

Apocalyptic Letters E1 Final

Apocalypse Please

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Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

Jon: Hey, this is Jon from the BibleProject. Today on the podcast, Tim and I are going to start a new series on how to read apocalyptic literature.

Tim: This is one of those moments where it's really hard to check our own language and ideas at the door, but we must, because spoiler alert, the

Apocalypse Please

word "apocalypse" in the Bible does not mean the end of the world. Like, not even at all.

Jon: This is parts of your Bible full of symbolism and imagery, and lots of crazy things happening. The Book of Revelation is one long piece of apocalyptic literature written in the form of a letter at the end of your Bible. So we're going to talk about apocalyptic literature. And we're bumping up the series because, well, things are crazy right now. So thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hi, Jon.

Jon: We have been doing a whole series, an ongoing series on how to read the Bible, and there are 19 videos in this series. The 19th video, which will not come out until, I don't know, right before the summer?

Tim: Yeah, I think late spring, early summer of 2020.

Jon: ...is going to be on how to read apocalyptic literature. And it's the final video in the whole series.

Tim: Yeah, the video series on how to read the Bible will have 19 parts. Three years in the making. And then we've had podcast conversations, short series for every one of those videos. It's been amazing. Apocalyptic literature is the last one. However, it won't end up being the last podcast series because we decided to do something brand new right now. In this podcast episode and for this series, Jon, what's the story?

Jon: Well, we still have How to Read the Letters.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: The letters being the small books in the back of your Bible that you're probably really familiar with, because they're easy to preach, they're easy to read.

Tim: They're the most used and quoted parts of the Bible in at least the contemporary Protestant church.

Jon: We have two videos that are going to come out on those - how to read letters in their historical setting, and also how to read them in their literary setting. But we're going to skip that podcast conversation, and then...

Tim: Or just delay it. We're going to delay it.

Apocalypse Please

Jon: Delay it, yeah. Not skip it. So we can jump into this conversation on apocalyptic literature because right now we are experiencing apocalypse. We want to talk about that. And then this conversation, talking about kind of what's happening in the world with this novel Coronavirus, and how the whole world is dealing with it, and how it's affecting everyone, by having a conversation about that, and whether or not that is an apocalypse. That'll tee us up to then just talk about apocalyptic literature for the next few episodes.

Tim: Right. The COVID-19 pandemic is weeks and months underway for most Europeans and Americans,. Obviously in Asia and China, particularly, it's been around for longer. And at this point, when we're recording this in mid-April 2020, virtually no one in the world has been unaffected by this, right?

Jon: Yeah. I just looked it up. There are only a few countries that don't have any cases.

Tim: And so there are lots of Christians and even former Christians on the interweb, who are having debates and conversations about whether this catastrophe is a sign of the apocalypse or a sign of the end times. I was telling you, Jon, the other day I got a mailer, like a neighborhood citywide mailer for a Christian prophecy conference, like an end times prophecy conference, that was going to be held at a hotel conference room in my part of town. But then they moved it to be online. And it was everything you would kind of expect. It was like, "See how the book of Revelation predicted the COVID-19 pandemic." That's what it said. "See how you know current events are written already 2,000 years ago in the last book of the Bible." This kind of thing.

Jon: What do you think they mean with "the book of Revelation predicted Coronavirus"? If you had to guess chapter and verse, what are they referring to?

Tim: Oh, there are three different seven-part cycles of catastrophe, right? The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and seven bowls. A number of them describe skin disease and diseases or plagues that affect the human population, but also famine and war and all this kind of thing. Cosmic collapse on a global scale. Those three seven-part cycles of catastrophe have fueled the imaginations of every generation of Revelation readers for the last 2,000 years.

The number of generations that have thought they were in the final era of the history of the world because of those descriptions is very many. We're in the long chain here. That prophecy mailer I got fits into a very long chain of that interpretation of the book of Revelation.

Apocalypse Please

Jon: Yeah, plagues are very biblical, I think.

Tim: Totally.

Jon: Bible talks about plagues a lot.

Tim: Yeah. Gone all the way back to the plagues on Egypt. Diseases and plagues have actually been a repeating phenomenon for most generations for most of human history. And so yeah, they're widely discussed in the Bible, not just in apocalyptic literature. Essentially, the weird irony—I don't know. Do you call it an irony?—we just finished that five-part podcast conversation on how to read apocalyptic literature, I don't know, two, three weeks before the pandemic really, really hit at least America.

To anticipate what's going to be talked about in the episodes to come, we thought we would record like a real-time reflection on what you and I have been experiencing since we have that conversation, and how we're processing it, how we're trying to think about it in light of what we've learned about apocalyptic literature in the Bible. Hopefully, I think this will be helpful for you and I, Jon. We hope that it will be helpful for you all and maybe kind of get all of us, Jon and I, and all of you listening into a frame of mind for how these books of the Bible and sections of the Bible could actually really help us not just make sense, but help us respond appropriately to the situation that we all find ourselves in.

[00:07:45]

Jon: So, in the coming episodes, we're going to walk through a lot of this, but let's do a bit of a crash course on apocalyptic literature. The first point that we talked about is, does the apocalypse mean the end of the world? Because in popular uses of the phrase, that's what it means?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: If you're talking about apocalypse, you're talking about the world ending, in English,

Tim: Yes, in English. And that's because look up the word "apocalypse" in any English dictionary and it will tell you that it's an event related to the catastrophic destruction of the world. Total and complete destruction of the world. That's the meaning of the word in English. And this is one of those moments where it's really hard to check our own language and ideas at the door. But we must because, spoiler alert, the word "apocalypse" in the Bible does not mean the end of the world. Like not even at all.

Apocalypse Please

Jon: Not even like a little bit?

Tim: It's not even close. The word has a very clear meaning. Look it up in any Bible Dictionary, look it up in a concordance, and it'll become very clear that it does not mean the end of the world.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: All right. Should we dive further into that point?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: We've just made a tall claim. Should we back it up?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Here's a teaching of Jesus where He uses the word "apocalypse" twice—two times. It's in Matthew chapter 11. It's a prayer that Jesus prays to the Father. A prayer from the Son of God to the Father. It's from Matthew 11:25-27. "At that time, Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of the skies in the land because you have hidden these things." And in context, "these things" are what Jesus is teaching about His true identity. "You, Father have hidden these things from the wise, from the learned, and you have apocalypsed them to little children."

Jon: Whoa, what was Jesus doing? He's ending the world?

Tim: "Yes, Father, you were so pleased to do this," Jesus goes on. "All Things have been given over to be in me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those people to whom the Son chooses to apocalypse the Father." Our English word "apocalypse" is not an English word. It's one of these Greek words that's spelled with English letters that has become an English word.

Jon: What's that called? Transliteration?

Tim: Oh, yeah, it's a transliteration. Like "baptism" is a Greek word that means immersion. "Angel" is a Greek word spelled in English letters.

Jon: I guess it's kind of more of anglicized version?

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Because in Greek, it's apocalypsis or something?

Tim: Apocalypses is the noun and then "apocalypso" is the verb. That's what Jesus uses here. So He apocalypses hidden things about Himself to

Apocalypse Please

children and He apocalypses God the Father to other people. So whatever the word means that has to be appropriate to how Jesus using the word right here. Well, this is interesting. In this statement, the opposite of an apocalypse is for something to be hidden. Do you see that?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "You've hidden things from the wise and you have apocalypsed them to children." You get the picture right here. The word means to uncover or reveal—to make something visible. That's what the word apocalypse means.

Jon: To make something visible.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Now when I said, "does it mean even a little bit the end of the world?" in that if an apocalypse is making the end of the world visible, then the apocalypse...Let's take the book of Revelation. The word "revelation." To reveal.

Tim: To reveal. That's exactly right.

Jon: It is an apocalypse. The whole thing is an apocalypse.

Tim: Yes. Sorry, just to make that clear, the first word of the last book of the Bible that we call the Revelation, the first word is "apocalypsis." An apocalypse of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him. It's a revealing. An uncovering.

Jon: This is a revealing?

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Arguably, it's revealing about the end of the world.

Tim: Maybe. That's debatable. In other words, if I uncover...Let's say, I made a really nice dinner for you, let's say Jessica and I had you and Tristen over for dinner...

Jon: What would you make us?

Tim: Man, do you like fennel?

Jon: I don't know, do I?

Tim: Anyway, let's say like pork chops and fennel. It's totally non-kosher meal. But let's say I cover the table with a little cloth to surprise you. If you

Apocalypse Please

come into the room and I pull back the cloth, it's an apocalypse. I'm uncovering. Now, the fact that I'm uncovering a dinner, that's the thing that's being apocalypsed. But that doesn't affect the meaning of the word apocalypse. That doesn't mean that the word "apocalypse" always means an apocalypse of food. It's just that's the thing in this moment that I might be apocalypsing.

Jon: But when the Bible is revealing things, I'm just playing devil's advocate here, when you're in apocalyptic literature, isn't the thing that it's revealing always the end of the world?

Tim: What we just read of Jesus, he's saying that His own mission to announce the kingdom of God in Galilee, He says it's an apocalypse. That's why he uses the word. He says God is apocalypsing two people who Jesus is. In this case, the apocalypse of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, what's being revealed is who Jesus is—His identity. So it's not the end of the world. That's about the apocalypse of the Son of God.

In other words, an apocalypse refers to a moment when something that was not clear or very visible to people, all of a sudden becomes clear because something has happened to open their eyes to see something they couldn't see before. That's an apocalypse. But what the apocalypse is about will differ from context to context.

Jon: And I've been a little facetious about this...

[crosstalk 00:14:03]

Tim: Well, that's good.

Jon: Because the other thing is that, you know, if you've been listening to this podcast for any length or watch our videos, we talk a lot about how the story of the Bible isn't about just going to heaven when you die, or the earth being destroyed and us being disembodied in some heavenly space. Story of the Bible is about a recreated earth. And so there is no end of the world. There's the beginning of the world and there's a new beginning of the world.

Tim: Yeah. In fact, in the Gospel of Matthew, later on, Jesus has a word to describe what He sees happening at the culmination of history. It's in Matthew chapter 19:28. He calls it, in Greek, the palingenesia—the being born again of creation. The New American Standard uses the word "regeneration", or the NIV uses the phrase "in the renewal of all things." I like that. But Jesus' vision for the end of history is the rebirth of the universe or renewal of the universe.

Jon: And the story of the Bible is interested in that too.

Apocalypse Please

- Tim: Correct. That's what it's all aiming towards.
- Jon: When the Bible talks about this pretty wild transformation of people and creation into something new, what is that going to look like? What's that going to be? The language and the symbols used end up being very imaginative, and are written in what we call apocalyptic style.
- Tim: In other words, we haven't defined yet, and we will later in the series—I'm not sure we will want to, in this episode—give a full description of what makes a part of the Bible an apocalyptic piece of literature. But some of the descriptions of the culmination of history in the Bible are written into the literary form that you could call apocalyptic. And it is. It's highly symbolic. But there are also depictions about the future of the universe written in poetry in the prophets. They're not apocalypses, which are usually dreams or visions. They're just beautifully written poems...
- Jon: Just poetic reflection?
- Tim: ...that anticipate what God's going to do in the future. Paul, in Romans 8, he's writing a letter, but he'll talk about the future of the universe in discourse style. So the future of the universe is talked about in many literary styles in the Bible. But sometimes, people have dreams or visions about that ultimate outcome. But whether or not that helps us understand everything about apocalypses in the Bible is yet to be determined. In other words, apocalypses can be about something else too, not just the future.
- Jon: Just not the renewable of all things.
- Tim: That's one of the things that can be apocalypsed.
- Jon: What else could an apocalypse be about?
- Tim: That's good. Thank you for asking, Jon.
- [00:17:37]
- Tim: Paul's letter to the Galatians in chapter 1, tells us a short autobiography. And he talks about how, "Listen I used to be a Pharisee. I excelled everyone in my generation in my rabbinic school." But all of a sudden he says, "God, apocalypsed His son to me." That's what he says in Galatians 1. What's cool about that is that he's referring to something that we have a narrative about in the book of Acts.
- Jon: Yeah, his road to Damascus moment with Jesus.

Apocalypse Please

Tim: That's right. It's such a great example. Paul has a vision of the world that's biblical as he's going to Damascus. I mean, it's fully inspired by a lifetime of close reading of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jon: He believes in the God of Israel, he believes in God's promise to Abraham, he is waiting for the renewal of all things. He's in.

Tim: He's in. And in particular, he believes that when the faithful among Israel get their act together and are hyper devoted to the laws of the Torah, then God will respond by gifting them with the Messiah and the Kingdom of God and the restoration of Jerusalem. That's his vision. And so when the Jesus movement pops up in Jerusalem, he thinks it's a heretical sect that's going to lead Israel astray from what really needs to happen. So he joins the team to stomp it out. And he starts getting people arrested.

While he's on the road to go arrest some followers of Jesus in Damascus, the risen Jesus appears to him in a vision. But it's also some sort of event that shines a bright light because the people who are with him, he says, experience something, too. And all of a sudden, Paul says, he heard and met the risen Jesus saying, "You're fighting against Me. I'm the one that you're hoping in. I represent the hope of Israel." And He stops Paul deadness tracks. The point is, is that the narrative doesn't use the word "apocalypse." It uses the imagery of light and how he can see Jesus now in a way he's never been able to see Him before.

Jon: Right. So it's describing a revelation. It's describing an epiphany.

Tim: An apocalypse. I mean, he calls it an apocalypse in his letter to the Galatians.

Jon: And he calls it an apocalypse?

Tim: Yeah. And what it is, is he can see something from God's point of view. From a divine point of view, he can now see the reason reality of the Jesus movement and of who Jesus is. He's been wrong. His current way of seeing the world is actually blinding him to the truth about reality and who Jesus is. And it took an apocalypse to reorient his imagination to truth.

This is such a great example. This is like the quintessential apocalypse, where it's not just that you're blind, or that you're hidden too. It's my current way of seeing the world leaves whole parts of reality invisible to me. I can't see them. And I won't be able to until there's some kind of event often that God will allow or cause that shatters and disrupts my way of seeing and all of a sudden, I can see things that I've never seen before, but they were there all along. In this case, the Jesus movement and so on. This is the heartbeat of biblical apocalypses. And so, the what

Apocalypse Please

is apocalypse might be something about the future, but in this case, it's something that's right in front of Paul.

Jon: It's about his life. It's about what's presently happening in his life.

Tim: Again, the episodes, we'll go into more examples and so on, but I guess real-time right now, for you and I, you've had, some time to think about this, not just in light of the pandemic we're sitting in—we'll talked about that in a minute—but just, I don't know...how have you processed that or sat with it as you've had weeks to think about it now?

Jon: Well, I think that it's a really important distinction. And it's going to be hard. It's hard in my mind to make the shift from that word's been used in a certain way in my whole life and pop culture and in church. An apocalypse, that's the end of the world. Apocalyptic literature then is literature about the end of the world.

Two, a shift of an apocalypse is that moment of clarity of something being exposed and revealed or uncovered. So one, it's difficult to make that switch in my mind. But secondly, it's such a ripe and really wonderful way to think about the purpose of Scripture. The purpose of meditating on God's Word is that ultimately—we talked about this in the poetry video—we develop these well-worn paths of how we think about this.

Tim: Literally in our brain, there are, well, Warren's synaptic pathways of that.

Jon: Yeah. And something crazy about the human brain, I think it's a wonderful thing that we have, is that we're able to filter what we experience through our senses to make a narrative out of it so that it makes sense. But when we do that, we're creating a paradigm for how we experience the world that might not actually be what's happening in the world.

Tim: Or it might capture only part of what's really happening, right?

Jon: Or just part, right. How I could say something to my wife in a certain tone, with certain language, and I think it's communicating one thing and she experiences something completely different. And then on and on and on. There are these moments in our lives where something happens that our filters get disrupted, and suddenly you can reorient yourself. And that moment, I've called it an epiphany for a lot of my life. In fact, built a whole company around the idea of making videos that have an epiphany.

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: As a person who's been in a spiritual tradition my whole life following Jesus, that's really important. There's this conversion moment you talk

Apocalypse Please

about a lot. This moment of like, "Oh, man, I've been thinking about things all wrong. I've been doing some christianese. The Lord of my own life, and all this stuff." And then there's this moment of clarity of like, "That's the change." I love that. I think that's so important. We need apocalypses. I love apocalypses.

There's something about my personality, I love it when things get shaken up a little bit. I'm just like, "Oh, something's getting shaken up. What's going to set loose? What kind of new thing is going to happen now that things are being shaken?" Not that I love this pandemic. I don't. This is crazy and gnarly. But there's so much now being shaken loose and things that we're rethinking and things that we're seeing from a new perspective because of what's happening. And so, yeah, I want to talk about that.

Tim: Let's kind of drill down on that one point. The language of the word "epiphany" describes when something...it's an idea that you feel like it happened to you as opposed to just I sat down and thought about it, and I figured it out, you experienced some new perspectives as something that comes from out of the blue. And that's why the word "epiphany" is great.

There's a similarity and meaning to the word "apocalypse" in the Bible. An apocalypse is when something is revealed to you. It's not like I just went out searching for it. Like for Jesus, he says, "There are things that were hidden, and the only way you're going to see what's hidden is if my Father apocalypses it." So it has to be done to you, not something you just do for yourself.

And so there's something about biblical apocalypses, they're not just when a good idea hits you. It's when God's way of seeing the world happens to you. It's when an event takes place, often a dream or a vision. As we're going to see in the book of Daniel, his apocalypses mixed together both his own life experience and his dreams—all kind of fused together as an apocalypse. And all of a sudden, he's able to see things from God's point of view in a way he couldn't before.

Sometimes it's a one-way traffic, like God just says zaps like Ezekiel the Prophet. He calls it, "the spirit took me by my hair and lifts me up." He has this experience of literally being taken out of his body. Whereas Daniel just described a dream that he has. And what he's dreaming about is a lot of stuff that's been happening to him at his job recently. But both of those are a type of new perspective that happens to you. And that's an important part of this definition of apocalyptic.

Jon: It happens to you, but you're making the distinction that all sorts of epiphanies can happen to you in many different ways. An apocalypse is when God pulls back the curtain and shows you, from His divine

Apocalypse Please

perspective, what's going on. And in a way, that's the type of epiphany that we should be most interested in, when the God of the universe tells us, "Here's what's really going on."

Tim: Yeah. If somebody believes that God exists, especially if that somebody believes that God is generous and good and wants to help us or share with us or do something with us, that person would be interested in what God thinks and sees so they can align themselves with it. That's very much a depiction of the biblical God, is that He wants to guide us and be with us and give us responsibility. So I want to see what that God sees. And if I'm not seeing the world correctly, I want God to do something to me to make me somebody who can. And this is what apocalypses do

Jon: An apocalypse is being able to see what God sees. To have an apocalypse is for God to allow you to see what He sees.

Tim: We'll explore this in greater depth in the series to follow. I thought, real quick, we'd take a quick tour of some chapters of Daniel and get a unique angle of vision on this perspective on apocalypse. And I think it might help us just have some fruitful reflections on current world crisis that we all find ourselves in. At least these are some perspectives that have been helpful.

[00:28:13]

Tim: The story of Daniel begins with a city being destroyed. The city of Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. A whole layer of government officials were arrested, taken captive, and hauled away to a far distant land. The story follows four of these figures, who are all a part of the royal line from David. They were all in the royal kingly line, and they're made like high-status slaves to serve in the government because they can read and write and they're smart. That's how the story begins. I've never experienced anything, even remotely, as traumatic or disruptive as that. But that's how the story begins.

Jon: Yeah. I am trying to imagine and I have no categories.

Tim: Yeah, I can't imagine either. The story goes on in Daniel 2 where the king who just took Daniel prisoner and his friends has this dream about a gigantic statue, metal statue made of four different metals. And then a huge stone, a rock, flies out of the sky, destroys the statue, the stone plants in the ground and becomes this cosmic mountain. This famous dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

Jon: It's like a comet that's a mountain seed.

Apocalypse Please

Tim: Totally, yeah. It's a well-known story. Nobody can interpret or understand what the symbols of the dream mean except Daniel, in whom is the Spirit of God. And so he goes, and he prays to God to reveal, to apocalypse. Again, the apocalypse language comes into play here. Can't figure it out, so he prays and he asked God to reveal the mystery. That's what he says in his prayer.

And we're told that that night God revealed to Daniel the meaning of the symbols. So he goes to the king and he tells them, "Yeah, this big statue is an image of all the empires of the world. You're first, you're at the top, but there'll be another empire after you, another after that, another after that. And eventually, the kingdom of God, which is the rock is going to come topple all the empires of this world and rule forever and ever." This is the apocalypse.

Jon: He revealed the meaning of the dream.

Tim: In other words, the meaning of the dream was covered or hidden, and God apocalypses the meaning of the symbols to Daniel, and then Daniel apocalypses them to the king. And what it's about is what we would call political history. There you go. Current events or events in generations to come.

Now follow the story. The next chapter, the king of Babylon, apparently inspired by his dream, actually goes and makes a gigantic statue that is a symbol of his empire, Babylon. He summons all the nations to come worship and give their allegiance to the statue. And here begins the testing stories. This is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. That's like one of the most famous stories in the Bible.

Jon: Oh, yeah, you could put this as like a top five?

Tim: Maybe because of VeggieTales. That's all.

Jon: It is very famous. They have to bow before this statue, swear allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar as their God essentially.

Tim: And if they don't...

Jon: They're going to be thrown in the fiery furnace—into the flames

Tim: Tuck that away. A few chapters later, there's another story. Babylon falls overnight. And then the next kingdom, which is the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians rises and there's a guy named Darius is the king over them. Daniel still got his job in the court, and there's a law made that anyone who prays in the land has to pray to the king as their god. And Daniel is seen praying to his God, Yahweh of Israel. It's a similar test

Apocalypse Please

where he won't obey the decree. And so he's not thrown into a furnace, but...

Jon: The lions' den.

Tim: In the narrative, very specifically, they're called sometimes lions, but other times are called beasts. Thrown to the beasts.

Jon: Thrown to the beast. It's fascinating by the way. The first set are thrown into a furnace where idols are made, when in the biblical imagination, humans already are God's image.

[crosstalk 00:32:18]

Tim: It's good.

Jon: And when they're thrown in there, they don't get destroyed. They're fine. Are they glowing?

Tim: One is there with them, who looks like a son of the gods, which means that he has some kind of appearance that is surprising. They see a human image.

Jon: And this human image is, in the biblical imagination, rule the beast.

Tim: Yes, they're supposed to rule the beasts.

Jon: They're supposed to. And Daniel is thrown to the beasts.

Tim: Thrown to the beast, and ends up...he's fine. He's at peace with the animals.

Jon: He's nuakh with the animals?

Tim: He's at rest with them. He's like Noah in the little ark and like Adam and Eve in Eden. He's like a new human. The point is, is Daniel's job is rough. He's like put in death situations every day. Well, not every day. But the whole point is his life is traumatic, very disruptive. There's all this stuff happening to him. And in Daniel chapter 7, he finally has his own dream. We've talked about at length in different podcasts series.

Jon: The Son of Man series in particular, right?

Tim: Yeah. But what he sees is a dream filled with images connected to things that have been happening to him and his friends. So he sees the chaotic dark ocean, which is an image familiar to Daniel from the first page of the Bible. It's the dark waters of disorder and chaos, and out of it are bulged up four mutant monsters. Beasts. They're called beasts actually. Maybe it

Apocalypse Please

was the day after the lion's den. I don't know. He was having nightmares about it.

Jon: Beast on the brain.

Tim: But there's four of them. Four of them just like there were four metals of the king's statue. And they are terrible and they are violent and they kill people and trample everybody. And the fourth and final beast is the worst, and it just havoc and tyranny and violence. But then he sees some divine thrones set up on high and he sees the God who he worships, who he calls the Ancient One, the Ancient of Days comes, and he holds the fourth beast accountable and throws it into the flames. Throws it into the fire. A beast thrown into the fire, which it's the two testing stories of the furnace and the lion's den mixed together into one now.

Instead of being thrown into the fire and to the beast, the beast is being thrown into the fire. And then what Daniel sees is a human figure who's raised up on high. He goes up to the divine throne on the clouds and he is seated with human ruler called the son of adam. The son of humanity is called the rule and he rules over the nations and all the nations give allegiance and worship, not the idol, but the real human one who sits on the throne with God. That's his dream. It's the apocalypse of Daniel.

Jon: Was a dream written in apocalyptic literature? Is it written in poetry?

Tim: The dream is written in just kind of a narrative style. But again, symbolic dreams that offer a divine perspective on something, that's the definition of a biblical apocalypse. Some kind of vision or dream, disruptive experience, where you see something often symbolic, but that gives you a fresh vision, a God's point of view on whatever the thing is about.

He's told that the beasts are the same thing as the four metals of the statue. It's the empires of the world, a sequence of empires. Except this time instead of starting with Babylon as the most important, as the ultimate one to come, that's the worst. That empires are going to keep coming one after another after another doing their violent work, but that God won't allow these beastly human empires to last forever. He will bring it to an end, and install...not take humans away, but install an ultimate human-led kingdom that will be God's kingdom over the world together.

Jon: Not led by a monster or a beast, but by a human who's retained his humanity and reflects God's image.

Tim: The point is, is that Daniel has a dream, but his dream is very connected to his actual lived experience that we see in the narratives. And so this combination of things happening to him, things he's thinking about, and

Apocalypse Please

then a dream, these all become the apocalypse of Daniel. And Daniel is one of the most clear forms of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible because it's about these figures apocalyptic dreams.

And so, are they about the end of the world? Well, what they're about is the story of what God is doing to bring history to its climax to install the humans as the image of God ruling over creation.

Jon: If you're at Babylon, it's the end of your world.

Tim: It's the end of your world. That's right. Totally right. So it's through this apocalypse that Daniel can now go back to work on Monday morning.

Jon: Doesn't he go back to work on Saturday night?

Tim: Oh, good point. Sorry. I was merging him into my calendar. My Gentile calendar. But the point is that he goes back to his job, and this apocalypse gives him new hope. It challenges him, and all of a sudden he sees the king in a different light. He can see the policies that the king is enacting in a new light. Because he knows that these policies are probably going to crush some people.

The point is, is that...like this prophecy conference mailer that I got, if all the book apocalyptic is about...is like the Bible's a hidden code that will tell you how the world's going to end.

Jon: Predict bad events because of the ultimate bad event we want to be prepared for which is the end of the world.

Tim: Well, it's giving you comfort. Comfort to say, "God's got this. The world might be out of control, but from God's point of view, it's in control. It's all going according to God's plan, even though I may not understand it." That's the kind of comfort that that view of apocalyptic gives you. But this biblical view of apocalyptic, it gives you that same comfort, but not in an escapist way. It gives you that kind of comfort, and at the same time, cause you to go out the next day and do something about what you now see. You can't unsee what you've seen, that the empire I live in is a beast, and there are people getting trampled that I've never seen before, but now I can see them. What am I going to do about it? That's what biblical apocalyptic...I think that's the effect that it's supposed to have.

[00:39:56]

Jon: So, when you read biblical apocalyptic literature...we'll get into that. That's what the next episodes will be. I love this framework that you're giving, which is when God does reveal what's going on in the world, whether that's in the dreams and visions that we get in the Bible, or

Apocalypse Please

maybe in some personal way that He does with you or your community, that's an apocalypse. What we should be after is we want to see the world the way God sees it. We want apocalypse.

Tim: And we have a whole bunch for us in the Bible, too. Daniel's and John's included.

Jon: With that definition in mind, the question is, are we experiencing an apocalypse? Just to set the table really quickly, again, there's a virus. You know what a virus is, actually, it's not a living organism. It's a string of code, like DNA or RNA or whatever, I think it's RNA, and then just encased in protein. And it's super, super small. It's not alive in the sense that it can't reproduce by itself. But when it's in a host body, the only thing that wants to do is hijack a cell and then reproduce its code. That's all it does. That's what we're dealing with here.

Tim: You know, but I've never heard it described as it's not a living organism.

Jon: Well, that gets into a whole conversation of what is a living organism?

Tim: Got it.

Jon: But I think in terms of what scientists would define, it's not. Well, like a cell or bacteria is because a bacteria is a cell that can reproduce itself. It's a lot more complicated. It's a lot bigger than virus. So anyways, we got this virus, and it's really contagious. So, basically, it's made the world just to sit at home for the most part. That's what I'm doing. That's what my family's doing.

Tim: I think here we're getting into it. I think this whole series of events has certainly been apocalyptic in the way we've been talking about it, for me, and in a big way. One of my own personal, I don't know, if it's a weakness or a strength—I think it's both. I think that's probably how most of our strengths and weaknesses are—is real high empathy. And it's been a very disruptive month in my sleep habits, and in my news consumption habits that I've had to like work really hard to get control of.

For people who get rewards and endorphin charges, you know, the whole thing about gamification of apps and stuff like this is all about hitting those rewards. For news junkies, the last 30 days have been like jackpot every day because it's almost every couple hours, there's something newsworthy related to this. It's crazy, man. I mean, even just today, the new unemployment as of April 16, is 22 million people out of work in the last 30 days in America. Just America. 22 million.

You know, I just think every single one of those millions represents somebody who doesn't know how they're going to pay for their food and

Apocalypse Please

their rent right now. I mean, Daniel went through something disruptive. I've gone through disruptive things, but this is apocalyptic man in that sense. Something's happening, that if my way of seeing the world remains the same after this, I'm just really not paying attention.

You and I have had different experiences, but it's been a really difficult month for me personally, just watching catastrophe happen to the lives of so many people. That's only one side of it, right? There's also a lot of things that are getting shaken up and rethought and reimagined that I think 10 years from now will have a positive outcome.

Jon: There are all sorts of epiphanies happening. People are realizing whether or not they can work from home. Some people are remembering like, "Oh, yeah, I'm married." We live so much of our lives outside our house and doing other things and now we're just home. And just we're home with our families all the time and we're like, "I really need to make this work better than it has been." There are people, like you said, who've lost their jobs and they don't know how they're going to pay for things. It's just turned everything inside out, upside down.

And in those moments, there's an opportunity for you to have some new perspective on life. But then the question, I guess, becomes, how do we make sure that we're seeing what God sees in this moment and not just some reflection that I have? Because I have all sorts of reflections now and work from home, or we're homeschooling our kids. So I have a bunch of new reflections on homeschooling, and all these different things. And there are revelations of sort or uncovering things. But what should I be seeing? If I believe in the kingdom of God through the person of Jesus, what is supposed to be becoming more clear to me because of this pandemic?

Tim: I know. I've been thinking about that a lot, too. I think it seems to me, for a follower of Jesus, the ethic of the kingdom of God as condensed and summarized by Jesus is kind of ground zero. You know, for a follower of Jesus, the sermon on the mountain, it's kind of the most condensed form of that, but throughout His teachings.

What He says he's doing is also condensing the heartbeat of what He said the Torah and the prophets, the Hebrew scriptures are all about, which is radical devotion to your creator that's expressed through radical love, expressed to your neighbor, which includes your enemy, or people you don't like. And in a way, that Jesus grounds it upon the biblical vision of the humans as the image of God. What humans are destined for is to be dignified noble kings and queens taking responsibility of creation, harnessing it's potential in a way that everybody flourishes. And how you apply that ethic, followers of Jesus have been working out for 2,000

Apocalypse Please

years, right? Different moments, different cultures, different ways. But I think that's been, for me the number one set of issues that this has apocalypsed for me, and a lot of the stuff that's keeping me up at night.

And listen, I'm not an economist. I don't know a lot. I'm certainly not expert on the American Health System. Something like this pandemic is an apocalypse and it's making visible things in my culture and society that were there all along, that are making them more visible to more people. And I think they're things that Jesus would care about. I was listening to this really interesting story on when COVID like testing centers popping up all over the country, these drive-thru or whatever testing centers, and if you get out a map and just place them on a map of the order and priority and timeline of where they were set up, you can just watch them happen faster in areas where people have higher per capita incomes and slower or still non-existent in neighborhoods areas where per capita...there's lower income.

That's not something that actually is surprising, but it's in a moment of crisis where you think like, "People's health? Why should your income matter in a moment like this?" There are so many inequities in my culture surfacing. The proportions of people who are dying from the virus, and their demographics, their race, their income, I mean, it's a damning story on what America says is its dream. I'm not a political commentator; I'm not trying to be one. It seems to me Jesus would want His followers to care a lot about what is surfacing about the inequities in American culture. That's the culture I'm in.

This is making it plain and obvious for anyone with eyes to see. There are probably some people who would have some other statistics who might want to offer a different point of view, but it's really worth looking at. Anyway. That's the stuff that's been keeping me up at night.

Jon: It's interesting that the best way to fight back this pandemic right now is just stay at home. And the people who can work from home are predominantly more fluent white-collar type people. The people out there still delivering our packages and packaging our food, and growing our food, and harvesting our food and doing all those things that we need are low paying jobs, many of which now have gone away. So many of the people who are now unemployed are in like service jobs that have gone away, or they're out there still risking getting infected, because they don't have a choice.

And so it's kind of to your point that, you know, we've always known there's inequities in how we work in different things, but this really just clearly shows how much more dangerous it is to be poor.

Apocalypse Please

Tim: That's right. It's not just an economic bracket issue. In this case, it really is about your risk level of being able to stay healthy. I was reading this interesting article about transit workers, public transit workers, bus drivers, and train drivers, those aren't super high paying jobs. And they're sustaining the transportation pipeline for many of the essential jobs in our cities right now. It's just this crazy moment.

I've had this moment too where after waiting in the line to go into the grocery store, I just want to hug all the grocery store workers. But it's against the law. But I'm thanking them. And I'm noticing all these people who I actually see weekly, but I see them now in a way I haven't seen them before. That's apocalyptic man, at least for me,

Jon: And so, as a follower of Jesus, I think what you said is really important, is Jesus and His ethic and the ethic of the kingdom of God is to care for the poor and care for people who are oppressed or marginalized.

Tim: Your neighbor.

Jon: And your neighbor. And there's no other time for us to make sure that we have that filter on as who's my neighbor, who's in need, how can I be generous right now, especially if you didn't lose a job. But just regardless, how can we be generous in the way that we live? If that's the only apocalypse that happens, I think that's a beautiful one.

Tim: Apocalypse is like Daniel. That was a very painful period of his life. His dream made him sick. His apocalypses make him sick with grief when he wakes up from them. They're not pleasant, but you can't unsee what you see when God shows it to you in these apocalypses. I don't know, man, my prayer right now to God is I don't want to look back on the season and feel like nothing shifted in me because of what I'm seeing. I pray it for our world and for my neighborhood and my city. I don't know, man. I think this kind of biblical apocalyptic can actually transform people. Certainly transformed Daniel, and I think it has the potential to change us, too.

Jon: In so many ways things have been shaken up, and this is an opportunity for us to see things in a new perspective. And whether we're going to do that through our own wisdom, or also somehow have God do it for us...

Tim: And those two aren't always different things. They're often the same thing.

Jon: Yeah. I think there's so much to learn. Tim, thanks for sharing your heart with things that you're processing. I know everyone's experiencing other things. I'm thinking so much about family. Being a teacher now to my kids, I feel like I'm more married than I've ever been, if that makes any

Apocalypse Please

sense. I feel like everything I've taken for granted is now surfacing in the household and saying, "Deal with this." And all those are moments for an apocalypse. I'm sure we all have our own stories. I guess what we wanted to do in this episode is just set the stage for this is not the end of the world...

Tim: It might be the end of a world as we've been familiar with it.

Jon: And this may be an apocalypse. And hopefully, it can be.

Tim: Biblical apocalyptic is actually the kind of thing that's often painful, but you needed to see rightly. That's a good way of putting it. I like how you just said that.

Jon: I'd love to hear what kind of apocalypse people are having that God has given to them in light of this. So if you do want to share that with us, that'd be wonderful. We don't ever do this. This kind of live, talk about current events. We may never do it again, but we've done it. Next week, we're going to start into the real beginning of the apocalyptic conversation. There'll be some redundancy, but not a lot, and we're going to dig deep into how to read the apocalyptic literature.

Tim: To all of you, listeners, and supporters of the BibleProject, thank you. Thank you. So many of you have reached out to us in the last month to check in on us and to give us encouragement and support to keep creating the videos and podcasts during this time. So we're grateful. We're going to keep chugging away. Our mission is to help people experience the Bible as the unified story that leads to Jesus. We're a nonprofit animation studio. And we're going to keep doing this as long as you all want us to. So thanks for your support.

Paul: Hi, this is Paul Mackie. I'm Tim's dad from Vancouver, Washington. I first heard about the BibleProject about 40 years ago when I was raising Tim, and watching him create a world that made sense to him, and then I watched him, in Bible school, draw out his learning experiences. So to me, this is just an amazing fruition of a lot of his early life culminating together.

My favorite thing about the BibleProject is how art and the Bible converge in an amazing language. They seem to be two separate ideas, but honestly, art has its origin in the heart of God. And so we find that there are a lot of artistic expressions and biblical expressions that are saying the same thing. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We're a crowdfunded project by people like me. You can find free video, study notes, podcasts, and more at the bibleproject.com.

Apocalypse Please