the one that Israel made as being pretty big.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It could have been small.

Tim: It doesn't talk about its size.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Doesn't refer to its size. These ...

Jon: All of a sudden now I'm, like, picturing, I'm just really scrapping together this tiny little, silly golden calf.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's like a paperweight.

Tim: Yeah. These that we're looking at images of are about the size of paperweights on your desk.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. Okay.

Tim: Or something. Yeah. Yeah. So that's bulls. So bulls were really common in the ancient Near East.

Jon: Because of power and fertility.

Tim: Well, cattle played many roles. One, they were a source of food.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But also, they were a source of productivity because you can pull plows. You can turn a whole field into a productive, food-producing field through the power of a cow. But as these horns—horns of an ox are symbols of power in—in biblical poetry. The raised horns of a wild ox are often symbols of victory. Victory in power.

Jon: Can we take one step back?

Tim: Okay. Yeah.

Jon: Why choose an image of an animal at all?

Tim: Exactly. Yeah.

Jon: I'm wrestling through why a cow versus ... and then I'm like, but what's the idea behind ...

Tim: That's great. So, let's quick survey. Lots of animals become symbols of divine powers at work in the world. In Egypt—and I've got some other images here—the falcon or the eagle—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —are very common images of different deities. The eagle is the primary symbol for the sun—god of the sun—Egyptian religion. But you also have—snakes are very common animal icons. Yeah, I mean, we're here going into how ancient people imagined animals.

Jon: Yeah. Tell me about that.

[Laughter]

Tim: Well, I probably should do a lot more reading and learning about it before I—

Jon: But what do you know?

Tim: —say anything. Well, I think the idea is that animals are in this in-between category between plants and humans.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: They're animate. They move around. They are more like humans than plants are like humans. They have a certain degree of intelligence, though pretty low—but not dolphins.

Jon: Not octopus.

Tim: Or octopus. It's like super intelligent.

Jon: Pigs.

Tim: Pigs. Semi—semi-intelligent.

Jon: Are actually highly intelligent.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: No, I guess they're more intelligent than dogs.

Tim: Oh, well, that's probably ... that's not very surprising.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah, dogs. So, they're like us, and there's a conviction, for the biblical authors especially, that somehow humans are more like the divine realm than anything else.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That human life and intelligence and rationality is something that connects us to what is above and beyond the earth and the animals. But also, animals have this connection to the ground, to the plants. They're at home there in a way that humans don't feel like we are.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: They multiply like humans do. They have the power of generation within them. And also, they provide for us. They do things for us. So, I think there's probably more there, but because what deities are—these other *'elohim*—are usually what we would call natural forces. The weather.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Fertility. And so, animals are this, like, medium, this meeting place.

Jon: How do I visualize a ... a—

Tim: Forces of nature.

Jon: —a force of nature outside of me that I think actually is a being?

Tim: Yeah, a power.

Jon: Or a power.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And the animals become the portfolio of creatures to think of them through.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I think I get it enough.

Tim: Yeah, actually, here—real quick. One of my favorite Jewish commentators on Exodus, a deceased Hebrew Bible scholar, Nahum Sarna, from his Exodus commentary, he has this to say about the bull. So he says, “Throughout the ancient Near East, the bull was a symbol of lordship, leadership, strength, and fertility. It was either deified and worshiped or used as a representation of divinity. Often the bull or some other animal served as a pedestal on which a god stood.” Actually, that’s true. Often, because you could ride a bull—people often did—or ride a cow.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And so, the bull was often viewed as, like, the chariot or the car. And so, Aaron, it seems, was following a contemporary artistic, like, convention in making a bull. So Sarna makes a case here that he thinks that Aaron intended it to be, like, as a throne for Yahweh, whereas the people thought of it as, like—

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: —a representation of the deity.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it actually makes sense of a little detail in the story of the golden calf, because when he presents the golden calf to the people, the people say, “These are your *’elohim*, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And then Aaron sees what’s happening—right?—what the people are doing. And then he built an altar, and Aaron said, “A feast for Yahweh tomorrow!” So almost seems like—

Jon: He tries to redirect it.

Tim: —he’s trying to redirect, yeah. They think it’s a representation of the divine powers that brought them out of Egypt, and Aaron’s like, “Wait, no, that’s what I meant. I meant that this is, like, Yahweh’s ... Yahweh’s bull.”

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So, he tries to redirect it: “Let’s have a feast for Yahweh tomorrow.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And in which case, both the first and second command are being called up here.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: No other *'elohim*, and no idols that represent Yahweh or any other *'elohim*. Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, I don’t know if I’ve scratched where you’re itching here.

Jon: No, I think so. Maybe one more question related to just this ancient practice of idolatry.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So, if I’m an ancient, I live in a world where I perceive that there are—there are otherworldly powers above and beyond, invisible, that influence me and have their own personality, and they can become happy with me, they can get frustrated with me.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And so, if the rain comes or doesn’t come, or if there’s a storm, or if there’s a plague, or if there’s whatever, if I can have kids or not have kids, it’s all about the emotions and the desires of these beings.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And so, the very tangible way that I interact with them is through creating carvings.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And engraved, kind of, images that represent them.

Tim: Mmm. Or that represent a thing in creation that is itself, like, an animate living symbol or representation of that transcendent power.

Jon: Okay. So, it becomes the thing by which now I have access—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: —to this other greater thing.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: It is a medium.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Such that, that divine power or presence was viewed to inhabit or be present within.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Definitely becomes associated with, or bound up with. So, a real ox is itself—

Jon: Yeah, a marvel.

Tim: —I think, in the ... in the view of an ancient Canaanite, is filled with that divine, transcendent power of fertility.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: So, I make a representation, an image of the ox, and that divine power humbles itself to take up residence, be associated with this statue of the thing.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm. So that's it.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I think that's the basic idea. So why would the biblical authors think that this is a problem?

[Music break]

Tim: What's interesting is, biblical authors just often make fun of idols, like Habakkuk. Like, "Why? You made it, why are you trusting in it to save your life?" But what's underneath that?

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Why think that this is a huge problem? There's one passage in Deuteronomy 4 where you get the closest to, like, a reason why.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And it's Moses retelling the story of what happened at Mount Sinai, when Israel heard God speak the 10 Commandments.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: We talked about this a couple episodes ago. And he puts it this way, Deuteronomy 4 verse 15, he says, "So watch yourselves carefully because you all did not see any form." He uses the Hebrew word *temunah*, which means, like, the physical outline or shape.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "You didn't see any form on the day that Yahweh spoke to you at Mount Horeb from the middle of the fire."

Jon: So, when Yahweh's voice was booming down from Mount Sinai—

Tim: In a cloud and lightning.

Jon: —they didn't look up and see Yahweh.

Tim: A humanoid. A humanoid.

Jon: Or any form.

Tim: Or any, actually, yeah, thank you. Any form.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You didn't see any form.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “So watch yourselves so that you don’t act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form”—he uses the same word, shape or form—“of any carved or shaped figure. The shape of a male or female human. The shape of any animal on the land. The shape of any winged bird up in the sky. The shape of any creeping thing on the ground. The shape of any fish in the water below the land.” Like, oh, that’s the whole view of the cosmos from Genesis 1. So, no human on the land, no animal on the land, no bird in the sky, no creeper on the ground or fish in the water. Also, “Watch yourselves so that you don’t lift your eyes up to the skies and see the sun or the moon and the stars, the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship and serve them. These are the ones that Yahweh your Elohim has assigned or allotted to all the peoples under the whole of the sky. But Yahweh has taken you all and brought you all out of the iron furnace from Egypt to be a people of his own possession, like you are today.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So, there’s a few reasons here. One of them’s on the surface, the other one is a little under the surface. And I think it’s ... they’re both equally powerful in terms of the reasons for not making idols.

Jon: Mhm. So, okay, yeah. You didn’t see God in any form.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And you’re going to have this impulse to try to create a form of God. That’s just normal in your culture. But there’s something dangerous and misguided about trying to create a form to contain Yahweh God.

Tim: There you go, there you go—contain. Notice, yeah, you drew on that metaphor there.

Jon: Sure, right.

Tim: But I like it, I like where you’re going there.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Because the moment you take any thing that’s beyond what you can imagine—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —the moment you create an image in your mind of it, you are already limiting and containing it because you’re reducing it to something you’ve experienced.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: I've experienced an ox.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I've experienced a sheep or a cow.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But say I'm an ancient person—what is a lightning storm, really? What is a rainstorm? I actually have no clue. No clue.

Jon: Yeah, if you're ... as an ancient.

Tim: But I might imagine it and try and reduce it. Anytime you imagine it, you're reducing it.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: And that—I think that's the dynamic that we're trying to avoid.

Jon: Yeah. What's so fascinating is, it's easy to think of idolatry as replacing Yahweh instead of just reducing Yahweh.

Tim: Reducing, okay, good.

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's a great distinction.

Jon: Because what—you were showing that perhaps Aaron, his intention wasn't to replace Yahweh.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: But all of a sudden, he realizes, "This is getting out of hand, and people are missing the point, and they are replacing Yahweh." He was just trying to contain or kind of give shape to the people who are kind of, like, "Tell us how we can trust and get access to Yahweh."

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: The mountain's actually kind of scary.

Tim: Yeah, mountain's scary—we don't want to go up there.

Jon: And so, there is an impulse to try to actually access the creator of life, but to do it in a way that begins to minimize and reduce.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And contain.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So, the moment you image Yahweh by something in your mind first and then give a physical expression to that by something you make, you are reducing the incomprehensible, transcendent reality. We're back to a gigantic step forward in the human imagination of God, because many ancient Near Eastern cultures believed there was a chief deity, you know, and that the mystery of how the chief gods work and what they do, that that's beyond human understanding. But this is a step to say, but now, actually, the One Who Is—remember Yahweh means “the one who is”—there is just one source of all reality, and that One Who Is is so above and beyond our imagining, it actually becomes outlawed to try and imagine—

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: —that One, in the technical sense of image, image that One in your mind, or to give physical expression.

Jon: I think there's more to understand there, but if I could, can we pivot, then?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Because all of a sudden, he starts talking about the stars in the sky.

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: And ... so, don't image Yahweh, don't reduce Yahweh to any form.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay. There's more there to explore.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But then he says, “And don't lift up your eyes to the skies, and look at the sun and the moon and the stars, the host of heaven, and serve them or worship them.”

Tim: Yeah, that's not Yahweh, either.

Jon: That's not Yahweh, either.

Tim: Yeah. And so here we're back to—we're meditating on an important idea from the seven-day creation narrative—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: —that on days four and six, God makes two categories of rulers.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The word “rule and have authority” is used two times in the seven-day creation narrative. The first rulers are the rulers of the sky, and it's exactly these three: the sun, the moon, and the stars rule the sky. And they are called *'ot* in Hebrew—signs, or symbols, an image.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: They are creatures that actually do reflect something really important about the One Who Is.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But they are not the One Who Is; they are a sign of the One Who Is.

Jon: And God allotted to the peoples under heaven, these stars.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, well, that's a whole other—

Jon: And that's a rabbit hole.

Tim: —rabbit hole we don't have time for.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, you have this hint to the rulers above—or maybe not a hint, just a reference to them.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You also have here another hint to the seven-day creation narrative: To the rulers below. It's very subtle, but notice what Moses says here is in verse 20, we read, “The Lord has taken you all, the Israelites, and brought you all out of the iron furnace.”

Jon: Referring to Egypt.

Tim: That is Egypt.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, there's just about three or four times that Egypt is described as a furnace for melting down metal.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And this, I think, is a very subtle reference to the fact that Israel is to imagine themselves as the molten image of God, the actual molten image of God. You yourselves are the image that God has made.

Jon: You're saying with this phrase, "Taking you out of the iron furnace," is a subtle way to say, "Guys, you're the image."

Tim: "You're the image." That's right. This referring to the process—

Jon: I—I formed you.

Tim: —of melting down metal to form, uh, a statue. Yeah. So, you shouldn't make an image of God, because you will reduce the transcendence, the mystery, the reality of God in the very act of imaging. But actually, years ago, we made a video where we put this into a little line: Humans shouldn't make images of God, because God has already made an image of himself, and that is—

Jon: That *is* humans.

Tim: —humans.

Jon: And it's not a statue of humans, it's just humans.

Tim: At the living, breathing.

Jon: The living, breathing humans are God's image. If you want to find a connection to Yahweh God, it's other humans.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That's pretty profound.

Tim: It's very profound. And now we're back to, really, the theme of the image of God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so, we'll just reference podcast series and discussions there. But if you want the closest representation—and still just a representation, a reduction. But a reduc—

Jon: But one that you can use that will get you there.

Tim: The image that ... that will, well, that will get you closer than anything else—in, then, in heaven or on earth—look into the eyes of your neighbor, your coworker, your family member, and you will see a reflection of the mystery and purpose of God that you will never encounter in a bronze bull.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or a statue of an eagle, or a statue of a human.

Jon: Or anything that we can make.

Tim: Yeah. Because another human is a being with whom you can relate, a being that has a mind and heart and desires, and that requires mutuality, reciprocity, and love to relate to. And that experience of having to accommodate and learn to know an other is the most like what it is to encounter God than anything else.

Jon: Huh.

[Laughter]

Tim: Uh, there's a great mystery there.

Jon: Yeah, that's wild.

Tim: But that, I think, is what's under the claim here. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Why would you make an image when you, yourself, and the mystery of your existence, and living with other humans, is the most brilliant image you could ever encounter? Why would you relate to a statue? Why would you want that? That's going to just distort your view of everything, including yourself, distort your view of yourself.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: This is another example of a huge leap forward in thought, then.

Tim: Yes. Yes. And that every human—

Jon: Yeah, male and female.

Tim: —male and female, rich or poor, slave or free—every human is an image of God. It's core to the claim of Genesis 1 and the biblical story, and that was a radical, innovative contribution to the history of human thought.

[Music break]

Jon: So, idolatry, now, I'm—I'm realizing, has two very different problems.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: I think.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: One is—when I usually think of idolatry, I think of replacing God.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: I think of making an object, giving it divine authority in my life, and so neglecting Yahweh as life.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And that's what the choice between Baal or Yahweh kind of represents—like, which God.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But what seems to be kind of more the focus here, potentially, or at least equally, is not trying to replace Yahweh, but just reducing Yahweh. It's this impulse to say, "I want to understand Yahweh. I want to do it in a way that feels safe and controllable. The mountain's scary. So let me create a vehicle to do that that kind of simplifies or domesticates or reduces," and that is also really dangerous.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so both of those are a form of idolatry, right?

Tim: Yeah. Yes, got it. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Does that make sense?

Tim: Yeah. So let me add one more to those two.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Which I thought was going to be the second of your two, but ... so it is both reducing Yahweh, the mystery of the One Who Is.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Reducing it to something I can imagine and then handle and deal with and manipulate. Sort of like it's God's way of saying humans don't get to determine who God is when they relate to God, just based on their limited life experience and imagination. Who God is really will always supersede and transcend our imagination. And so, it's an insult to God, and it's not true to reality, but at the same time, it's an insult to our own dignity. To treat a created thing as an embodiment of the divine is to ignore the biblical claim, at least, that you are yourself the closest image of the divine mystery.

Jon: Yeah. The most tangible—

Tim: The most tangible—

Jon: —expression of who God is—

Tim: —image. Yeah, so it's ...

Jon: —that you can have access to—

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: —is you and your neighbors and your enemies.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So, whether you are reducing or replacing, there's this third problem, which is missing out on something that seems pretty important, which is the role and the purpose of humanity.

Tim: Hmm. Yeah. Yeah. And maybe this goes to the difference between humans and animals. Humans are invited in the biblical story and in our life experience, like, humans have this ability to transcend nature and natural impulse and to discern what is good and to discern between good and bad. And actually, that was the educational program God was inviting humans into—right?—in the garden, which is to trust God’s command and that that will lead us to know good from bad. And then, so remarkable—humans can look out at a situation and have some sense of what is good and then act in ways that live up to that good. So, it’s good for me to live and have food. Every animal wants food.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But man, you know what is also good is to withhold food from myself so that I can give that food to others as a sheer act of love. And then you might say, “Well, that’s tribal good, because it’ll help your group survive.”

Jon: Mhm. Mhm.

Tim: But what about, like—right?—instances where you want to do love and do good, and you withhold from yourself in radical ways, that you truly diminish your own life? And these are debates about altruism and other forms of altruism in nature. But it is remarkable that humans have this ability to say, “You know, what’s good actually is what’s bad for me—and to do good to another.” And you’re transcending nature at that point to pursue the true and the good and the beautiful that’s not reducible to the laws of nature. So, I think the biblical authors saw that, and they know this is part of the human experience, and that that good points to the author and the source of all good. And then, in that sense, we become images of divine good. And that humans are the unique vehicle of the way divine goodness is present in our world. We are the image, the closest image. And when humans forget that, when we violate that, it tends to dehumanize us and our communities.

Jon: You’ve talked about each of these commands, these words we can flip. So, there’s the do-not and then there’s the flip. And then in the flip, you’ve got much ... kind of bigger universe to explore.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Don’t create an image.

Tim: Mmm. Yeah.

Jon: Flip it.

Tim: Be the image.

Jon: You're the image.

Tim: You're the image.

Jon: Be the image.

Tim: Be a faithful image of God by how you live in the world, relate to your neighbor, relate to creation, and how you relate to God. Be the image.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Don't make an image, rather be the image, which is pretty darn open-ended.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's like—

Jon: There's a world in there.

Tim: —takes a whole human life to figure out and even longer. Yeah.

Jon: And so, these two work together: "I'm Yahweh Elohim. I am the creator God. I rescued you from Egypt. I rescued out of slavery. Don't have any other *'elohim* before me. I am your life. I am yours. I am life." And so very closely connected to that, then, if we're going to make Yahweh life, and we're going to—when we think that there is this good and this beauty that we can find beyond ourselves that is true life, what we're looking for is Yahweh.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But how does that actually, kind of ... what's our tangible, like, expression of that? How do we do that?

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. Well, I guess Jesus made it pretty simple by following a tradition of Israelite teachers in his day, which is to say, love, love.

Jon: Love.

Tim: Love. Love God, which means loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Because the One Who Is is love.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: Or God is love.

[Laughter]

Jon: I am, and I am love.

Tim: Yeah. What I am is love. Yeah.

Jon: So don't form—don't put anything before that.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then, what does that look like, then, lived out?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It means to love each other.

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

Jon: And—

Tim: Yeah. The moment a river is treated as the One Who Is, what typically happens in the arc of human history is that the value and dignity of human life gets reduced to become a ... a servant to these forces that we think determine our destiny. And so, we might think it's a primitive form of ancient, like, child sacrifice, you know, to the gods. But I guess here would be more modern forms of self or communal sacrifice, where we sacrifice our well-being, we sacrifice other people's well-beings or their lives in the service of some ideal or power or good. And that's the same dynamic the biblical authors are trying to say, "Isn't it interesting that when humans serve idols or make idols, that they tend to start reducing their lives, harming themselves, other people, killing each other? But when you channel the right honor all the way up the chain to the One Who Is love, that that will compel humans to begin imaging God in a very different kind of way."

Jon: Compel humans to image God in a different type of way.

Tim: Yeah. If what you believe is that love is reality, that's what reality is ... is others-centered, outgoing love. You elevate others and prioritize their well-being, which is, by the way, what the word "passionate" or "jealous"—"I am a jealous Elohim"—what God means is, "I am passionate for the well-being of my creation." And anything that harms or reduces it, Yahweh is on a mission to get rid of that.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But those who are in tune with loyal love—God's loyal love—displayed through creation, "for those who love me and keep my commands," then, there you go. That's the stuff of what reality is about.

Jon: And the way we do that in Jesus' words is by loving each other.

Tim: Love. Love your fellow images. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And then we didn't talk about this last six lines, but you did call out, there's generational consequences for not living this way.

Tim: Yeah, actually, yeah. So, it's these verses five and six, the 10 Commandments, Exodus 20. Maybe ... we actually have talked about these lines in-depth in our "Character of God" series years ago. So maybe let's make sure we cross-reference that in the show notes. But what does it mean that God visits the iniquity of fathers on children?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To the threes and the fours, what does that mean? So, we—we've covered that ground. But what it means, in essence, is that God will allow people to make their bed and sleep in it over the course of many generations.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And if that means—

Jon: And "threes and fours" is a turn of phrase, right?

Tim: "Threes and fours" means generations, and it means however many generations.

Jon: Three—yeah, three or four is kind of a Hebrew way of saying, “However many it takes”?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That’s right. But for those who love God and keep his commands, there will be a reciprocity of infinite generations, thousands of generations, which is basically saying—

Jon: Uncountable.

Tim: —uncountable. Like that’s the kind of loyal love from God that’s reciprocated by love from humans and honoring God’s commands. There we’re ... now we’re talking about the stuff of what creation is all about, and that will never end. Because that creates a world of infinite possibility and ongoing potential, which is what the One Who Is is really into, is sharing life and inviting others to share in God’s own life.

Jon: That’s it for today’s podcast. Next week we move on to the third word in the Ten Commandments. And you’ll recognize it by the translation, “Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain.”

Tim: You might say misusing God’s name in your speech is one way—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —you could misrepresent God, but it seems like carrying the name is bigger because it refers to your behavior. Stealing, deceiving, lying, swearing falsely in my name is a way to mistreat the name of God.

Jon: BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Everything that we make is free because of the generous support of thousands of people just like you. Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.