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## **What is the Story of the Bible?**

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# What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Welcome to Bible Project podcast. On today's episode, Tim and I are going to be asking the question, how would you summarize the entire story of the Bible?

Tim: The Bible is big and complex and has way too many characters. How can it possibly keep all this straight?

Jon: The Bible is one unified story, a story about humanity's role to rule the world on God's behalf. This vocational calling is what we refer to as the image of God. And it's a high bar. It gives humans a lot of authority and a lot of power.

Tim: A question that's on everybody's mind right now is, what does it mean to use power responsibly?

Jon: The story of the Bible is how that calling's been corrupted and how God's on a mission to fix it.

Tim: How Jesus redefines power in his teachings and his life is scandalous but it's also wise. It's as he claims the only way forward.

Jon: The entire story of the Bible summarized. Thanks for listening in. Here we go.

We're going to talk about the Bible as a unified story, and we're going to try to walk through the whole story and make a video that tells that story in five minutes. That's the plan?

Tim: One video telling the whole story of the Bible.

Jon: We've been asked to make this before.

Tim: No pressure.

Jon: Yeah, no pressure.

Tim: We have been asked to make this video and I think we've both always wanted to make it at some point. It was just about the right timing and the right series.

I'm excited that we're doing it as a part of the How to Read the Bible series. Because I think that understanding how any section of the Bible contributes to and fits into the broader overall story, it's a really important skill to develop. And if you don't have it, it really makes reading the Bible hard. Or you just end up not knowing how to read anything in context.

Jon: I'm not really sure how we're going to do this because every time we do a theme video, what I notice is that the Bible is much more nuanced and sophisticated than I

# What is the Story of the Bible?

had realized. And by just tracing that theme through the narrative of the Bible, you get this really beautiful story arc.

What we can do is make a video that's a summary of every biblical theme and how they all tie together into this one epic narrative.

Tim: That's a good point. For a long time, I used to hang my hat on some of those real general outlines of the story of the Bible, like creation, fall, redemption, new creation, something like that. But inevitably, those schemes just...like, even that one by nature, just leaves out so much.

Jon: Creation, fall, redemption, new creation, I mean, we kind of go through those movements in every theme video. It seems like. We always are like, "Okay, let's remember this is what creation was about, and then this was the problem, and then this is what God was doing with Israel. Here's how it all has its climax in Jesus redemption and then realized fully a new creation. So we go through those beats.

Tim: Yeah, we do. But even just what you did right there, the Israel part, which in terms of page numbers takes up vast majority of the story kind of lives in this hazy in-between spot. In between fall and in between redemption.

Maybe the story of redemption begins with Abraham, but really, it's about Jesus. I've just become dissatisfied with versions of retelling the Bible story that skips the actual majority of the Bible.

Jon: Well, here's the thing though with that majority. It's an ancient culture that's very different than anything we've experienced. So that's difficult.

Tim: It's true.

Jon: It's difficult stories oftentimes that aren't very clear-cut. Like why did David cut off the four skins of those Philistine? Is David and Goliath a story about how I'm supposed to tackle my own giants in my life? That's difficult to navigate. They're just all these questionable stories and questionable characters and I thought the Bible is about being a good person and...

But then on top of all that, it seems like, well, if Jesus is really coming to fulfill all that and really my focus is on following Jesus, why do I need to care about all of that history? It just becomes this big prelude that I can skip and just go to the main event. It's a lot easier to navigate the main event. It makes a much smaller book too, just carry around the New Testament. And it's a small...

[crosstalk 00:05:26]

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Tim: Totally. I've done this in large group settings before a classroom setting, where I have people get out the Bible and I use that for part scheme. I put it up, right it up or something and then I'm like, "Let's account for the pages of the Bible, creation, and fall.

Jon: 1 through 11.

Tim: Actually, in most people's minds, that's just the first three pages of Bible - Genesis 1, 2 and 3. Then redemption skips forward to the New Testament. Maybe test down at one page of Isaiah, a child is born to us. And basically skip forward to Matthew and then the New Testament.

Then if you just hold the Bible, like get both your hands out and hold in your left hand Genesis 1 to 3, and then hold the New Testament and then just look at what's in front of you, it's bizarre to say this four-part scheme is a summary of this book. And then to realize that it leaves out...It's not even funny. It's not even you could maybe mistake it for being the whole thing. It's four-fifths of the Bible isn't accounted for in that scheme. One.

Two, even when we say that that scheme where Jesus is the fulfillment of redemption, but if you simply actually read the four accounts of his mission, and life, and preaching and death and resurrection, he's constantly appealing to that part that you skipped over as the way of explaining who he was, what he was doing, why he says what he says.

Jon: Not only him but the writers. The gospel writers are referring back to that.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Then on into the writings of the apostles. Jesus and the apostles firmly believe that knowing how to read this majority section of your Bible that Christians call the Old Testament is a part of discipleship to Jesus. And it takes a lot of work and the cookies are not on the bottom shelf. But there's just nothing for it.

If a person wants to say they're representing the Bible, they need to be able to retell the story in a way that accounts for all of it.

Jon: Take a step back, though, and it's strange that as a community of Christians, a group of people to say, "Hey, part of our identity is to really care about these ancient stories from another culture." And they're difficult to read and difficult to understand, for many reasons. One, it's a different language, different culture, but also, it's literary genius. So literary genius is hard to—

Tim: It's not always easy reading.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: It's not always easy reading.

Tim: Like Moby Dick and East of Eden, it's intense. It's rewarding but it's intense.

Jon: If you just take a step back, it just feels like—

Tim: How many of your friends...

Jon: ...have their identity around something that requires them to have a mastery of ancient Hebrew texts?

Tim: Or at least to like, this is some part of my life is becoming a more wise reader of an ancient text. It's unique. There's nothing for it.

If I didn't follow Jesus, there's no way I'd be compelled to read the Bible, especially the Old Testament. And I say that as someone who's dedicated most of their adult life at this point learning how to read the Bible. But it's not simple.

When it's foreignness and its otherness really begins to stand out to you, you can't unsee it. You're just like, "Oh, this is odd." A whole community with this practice of reading a text from millennia ago on the other side of the planet, I don't have any friends who do this except people who are part of my community. Maybe people who care about Shakespeare.

Jon: If someone came - like a friend you haven't seen since high school or something - and they come up and they're like, "Man, my life's really been changed by this figure in history, so I'm mastering Egyptian hieroglyphics. I'm reading all these stories in ancient Mesopotamia. It's bringing meaning to my life now and hope for the future, and it's helping me understand myself and the world I live in," you're just going to be like, "Wow. That's such a weird, geeky niche thing for you to get into."

Tim: "I didn't know you were like that. I thought you were normal." It's unique and it's something that has marked the early Jesus movement from the beginning.

Oh man, last fall I read one of my favorite New Testament scholars. A guy named Larry Hurtado wrote this excellent history of the early first century to Christianity called "Destroyer of the Gods." It's the best book title ever. That's like a heavy metal band name. But it's called "Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World" - What made the early followers of Jesus odd and the object of mockery in the Roman culture.

One of them was their obsessions with written texts. There was no connection between being religious or being a devout worshipper of the gods and having a

## What is the Story of the Bible?

personal habit of reading ancient texts connected to that God. Apart from ancient Judaism, that was totally foreign.

But the early Christians, because it was such a universal movement spreading across the world, the reproduction, and reading, and studying of these biblical texts became part and parcel of the movement itself.

Jon: Which is a discipline they learned as second temple Jews.

Tim: Correct. The first generations all grew up reading the Hebrew Scriptures and they're immersed in it. But then the movement goes viral through the Jesus the Messiah, and that spreads throughout the Roman world. Then it's Hebrew texts and Aramaic translations, those go east and Latin translation, those goes west, and Egyptian translation, and Greek translations. And all of a sudden you have a religious movement that the world's never quite seen before.

One of the things that marks it is its obsession with literature and texts. This was a brand new thing in human history.

Jon: I mean, other religions wrote down their stories?

Tim: Yes, but they weren't part of personal devotion or community devotion. You could go to the temple, and the priests would bring out some tablets with the stories about the god worshipped in that temple. But the idea of mass production of text so that every house church can have something of its own writing of Isaiah and Genesis and Matthew and—

Jon: And before that, the devotion of the scribes who came together to form the texts and just that literary culture that even created the Jewish history.

Tim: Yeah, it was the minority.

Jon: And that's the thing. This is all Jewish history.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Early Christian history is Jewish history. That's right.

Jon: There were Second Temple Jews who came out of this culture of obsession with their sacred texts, which seems unparalleled that the amount of genius that was all concentrated in one people group at one time in history.

Tim: That's right. We have lots of literary texts from ancient Egypt or ancient Assyria and they survived on tablets and parchment or some papyri. But the Hebrew Bible is an utterly unique phenomenon in the ancient world in terms of its size and

## What is the Story of the Bible?

intentionality and interconnectedness. There were prophets in Assyria, but there was no such thing as a book of Isaiah.

Jon: An Assyrian version of the book of Isaiah.

Tim: An Assyrian equivalent of the book of Isaiah, nothing even close. Second Temple Judaism was a textually immersed culture. Jesus was the part and grew up in that culture and he made a radical claim that all of these texts that Christians call the Old Testament were about him and what he was doing.

Jon: When he started ministry, he opened the scroll of Isaiah and he read from it and he said, "This is being fulfilled?"

Tim: This is being fulfilled. So Jesus made sense of everything he did by appealing to this greater story told in these sacred texts.

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Jon: I guess my experience of the Bible has been this. Let me give you a clear theological framework. You're put on earth to glorify God, you have screwed that up, you've missed the mark, sin. Because of your sin, you deserve death, but Jesus came, and he took that penalty for me. And if I believe, have faith, then one day I can go to heaven.

Tim: Pay attention. That's an individualized version of creation, fall, redemption, heaven.

Jon: Heaven. Yeah, new creation. And it's all about me, and my individual, and it skips Israel.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Over and over, that's theological framework. And then it's like, "Cool. Now go read the Bible with that in mind."

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Jon: So I'm drawn to read the New Testament because everything else it's just like, I don't know where this fit.

Tim: And maybe just illustrations of bad people and good people, right?

Jon: Right.

Tim: Or what else can you do with it?

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: So I'm reading the epistles and then I'm drawn to certain verses. It seems like conversations are always about how does this fit into that framework. A different framework is trying to put yourself in the perspective of a first century Jew who has grown up with the scriptures. Their identity is with the story of the Scriptures, and they've seen and heard what Jesus is doing and saying, and now they're trying to make sense of it for what it means for the Jesus movement.

Tim: Though in that equation, the Hebrew Bible has already existed in your life and your community for a long time. Already it tells a story that you're living in. You see yourself as living the story.

Jon: When you say Exodus, that means so much to you. And when you think of the Messiah, that means so much to you.

Tim: And Israel's unfaithfulness leading to exile in Babylon, so then our ancestors came back to our land and rebuild the temple, and we're waiting for the promises of the prophets to come true. There you go. That's the story you see yourself as a part of if you're Matthew or John before you've met Jesus or Simon Peter. So yeah, there's a preexisting story. Then Jesus comes saying, He's bringing that story forward, but how he does so rocks your world.

Jon: Yeah, it rocks the world that you're living in.

Tim: And it rocks everything you thought you knew about that story. It forces you to go back and say, "Oh, I see. Now I understood what this story of the Old Testament was." But actually, it was pointing towards the strange thing that happened with Jesus.

Jon: And so you get the story of the road to Emmaus. When Jesus opens up Hebrew Scriptures with them, I guess they're walking, so I don't know if they're just talking about it.

Tim: Yeah, they are talking about it.

Jon: And he's just pointing out everything. He's like, "Hey, you remember this part of the Hebrew Scripture? This is how it's about me. We don't have the conversation. I know what you did."

Tim: "I know it's bummer." A little drone flying above them.

Jon: If I think about reading the Bible, my main concern is, how do I do this in a way that doesn't thoroughly confused me. So we got to get people over that. We got to get them into this video.



# What is the Story of the Bible?

Tim: A very simple way is just the hook is the Bible is big and complex and has way too many characters.

Jon: Some of them have names of people you are friends with but some of them have names that you can't pronounce.

Tim: Yeah. There's Adam and Jacob, and then there's Jezebel and Cain. The point is, is that cast of hundreds over millennia. What? How can possibly keep all this straight? So not only is it old, it's huge and complex.

But despite that, if you look at the first page and if you look at the last page, you'll notice something. The first words "in the beginning." The second to last paragraph of the final page of the Bible is "and they reigned forever and ever." So the opening and closing movements, you don't even have to be an intellectual or like reading books.

Jon: "Beginning" and then "forever."

Tim: Yeah. "In the beginning," and the story goes on. Then the concluding of the narrative movement of the whole thing is, "and they range forever and ever." What kinds of books begin like that? Obviously, narratives. But what kind of narrative will a huge, thick, with a cast of hundreds? And so it's an epic.

The literary category for this is literary epics, which were more common in the ancient world, even in the medieval world. Someone like Tolstoy's. The great epic novels of like "Les Miserables," "War and Peace" or something - Those are epic novels with lots of characters. That's what we're talking about here. A large narrative, but that has interwoven main plots and subplots, but it all ties together and it finds its unity and coherence in the person of Jesus.

Once you see what that main story is, the main movements of it, you can recognize where you are no matter where you drop in. If you have the big picture in mind, and the main movements of the story, you'll always be able to know your address, know your spot on the map.

Jon: Yeah, coordinates.

Tim: Coordinates. Then here's how the story works.

Jon: There's something about the Bible because it's so large, it's kind of a rarity to read through from beginning to end. You're usually jumping in somewhere in the middle.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Which means you kind of need to know where you're at.

Tim: Yeah, "where am I right now?"

Jon: Basically, let's just create that grid so that any moment you're jumping in scriptures is you plug in the coordinates, and you're like, "Okay, I'm in this part of the story."

Tim: If I were trying to do it - and I've done this in a few different classrooms and sermon contexts - the movements or something like this, obviously, pages 1 and 2 are really, really important. Jesus on a number of occasions refers back to pages 1 and 2.

Jon: We've probably spent more time anywhere in the Bible in pages 1 and 2.

Tim: And there's a reason for that. They set the narrative world, they set what the purpose of all of this is, what the purpose of humans are in the story, what the problem is. There's a reason.

Jon: By the way, how did you get in the habit of saying pages 1 and 2 whereas it's chapters 1 and 2?

Tim: Well, I just like it more.

Jon: I know, but where did you get it?

Tim: I think I just made it up one day. Because we don't think of it that way. I don't know why. For some reason, it makes me think about the Bible on the different way to just say pages 1 and 2. I don't know. Somewhere in the last couple of years.

So God makes a good world full of potential. He wants to share it because that's apparently the nature of this God. He appoints humans as this is divine image to rule it and take care of it on his behalf. That's page 1 and 2.

But it's all about the job given to humans. God wants to share the world and rule it through humans, and their job is to rule the world and harnesses its potential towards positive ends. This whole story isn't just going to be about some sort of paradise where humans live in relationship with God.

Then plot conflict is relationship is broken. That's a very common Christian way of doing it. It's all about the perfect relationship. The relationship is broken; the plot resolution is going to be the restoration of relationship.

That's true, but it's not quite how the story actually goes. And what kind of relationship? It's a working relationship. It's about a business partnership gone

## What is the Story of the Bible?

wrong. That's the nature of the plot conflict is humans have a job and God's committed to humans doing this job. So it opens with the job "rule the world."

The introduction of the plot conflict then, on a cosmic level, is the humans forfeit their opportunity to do the job in a way it creates life. Instead, they rebel and fall prey to death and moral corruption and so on. The nature of the plot conflict is, "Oh, no, now humans can't do their job rightly. And when they do their job, calling the shots on their own and redefine a good and evil it creates death instead of life." That's the plot conflict. Not just that they aren't doing their job, it's that they're doing it in the wrong way and introducing all of these horrible results.

Jon: It's like giving a two-year-old a dart gun. It's not going to end well. Paxton got this new Nerf gun thing for Christmas, and it shoots really fast.

Tim: Wow.

Jon: It's powerful and it's just tiny little thing.

Tim: Just typical little Nerf dart?

Jon: Well, it's this Nerf dart and on the front is hard plastic.

Tim: Oh.

Jon: Actually, if it gets you a point blank on your skin, it stings. This thing flies. And it's like this little revolver. I coked it for him because I was like, "I don't even think his little finger can pull this trigger." Then I stopped paying attention and he's just aiming at me. He pulls the trigger successfully and that thing flies right into my eye. I just barely had time to close my eye. For the next two days, my eye was throbbing.

After it happened, I was like, "I think I'm going to go blind. This might be it. From now on when people ask me how I lost my eyesight, I have to say, "From a Nerf gun." That's all going through my mind is how bad it hurt.

I'm okay now, but that's humanity. It's a three-year-old with a Nerf gun.

Tim: The story is, that's humanity thinking that it can define good and evil by the standards of what will survive and protect me and my group. As long as that's the only goal that we have in mind, defining Good and Evil is a destructive weapon in our hands.

Jon: That's the fall.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Tim: Whether that's one movement or two movements, you have creation and humanity. I'm not pleased with that title, but we could find a different way. Creation and the human calling or something, and then rebellion and the fallout. No story can be told without introduction and introduction of plot.

Jon: It's the premise.

Tim: Premise and then plot conflict. You've seen me do that drawing - you were doing it earlier - of the multi-tiered plot. This is the cosmic background, so to speak, of the story of the Bible where it's God and all humanity.

The story goes off the rails on page 3 and it culminates. It goes to Cain and the flood, all leading up to Babylon, which is all a diagnosis of the problem. It's very cosmic. All nations, many generations, long periods of time.

Then all of a sudden, in chapter 12, the story takes a very clear turn to focus it just in on a few generations of one man and his family. That becomes the calling of Abraham as the way that God is going to restore his divine blessing to the nation's becomes the branch off of a subplot.

Jon: When you say divine blessing, you do mean that initial vocational call to be business partners with them?

Tim: Yeah, right. The job given to humans on page 1 is a blessing. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea. That kind of thing." So the job is a gift. It's a blessing. I want to do this with you. This is our responsibility or privilege now.

When God says to Abraham, after all the nations have run things into the ground to say, "I'm going to bless you, make you into a people group, and you'll be a blessing, and I'm going to bless those who bless you, and I'm going to protect you from those who curse you, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessing or will discover blessing," this is five times the word "blessing."

Jon: It's a lot of blessing.

Tim: It's a lot of blessing and it's literary device. It all points back to that blessing on page 1. That the blessing that was for all humanity was forfeited. And so God's going to take one family and give them that divine blessing and invite them to experience themselves, and somehow through them, it will spread again to all humanity a blessing.

# What is the Story of the Bible?

That's the storyline of the Bible, how God is on a mission to bless his enemies through the family of Abraham somehow. Even then, many people would then just hop to Jesus at that point. But in my mind—

Jon: Great, great, great grandson of Abraham.

Tim: Yeah, totally. In my mind, there's still some more things that are crucial to who Jesus is that you need to account for. This is fairly quick. You have creation and human calling, human readable and the fallout of that, and then you have the Israel part of the story.

God chooses the family of Abraham. Through him, he's going to bless the nations. The problem is the family keeps failing.

It happens in Abraham's lifetime, he fails, most of his children fail, great grandchildren all try to kill each other or sell each other into slavery. God rescues the whole family out of slavery and invites them to be faithful to Him and follow the 10 commandments and 603 or more.

Jon: And they build a golden calf.

Tim: They build a golden calf. Every part of Israel story is a failure that mimics the failure of the humanity on pages 1 and 2. So the story of Israel it's not just that it's an illustration of what all humanity undergoes or underwent in the garden. It's actually the story of Israel intensifies the problem.

An analogy would be like a high school teacher. The Bible Project studio is in the lower floor of an old refurbished high school. This was the wood shop. We're in what was the wood shop of an old high school.

Jon: That's what I've been told. So smell the sawdust.

Tim: It would be something like high school shop teacher puts out an assignment for all the students and they all fail. And that's a bummer because he's been trying to teach them how to use the wood lathe or something like that. That's disappointing because he like, "Man, I showed them how to do it." So that's Genesis 1 through 11. But then the story of Israel is like the shop teacher takes one student and for months—

Jon: Just apprentices him.

Tim: Yeah. The student comes after school gets out and they work till dinner time, and he's teaching, and you have all these investment months. And they become really

## What is the Story of the Bible?

close. Then semester final project comes and this student not only fails again but intentionally fails and make some lame object that's misshapen. It's even more tragic.

Jon: Like, "He knew better."

Tim: Yeah, he knew better. That's not just, "Oh, that's just another illustration of lazy high school students." No, it's more. It's that even when God shows extra measures of grace, human nature is so bent that we still find ways to twist God's words, and to doubt God's goodness, and to think God's holding out on us, and to act in really destructive, disrespectful ways. That's how the story of Israel works.

So you finish the Old Testament story and you go, "Man, I thought we were in a bad situation on page 3." But then you get to page 593 at the end of the Old Testament, and you're just like, "Oh, man, we really need help." And that's only the story.

Then you come to the prophets of the Old Testament, and they're like, "Yeah, that's right." And God promises that he will send help. It's so thoroughly clear that humanity needs help. Made even more clear from the story of Israel that the solution has to be something remarkable, some close joining of God and humanity - a king, a leader, this ideal human who's close to God that like King David, he would call God his Father. He's so close to God that this leader is infused with God's Spirit and personal presence. That if humans are ever going to get it right, they have to have God's transform them into different kinds of humans.

This is all what the Old Testament prophets are talking about. You need a recreation of the human heart, mind. Total renewal and transformation.

The story of the Old Testament ends and you're waiting for this leader. You're hoping that God will do something to just change humans on a fundamental level. And you think that's the only hope for humanity. It seems to me that that's all very important for understanding who Jesus is.

Then if you didn't have that, it just half of what Jesus and the apostles are saying. Just doesn't land. That was my not so short summary of the Old Testament.

Jon: It was pretty short.

Tim: So here's the movements: you have God creation and the human calling, human rebellion and the fallout. Then God and Israel. God chooses Israel to spread his blessing to the nations. Israel fails at every step of the way.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Israel's sitting in a mess of its own making and the prophets come in and announced that they're still for coming leader, a transformation of the human heart and then a brand new world that God's going to bring about. That's where you sit then, at the end of the Old Testament.

Then the movements flow right into Jesus. Everything Jesus said and did connects right on to the Israel part of the story. And it makes sense of why Jesus came not announcing that you can go to heaven, but announcing that heaven that God's reign and rule, that humans rejected and Israel rejected is now on an invasion mission - to invade Earth. It's a similar theme that we've explored before.

But you have the Jesus and the kingdom mission. The death and resurrection fulfill that. Then the spreading of Jesus's Kingdom people into all of the nations, that accounts for most of the New Testament. And then the Return of the King and new creation.

[00:35:23]

Jon: All this king and kingdom language comes from a very specific part of Israel story where they get a king. It's a highlight in their story because it's when they were the most unified under King David, and successful and awesome. Powerhouse. No one ruled over them, they're united.

Tim: In Israel's whole history, there was only one king who successfully unified all of the tribes of Israel and brought abundance to the land.

Jon: And he loved their law of God.

Tim: Yeah, he was faithful to God of Israel. He had some serious failures from which he never fully recovered, although he did turn.

Jon: But he gives us the poetry of "how I love your words, O God." All the stuff that we sing and worship songs, at least in my tradition, he was referring to the—

Tim: The Scriptures and the poem that existed in his day.

Jon: As you're saying, king and kingdom, we have to talk specifically about that for that to have any meaning. Because what Jesus isn't talking about is an actual kingdom like we know it. Like a kingdom of Israel going into all that. When you say Kingdom people, it becomes like a metaphor in a way.

Tim: When Jesus uses Kingdom language, he's tapping into the Pope of the prophets, that God himself would come and appoint a new leader for Israel to reconstitute

## What is the Story of the Bible?

them. But what Jesus doesn't seem to have in mind is that takes the form of a new nation-state. But he does have it in mind that it forms actual body of people who live by a code of conduct and who follow him as their leader. He does have that in mind. So that starts to look like a kingdom.

Jon: Like a kingdom.

Tim: Exactly, yeah.

Jon: All of a sudden becomes "like a kingdom" which is metaphoric language, right? When something is like something, you're describing a metaphor now.

Tim: You're right. He said following him was entering God's kingdom and experiencing it. But it didn't have the structure of what was recognizable as the state in the eyes of Rome, although Rome still did see the Jesus movement as a threat.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Like when Paul is in Thessalonica, this is Acts chapter 17, he's accused of defying Caesar's decrees and spreading trouble all over the world by announcing that there is another king, one called Jesus. So the early Christians were heard and viewed as...

Jon: Had their real-world identifications.

Tim: ...as having what we would call implications. In that sense, it's not a metaphor. Jesus came talking about a kingdom, he acted like a royal figure, and he called people to give their allegiance to him, and to no other God or king or actually, to express their devotion to Jesus by honoring every other God and King. Actually, that was the moves that they made.

Paul would tell people to pray for Nero and pay taxes. And Peter would say, "Honor the king. He might be sending soldiers to kill you but honor the king." But that's all about the paradox of power in Jesus' kingdom. If there's anything that gets at what you're talking about, "it's like a kingdom," it's that it doesn't behave like a kingdom as we know it.

Jon: Yeah. Because a kingdom as we know it, the king would be here, I suppose.

Tim: Not invisible?

Jon: Right.

Tim: Let's be honest.



## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Yeah. Not some life-giving spirit.

Tim: Who's presence is through his people and so on.

Jon: That's not a normal kingdom. Then the values of the kingdom are completely wonky and their perspective of a normal kingdom, as you say, upside down. In a way, is that why you're saying, "Like a kingdom," because it's different than kingdoms but it is—

Tim: Yeah. I guess it's its own category of a kingdom, the people of Jesus spreading throughout history and through the nations. But it ought to be recognizable as a distinct group of people who live with a different set of allegiances and by a different ethic. But they aren't a threat to the rulers, aren't a military threat to the rulers, whatever Kingdom they happen to live in. That's what I mean by people of the kingdom.

Jesus comes announcing the kingdom, then the people of the kingdom spread throughout the nation's awaiting the return of the world's true king.

Jon: That's a phrase that becomes important. It seems like really unpacking this idea of kingdom.

Tim: I understand. Well, okay, that's a good point.

Jon: Which is slightly different than anchoring in on vocation.

Tim: That's true. But what is the vocation? To rule.

Jon: To rule.

Tim: That's Kingdom language. What the humans are called to do is a royal task of being royal rulers over a creation.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: So we could choose ruling kingdom stuff as an anchor. I mean, there's a strong argument to be made that that is one of the main themes. The red threads that ties the whole story together, who's going to rule the world?

Jon: Who's going to rule the world and how will it be ruled?

Tim: Yeah, how will it be ruled?

[00:41:35]

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Am I going too far to say, Adam and Eve eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil corrupts their power? Because now when they use their power, and they're deciding what's good and bad, they do a bad job. And inevitably, it's because of self-protection and self-preservation. That's just the natural way for humans to define good and evil, but we need God to define it for us.

So Jesus comes and says, "Here's what's good. It's self-giving love and this is how this kind of goodness exerts its power." Even now, as I think about it, it's absurd, right? Because I'm still a human who's trying to define good and evil on my own to some extent. Then Jesus said, "Here's what's good. It's laying down your life for an enemy." And I am thinking, "Really?"

Tim: That's stupid.

Jon: It's actually kind of stupid.

Tim: But this is third part of our mission statement is that the Bible's unified story that leads to Jesus that has wisdom taught for the modern world. You were just telling me about a book you're reading called "The Power of Paradox." And it's talking about how real influence is very different than our main cultural conceptions of influence and power. That's what came to my mind.

Jon: That's why I've actually really been interested in that book. It's not from a Christian perspective. It's just this...I don't know can't remember where it's from...Stanford or somewhere. But he's a psychologist and for 20 years. He's been studying power.

And he would say that the way we think about power really comes from this famous book written by Machiavellian, I think is his name. It's basically the premises to really have power, you need to lie, cheat and kill, basically. That's what true power is.

That's really seeped into our subconscious that in our epic stories of powerful people...Think of House of Cards, I don't know. You probably haven't watched that. But it's all about this politician who gains power through corruption.

We have plenty of stories, but his point is, those are our stories, but if you look at how the world really changes, and who really gets influenced in the long run, people that we actually still really celebrate and that have moved the human story forward, had a different kind of power - Martin Luther King, or Mother Teresa, or Gandhi - that kind of power comes from seeking the greater good. He just makes really good case for that, which is kingdom language.

Tim: It sounds like Jesus.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Yeah, it sounds like Jesus. He's basically like, "Hey, I've discovered after 20 years of research that..."

Tim: Real power looks like Jesus of Nazareth.

Jon: ...real power looks like what Jesus is talking about."

Tim: You described for me. It was empathy?

Jon: Yeah. Well, some of the characteristics of maintaining this kind of power is empathy, generosity, celebrating other people's stories. What was the other one? The fourth one is escaping me.

Tim: Anyway, nonetheless.

Jon: It's called "The Power of Paradox" because that's how you gain power. But when you have power, what it does is it makes you more insular, it makes you feel important, it makes you feel self-sufficient, and naturally, you become less empathetic of other people. You begin to now think, "How do I protect what I've gained?" becomes something you worry about more. It makes you tell grand stories about yourself and your success, which really minimizes kind of other people.

So the natural implication of power is to then become the kind of person who wouldn't ever be given that power. And that's the paradox is that once you have power, we don't know what to do with it. It destroys us.

Tim: It distorts our ability to think straight.

Jon: And I've thought about this before. I couldn't be president of the United States. It would destroy me. When I was helping run a company that was doing really well, it just messes with you a little bit because all sudden, you're making these more important decisions that affect people, you're spending amounts of money that you know, most people don't even make in a year on business decisions. Different things that just makes you feel just to kind of other and more important and it kind of outside of the rules.

It just ends up distorting your view of things and inevitably makes decisions that will oppress people. That's the human condition.

Tim: That's precisely the Bible's diagnosis of the human condition. That you get on pages 3 to 11 in miniature and that you get explored in depth with amazing literary portraits in the story of Israel. That's exactly it.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: But what we really truly want, if you think about what do you really want as a human, it's not power. I think I want power, but I think I want power because that's going to bring me happiness and freedom and joy and security and stability. Those are the things I want.

But the power, if you knew the corrosive of it, that's not what you really want. What you want is the friendship that brings stability. Think about stability of community that cares about each other.

Tim: You want to make a meaningful contribution to the people that you care about or the people that you think need help.

Jon: And you want to know these other people intimately, and you want to be known by them, and you want to think that what you're doing is meaningful. Those are the things you want and those are the things that bring happiness not power. But the people who do that well and are building those communities, they're the ones that the communities then give their power and then what do you do with it.

And Jesus is saying, "This is what you do with that power." So it does start to make sense. But still, if you came to me and said, "Jon, you're going to have to die for these guys so you don't like...," I'd be like, "I would rather hang out with my kids for another couple decades. I'd rather fight that guy and kill him if I had to, if it came down to it and be with my family. My kids need me." That makes way more sense intuitively that lay down your life for your enemy.

I hope I'm never in a position like that. But that's what Jesus has message is. In the long run, that makes sense if you think in terms of Big History, and generation after generation and the systemic problem. But when it comes down to me, and just this moment...right?

Tim: That's right.

Jon: I guess a lot of things are that way. I mean, if you think about it with the environment, if everyone just decided to make a couple small changes, we could really clean things up. But am I going to do that in my life?

No, I'd rather—

Tim: That's right. It's the nature of a broken system. As you're talking, I think that's the heartbeat of the thing. I think we want to create a video that makes clear that coherent unified story of the Bible and how Jesus, he unifies the whole thing.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

What you just described to me, is a really compelling story. I think we could make the video about that. About humanity's capability and task, royal task, powerful task, corruption.

Jon: We were given God's breath.

Tim: Yeah. We're given divine authority that no other species has what our species has the capability of doing here in our world. And how that's corrupted according to the story, which is very true to human experience. Then the unique role of the family of Israel within it has an even deeper diagnosis of the problem.

Then how Jesus becomes the one who shows us true power by totally reinventing it almost and taking that reinvention, or upside down to the full extent by embodying it in his death.

Jon: That's the CliffsNotes version of the Bible?

Tim: Yeah. Then it's about the launch of that new kingdom or new different kind of humans who are called to rule—

Jon: If humans come together to rule in that way, in an organized fashion, what would that look like? And that's supposed to be.

Tim: It's at least the ideal of what the church is called to in the New Testament as they anticipate the return of that King.

Jon: And what does it look like when you're destroyed doing that? Like Martyred, persecuted, right?

Tim: Yeah. According to the book of Revelation, that's how you win. I think there's a really cool opportunity.

Jon: That's a very natural question that Revelation addresses through this lens, which is, "Okay, great. I'm going to be a part of that kind of movement. But what happens when the big bad guy comes and decides to just be evil? I'm over." And it's like, "Yeah, that's how you're going to conquer."

Tim: You stand up and you bear witness, and you call it out, and you name the beast. It will anger the beast, the beast might kill you because you won't give the beast your allegiance, but you'll have died bearing witness to the real king of the world. And he'll vindicate you when you're raised from the dead.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

I think there's something here. What I brought up the wisdom for the modern world is, to me, like I looked up that book, Machiavelli's book. It's called "The Prince." But it's—

Jon: Is it Machiavelli not Machiavellian?

Tim: Machiavelli. Then his nouns, his name becomes an adjective. Machiavellian

Jon: So I said it wrong.

Tim: But the Bible is on par with these great contributions to human thought and it's diagnosis of the human condition. Essentially, it's one of power. It's about power. I just think that's really profound. If you hurt yourself, like summarize that book, it's really, really interesting and compelling and relevant.

I think it could be a cool opportunity with this video both to serve people and seeing the Bible as a unified story, but to see that it's about something that is relevant as—

Jon: Very relevant.

Tim: Like the political climate that we as Americans are living in right now, that the whole world's in right now and has been as far back as we can possibly tell. Anyway.

Jon: Well, you could see how upside down it is in that, what seems to make the most sense for a nation-state? Like when things get tough, you go, "We just need to protect ourselves." That makes a lot of intuitive sense and it's really hard to argue against it in a lot of ways.

Tim: A question that's on everybody's mind right now is, what does it mean to use power responsibly?

Jon: Yeah. What does it mean to use the power of organized group of people?

Tim: To gain power and then to wield it, use it.

Jon: The Bible speaks to it so closely, and Jesus talks about it so much.

Tim: The whole story of Israel is about that.

Jon: It's so much wisdom, which is scandalous. It's absurd.

Tim: In a way. But that's why I brought up that book. It's also wise.

Jon: But it's also wise.

## What is the Story of the Bible?

Tim: We were speaking about Les Miserables earlier, but, you know, that's the hinge if the whole plot is Jean Valjean is shown the scandalous act of totally irresponsible generosity, and grace and forgiveness.

Jon: I love that. Irresponsible generosity.

Tim: And he doesn't experience it as an act of kindness in the classic paragraph that describes Jean Valjean's response. He scandalized, he's angered because he knows if he continues being on the same horrible human, he'll be even more damned after having been shown this act of love and grace. It's amazing paragraph.

It was like it confronted every part of his being and he knew this was the moment to overcome or be conquered forever. He chooses to let it transform him and his view and what he does with the rest of his life, which was—

Jon: Peace.

Tim: Yeah, it is. It's amazing. But it's that. It's how Jesus redefined power in his teachings and his life is scandalous but it's also wise. Like it's, as he claimed, the only way forward for any of us. And he offers his wisdom. And then along, come to Stanford professor, he writes a book and says, "You know, the most powerful people in our world are people who end up behaving like Jesus."

Jon: "The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence."

Tim: Who's it by?

Jon: Dacher Keltner. Professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Tim: UC Berkeley?

Jon: Yeah. And he's the director of Greater Good Science Center. That's kind of why he puts his money where his mouth is, I think.

Tim: It's cool.

Jon: That's a part of UC Berkeley.

Tim: How did you hear about it?

Jon: Gosh, I was just browsing Barnes & Noble and I just saw the title. I was like, "That sounds like a really interesting title." Then I started skimming it, and I was like, "This is awesome."

## What is the Story of the Bible?

- Tim: That's an argument for your local bookstore. Just go walk around and you'll never know what you find. It could change your life. I think we've put our thumb on it. I think this is what we've got to do - break the biblical story and the main movements, but under the whole unifying thread about rule and power.
- Jon: Isn't the Bible about salvation?
- Tim: Yeah, totally. I was just thinking that. It makes it feel less religious and more like a work of moral philosophy.
- Jon: It's refreshing in one way, but in another way that's potentially problematic because the Bible is more than just a book of philosophy.
- Tim: That's true.
- Jon: It's making a claim about how the world actually is.
- Tim: You're right. It's not a moral philosophy in terms of just "Here's how you ought to be." It's almost like, "Here's how basically, you're incapable of being and here's one who was there for you and wants to be the source of power for you to become that yourself."
- Jon: And then it becomes mystical.
- Tim: Yeah, it's a good point.
- Jon: Then it becomes religious again.
- Tim: Then becomes religious again.
- Jon: It's not like have a new state of mind. It's like have an encounter with the God of the universe, personally.
- Tim: Something happened in the person of Jesus. And to understand that, you need to know the story. Once you know the story, and that it is leading you to Jesus, you have a decision to make of whether or not you're going to connect yourself to this Jesus.
- Jon: Connect to the source of this power. This resurrection power.
- Tim: You're right. There's always a choice that's put before you that you can't avoid. But at the same time, it's as a diagnosis to these problems, this crisis of power. It's very much a contribution to the question of our day, the anxiety of our day.



## What is the Story of the Bible?

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. The Bible Project is a crowdfunded studio in Portland, Oregon. We make videos and resources that show how the Bible's one unified story that leads to Jesus and has profound wisdom for the modern world.

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