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The Bible as Jewish Meditation Literature - Jewish Scripture Meditation vs. Modern Meditation

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Jon: This is Jon at The Bible Project. This week on the podcast, Tim and I, finish a conversation on how the Bible is ancient Hebrew meditation literature. Last week, we talked about the story of Cain and Abel that you find on page 4 of the Bible. It's a classic story that highlights the Hebrew narrative style. It's short, confusing, ambiguous, and for millennia, people have studied and meditated on it.

This week, Tim and I continue our conversation on the Cain and Abel story, and we discuss why meditation literature encourages this type of wrestling.

Tim: Why do we use the word meditation? It's actually the way the Bible portrays the ideal reader of this kind of literature. If you think about things like the Cain and Abel narrative, it'll bring good things into your life. And that's what the Bible is designed to do.

Jon: Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Tim: Do you want to summarize right now or do you want me to try to?

Jon: I think we could summarize while looking at Psalm 1.

Tim: Oh, good. Great.

Jon: But before we go to Psalm 1, can we just blitz through a couple more things in Genesis 4. I mean—

Tim: Since we're here?

Jon: We're here and we're saying it's genius. Let's just continue on. We got to the point where Cain is angry downcast. We got to this really brilliant God's statement of "do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." That's verse 7. We talked about that.

Verse 8: "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." In two lines there, all of a sudden, you're like, "Whoa, what just happened?"

Tim: All right. Think about the narrative technique here. We had Cain's response: anger and fallen face. God says, "You got a choice here?" And what we don't get is a whole depiction of the interior struggle of Cain, the scene of him...

Jon: It would make such a great scene if we're going to make a movie out of this.

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- Tim: It would. Him walking away from talking to God, and being like, "Oh."
- Jon: This is the breaking bad moment. It could be over five episodes right now of Cain—
- Tim: Yeah, totally. Struggling with the decision. It would be of him having dinner that night in a dark room—
- Jon: And he starts to plot like, "Okay, I think I know what I'm going to do."
- Tim: Yeah, totally. No, what we get is the next thing happens is Cain talk to his brother.
- Jon: "Let's go to the field."
- Tim: "Let's go to the field." And you're like, "Wait, well, okay. The field?" The field is where Cain works. Cain is a farmer. "So let's go out to my territory." Then, all of a sudden, he rose up and slew his brother. You have to fill in the story there. Why did he do that? What was he thinking?
- Jon: And you go back to the previous verse...
- Tim: And all you have is...
- Jon: ...sin was crouching at his door.
- Tim: ...he allowed the animal sin to eat his lunch and he choose not to rule over it. God's point was, "You have a choice here. You can choose good and resist, or you can allow sin to overwhelm you. But you have the capacity to rule it."
- Jon: And the consequences are so severe. Like it's killing your brother.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's not just taking a piece of fruit, like in the parallel of the previous chapter.
- Jon: Yeah. It's kind of like, "What was the big deal about the fruit?" "Okay, pull out the story. Killing your own brother."
- Tim: So intense. That's right. There are two things happening here. Once again, the previous verse 7, "If you choose Good," that's the hyperlink back to the good and not good - good and evil of chapters 1 and 2. Then the phrase "sin's crouching at your door but you can rule it," the word "rule" has appeared only one time in the story so far, and it's what the humans are giving—
- Jon: It's the image of God.

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Tim: It's the image of God to rule over the world on God's behalf. Now, we hear that you can rule your moral decisions if you choose. The implication is "Okay, well, if I don't rule over sin, sin will apparently rule me." Which sounds a lot like how Paul view sin in Romans chapter 6, which he's almost certainly been reflecting on this very story and its vocabulary.

Jon: He's meditated on it.

Tim: What does it mean to let sin rule you? It means that I now define as good that my brother must die.

Jon: That's the good thing. That's the right decision. The right decision because my life isn't working out the way I want it to work out. I'm not getting favor from God. What should I do? Well, maybe if I kill my brother, then I can get some of the favor.

Tim: Yeah. Or I'm now angry because I've been left out. I'm the one who didn't get what I deserve.

Jon: That's true. We don't get his motivation. We just know he's angry and now he's in going to kill his brother. That's good in his mind.

Tim: That's right. This is a good example of what Jerome Walsh was talking about. You have to fill out possibilities in mind.

Jon: Yeah. We just fill that too and then you could bring those forward.

Tim: I don't deserve what I've got in life and I'm angry about it, this other person is getting what I deserve, the good thing for me to do is, whatever, make my life more important than theirs. And so I kill them. That's one totally legitimate way of viewing what's going on here. And if we could probably imagine two or three others.

But the point is that we're intentionally not given what Cains motivations are so that will go through exercise and wrestle with it. You walk away from that cup of tea pondering Cains motivations learning a lot about yourself.

Jon: Success in reading the Bible - a devotional time, which is the phrase was used in my tradition, or your quiet time - success isn't coming away with necessarily some more understanding or some clear principle. Success could just be coming away with an ambiguity that you need to wrestle with for the rest of the week. Correct?

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Tim: Yeah, right.

Jon: That success in and of itself. When I say freedom and excitement, that's what it brings. Is like, "Oh, cool. This is something that I get to carry with me and wrestle with and it can shape things. It's not like some textbook that I have to go and memorize answers and then be done."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly right. And every story is just a universe of this kind of thing. Right now, personally I have a project I'm working on. I'm studying 1 and 2 Samuel.

I'm in the thick of the narratives about Saul and David in period where Saul goes from the chosen King, everybody's happy to his descent into madness. And dude, I'm telling you it is breaking bad. Or whatever godfather series it's a whole story that through this level of brilliance, there's like 40 episodes' stories all packed next to each other and everyone is this brilliant. And you're watching this man descend into selfish madness, destructive madness.

I'm telling you every time I read a new part and I'm taking notes and thinking about it, I'm walking away going like, "Oh my gosh. I am so screwed up. Help me. God, please help me."

Jon: You're supposed to fear the Lord in you.

Tim: It does. It does. Because you're just like, "I could do this."

Jon: How quickly I could unravel.

Tim: I see these own patterns in my own behavior that easily lead me down a path. But you have to allow yourself to enter into the story of this ancient character.

Jon: Yeah. You can't just float above it and try to pick principles from it. You got to enter in.

Tim: You got to enter into the world of this narrative. It's the same kind of thing. Why did Saul do that? Why didn't he listen to Samuel? Why did he offer the sacrifice then and not wait? And you're wondering, and then it's precisely gets you in the same headspace of "Oh, I'm ever impatient? Oh, shish. I think I am. I'm just like this guy. Oh, no." It's so good. But you have to take the time.

Jon: Can we keep going?

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- Tim: You're right. Genesis 4. I want to keep moving. You want to keep going? Okay, deal.
- Jon: Should we move on then?
- Tim: No. What questions do you have? Just keep going.
- Jon: Well, verse 9. We're in verse 9.
- Tim: He kills his brother.
- Jon: "Then the Lord says the Cain, 'Where's your brother Abel?'" This should probably help us. In the last chapter when Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they hide, and then God comes and "Where are you?" It's like total hyperlink back to that - that detail in the story. It's the same thing in Genesis 3. Like, why did God ask where they are?"
- Tim: Exactly.
- Jon: Why is he now asking where Cain is?
- Tim: Now he asks, "Where's your brother?"
- Jon: "I don't know," He replied, "I am I my brother's keeper."
- Tim: Let's pause right there. Now it's another narrative statement. Instead of the narrator telling us, "And Cane thought to himself, 'I'm not accountable. You're the one who didn't regard my offering. Why are you...,'" we have these two words in Hebrew.
- Jon: Am I responsible for my brother?
- Tim: "I don't know," and then, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Then that gets you thinking, "Well, oh."
- Jon: "No, you're his brother."
- Tim: Yes, that's right. "But am I the guarder, the protector of my brother."
- Jon: "Am I the one to make sure my brother stays safe? No, that's your job. You're the one that gives him favor."
- Tim: It's such a rich question. It gets you thinking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Well, in one sense, I am.
- Jon: Everyone's in a way.

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- Tim: Within the narrative world, these are the only four humans.
- Jon: They're married at this point, right?
- Tim: No, not yet. He's going to go find his mystery wife and in a very few paragraphs. Such a rich line. And so you think, "Well, in once, yes, I guess you are." I wouldn't have put it that way, but now that you've put it that way, what a classic line.
- Jon: Verse 10. "But the LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen!'"
- Tim: Hold on. "What have you done?" It's exactly what he said to Adam and Eve and to the serpent. "What have you done?"
- Jon: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!"
- Tim: Yes. Holy cow.
- Jon: That's going to become very significant idea in the Bible.
- Tim: Innocent blood crying out from the ground.
- Jon: That's weird statement.
- Tim: Well, there are some cultural things underneath there, and then once some little details. So maybe let's just start from the ground. The word "ground" is the word "adamah," which is connected to the word "Adam." Human Adam. Humanity comes from the "adamah" and they're supposed to return back to the "adamah."
- Jon: So if you're reading this in Hebrew, it would be like, "Your brother's blood cries from the adamah"?
- Tim: Yes.
- Jon: And immediately you're triggered like, ground, humanity, our rule to cultivate the ground, that we came from the ground. All this stuff, it's all in there.
- Tim: Yes. "You came from the ground, and to the ground, you'll return." Genesis 3. But here, Abel has returned to the ground, so to speak, but not in a legitimate form of dying at a ripe old age. Rather, it's his blood that's been spilled on the adamah, the ground. Yeah.
- So then the innocent but blood lying on the ground, instead of this person being buried in the ground, the blood on the ground. Then there's a cultural

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thing about...Actually, it's true. Still, in our culture, I think burial or cremation and whatever you call that, depositing the ashes in a certain kind of space, we see that as a form of closure.

Most cultures are looking for a way to find closure for the end of a human life. Many cultures have different practices and ways of doing this, but it's appropriate. Or we equate it also with honor and dignity. Like if this person deserves burial as the proper way to honor who they are, and so on.

So most cultures have an awareness that to die in a way in which your body is not properly dealt with is somehow unjust. It's true biblical culture to not be buried is one of the most dishonorable horrifying things you could imagine - to have your body just lie there in the field rotting and your blood spilling on the ground.

And so you get this phrase that "blood spilled on the ground becomes like this megaphone to the just good Creator God. Then he notices all of the innocent blood spilled on the ground and it cries out to him. It's very powerful. And it's not the only time used in the Bible this image of the unburied or the blood crying out from the ground. It happens.

It's the same phrase that's used of the Israelites and slavery. "And they cried out, and their cry rose up to God." In Exodus chapter 2, it's the same phrase, "crying out."

Jon: What about in the Psalm where the rocks will cry out? Is it the same face?

Tim: That's more about creation having this voice that praises God. That'd be interesting. Things that cry out to God.

Jon: Things that cry out to God in the Bible.

Tim: Creation does.

Jon: Blood from the ground.

Tim: The suffering of slavery is a cry that God hears, God hears the cry of creation and praise, and God also here's the cry of innocent blood. Now we hear the statement that "Oh my gosh, human life matters to the creator of life, so much so that God notices even the cry of innocent death in the middle of a field where you thought nobody was listening. Why did they go out in the field? No one will hear. But then you realize God knows and He hears.

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- Jon: Verse 11: "Now. you're under a curse."
- Tim: You're cursed from the "adamah."
- Jon: Yeah, you're driven from the adamah. In Genesis 3, he's cursed, but the curse is actually the ground is going to be harder to deal with. Is there some sort of link here?
- Tim: In Genesis 3?
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. In Genesis 2, you're set to cultivate the garden. Genesis 2, use the garden, cultivate it, work it. Become farmers. Genesis 3, "Now that you've chosen to know and to find good and evil on your own terms, the environment, both relational environment and your experience of life here is going to be one of hostility and tension rather than ease and peace. But you're still working the adamah, the ground in Genesis 3; It's just hard.
- Jon: And you're still working it.
- Tim: Now what he's being cursed from is, "Now you don't even get to stay put in one place to work the ground. You're cursed away from the ground." This is what he says. "You're going to be a wanderer."
- Jon: You're not going to have your own part of land.
- Tim: Correct.
- Jon: That's even a worse situation.
- Tim: It's becoming the exile and sojourner who doesn't have a home anymore.
- Jon: A restless wanderer on the earth.
- Tim: Yes.
- Jon: Cain in verse 13 says, "That's harsh. My punishment is more than I can bear. You're driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence." Which, by the way, if you're reading carefully, you're like, "God didn't say he'd be hidden from your presence." So Cain's like putting words in God's mouth?
- Tim: Yeah. He assumes that "If I'm a wanderer, then God is no longer with me."
- Jon: Which I guess you're can understand why you would assume that at this point, but it is an assumption.

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Tim: And it's the introduction of a phrase that the hiding of God's presence or being hidden from God's presence becomes a negative image of God's judgment or of the Gods angry or withholding his presence from him.

Jon: Oh, if God's presence is—

Tim: If God's presence is not with me, I'm in danger.

Jon: It's interesting that Adam and Eve are the ones that hide in the last story.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: And then?

Tim: And then everyone who finds me is going to kill me. So if your presence isn't with me to guard and protect me—

Jon: It's over for me. So basically you're punishing me to death. I think it's really interesting he's being such a whiner for having been punished for killing someone. But I'm a whiner too, so I get it.

Tim: Yeah. Sorry. One more detail there. In verse 14, he says, "You have banished me." It's exactly the word us to describe, "And God banished Adam and Eve from the garden" in chapter three.

Jon: Another parallel of being banished.

Tim: Two parallel stories, but the banishment is away from the presence, so to speak, in Genesis 3, which means away from the garden. Then here it's another form of banishment.

Jon: It's a banishment from having a place to call your own, you become a wanderer.

Tim: This sets up the image then to give in to sin, to not rule over it, but to allow bitterness and anger and resentment to rule me. Then to begin to make choices and have habits or behavior that have destructive relational results, that will result in greater and greater isolation, becoming a more and more isolated wanderer in the world with no home.

The phrases used is "to be hidden from God's presence." I'm in God's world, but I'm becoming more and more hidden from God through my own moral failures. And who doesn't know that experience? Destructive choices, the

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breakdown in your relationships continue to isolate you more and more as you go on through life.

And that experience of being in the world as an exile because of my own stupid decisions, that is such an important image in the biblical story. So much that we're going to make a whole video just about this concept of exile and banishment. Once again, the story is loaded.

Jon: All right. We could stop there.

Tim: Okay.

Jon: So what just happened? We were showing how a chapter in the Bible is so—

Tim: It's not even half chapter. 14 sentences.

Jon: ...so packed, so dense, full of ambiguities, and we could sit there and we can start to see as we wrestle with this ambiguity how it connects to the rest of Scripture. In that way, not only is it telling us what the story is about, it's actually messing with us. And we're realizing like, "Whoa, when I get bitter, I'm letting sin devour me and the consequences of that is being left without a home being isolated and wandering.

I get that when it comes to the story, but I also get that when it comes to my relationships with people; relationships with my wife, or whatever it is. Now by meditating on this, it's becoming much more significant. So that's the Bible as meditation literature.

Tim: That's a good summary. Now, watch this. This story is giving us language and imagery, especially the way sin gets personified that's going to find greater clarification way later in the Bible. There's this little paragraph in the New Testament in the letter of 1 John chapter 3. He's talking about people who are children of the devil and children of God.

Chapter 3 Verse 7. He says, "Little children, make sure nobody deceives you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just like God is righteous. The one who practices sin - Remember Genesis 4 is the first time that word occurs - The one who practices sin or does sin is of the devil, for the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God does sin, because God's seed abides in him; he cannot sin because he's born of God.

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So John's got this idea that you can either be a child of God because God seed is in you and therefore you are a part of God's seed or you can be the seed or the child of the devil, because you do sin. And you realize all this vocabulary comes from Genesis 3 and 4. That there's the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. But there is coming one - a seed of the woman - who's going to crush the head of the serpent, which John phrases here as the Son of God who came to destroy the works of the devil.

But even though that's happened in Jesus, victory over sin and spiritual evil, you and I still have a choice of what seed we want to be a part of.

In verse 10, he says, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who doesn't do righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn't love his brother." This is the message we've heard from the beginning that we should love one another not like Cain, who was—

Jon: At this point, if he didn't think he was referencing to these stories. Now he's like, "Let me just name drop Cain."

Tim: Not like Cain who was of the evil one. I think Genesis 3 said there would be the seed of the serpent. You entertain two possibilities there at least. This is talking about baby snakes or it's talking about people who give in to the serpent's temptation just like...

Then you get to Genesis 4, which is somebody facing another temptation and the temptation is called sin, and you watch Cain do it. Which now you realize, like, "Oh, I'm supposed to see people who give into sin as allowing themselves to become the seed of the serpent."

Jon: Part of the legacy of evil.

Tim: The legacy of evil. That's exactly what he says here. "Don't be like Cain who was of the evil one, and so murdered his brother." For what reason did he slay him? Remember that was the question we asked. He just says, "Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous."

Jon: It doesn't really give an explanation.

Tim: What he's saying is that Cain and Abel are these archetypes of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The more that I give in to evil and act on those evils, whatever, temptations or purposes, I become of the evil one. It's becomes my nature.

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But there is a different seed, a different nature that I can receive as a gift, and it's to become the seed of the woman leading to the overcoming of evil, which is...that's the story of Jesus.

Why this little paragraph is great is one, it shows us a new testament author who's has meditated on Genesis 3 and 4. But also, it's also reading that story in light of where it all led to in Jesus. John is reading the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, and then he goes back and he meditates on every single story of the Old Testament now in light of the whole story.

So it's both allowing each story has to become a little universe of meditation to reflect on myself, and life, and God. Then it's also learning how to read backwards and forwards and read every story and poem in light of every other story and poem as a unified whole. This is what we mean when we say, "reading the Bible as ancient Jewish meditation literature."

Jon: Yes, that's great.

[00:26:06]

Tim: So why do we use the word "meditation?" That's intentional ambiguity we have not answered up to this point.

Jon: Well, because the idea of meditating is slowing down and concentrating on something. But did you pull that word out of a dictionary or a thesaurus and go, "Oh, that's a good word"?

Tim: I didn't just think it up. It's actually the way the Bible portrays the ideal reader of this kind of literature and the place where the Bible describes the ideal Bible reader as in Psalm 1.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's great. Now we're looking at a poem. We looked at a narrative, now we're looking at a poem.

Jon: We did look at some story and we looked at some discourse in John and now we're looking at a poem.

Tim: It begins with how a blessed, how fortunate is a person who doesn't do three things. He doesn't walk, stand or sit in the company of certain people. He doesn't walk in the plans of the wicked, he doesn't stand in the path of

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sinners or sit in the seat of mockers or scoffers. To walk is a very common image of your way of life. Life as a path or journey.

Jon: Yeah. The metaphor is life as a journey.

Tim: To stand is about where you're seated and stationed, and rooted.

Jon: Your position.

Tim: Oh, excuse me. Where you stand, your position. Sorry. And then where you sit, is where you're rooted. All these images of "life as a journey," "life as a position," and "life as a location," "as a home base"...

Jon: Standing is kind of your vantage point, and sitting seems to be more like your home base.

Tim: Yeah. And so the wicked, the rasha [SP], the sinners and the scoffers.

Jon: That could be your way of life, that could be your point of view, that could be your starting position?

Tim: Yes. And the fortunate human is the one who doesn't end up in any of those scenarios. So if a fortunate person doesn't end up pursuing those kinds of whatever life trajectories, then what do they do? They make them so fortunate? What we're told is the blessed person's delight is in the Torah of Yahweh.

Jon: Which if you're reading along in NIV it says, "The law of the LORD."

Tim: Yes, the law of the LORD.

Jon: But that's referring to the Torah?

Tim: Hebrew word is "Torah."

Jon: The teaching?

Tim: Yeah. Which in its most limited sense can refer to just teaching that an elder give, a priest give, or a prophet. The phrase "Torah of Moses," or "Torah of the Lord" can come to refer to the body of Covenant literature connected with Moses. It can also come to refer to just biblical literature as a whole.

Jon: So delight in the Bible?

Tim: Delight in the Bible.

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- Jon: And scripture.
- Tim: The Bible nerd. So they, first of all, find delight. Why is it that they find delight or how did they express that delight? What they do is every day and night, they meditate on the Torah. So meditate is the English word "invoke."
- Jon: Right. We typically think of sitting quietly, emptying your mind, and maybe repeating a phrase or something, listening to your breathing.
- Tim: Yeah, that's a great point. In terms of the wave of influence of like yoga or mindfulness, I mean, there's so much wisdom to engaging these habits of breathing and emptying your mind for the purpose of kind of calming yourself. That's not at all what's being described here.
- Jon: That's not the meditation here.
- Tim: Rather than emptying your mind, this form of meditation is about filling your mind. But about filling your mind with something other than just your own thoughts. The word "meditate" in Hebrew is "hagah" and it occurs like eight or nine times. So it's not a super common word, but it's used enough. We have a very clear picture. Actually, the majority of the times that it's used, it's animals that do it.
- Jon: Oh, they're meditating? Interesting.
- Tim: It describes what a bear does over its prey.
- Jon: A bear meditates over its prey.
- Tim: So bear captures a raccoon. It kills a raccoon. Or in biblical terms, it would be like a rock badger or something. So yeah, it's like eating it.
- Jon: It's eating it.
- Tim: So what sound does a big bear make as it's eating an animal?
- Jon: Eating sounds.
- Tim: It's like, "Harrh harrg."
- Jon: Oh, right.
- Tim: Mouth noises, right?
- Jon: Right, yeah.

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- Tim: Like growling. The English word we have for that is growl.
- Jon: Growl, but also the smacking in the enjoyment.
- Tim: Two times this word, once in Isaiah 59, once in Ezekiel 7, it describes what doves do up in the little rock crevice or in the eaves of a building. The doves will go up there and hagah.
- Jon: Hagah. Making their little noises.
- Tim: Yeah. We have a very specific word in English.
- Jon: Cooing.
- Tim: Cooing, yeah. So in both cases, it's a quiet, low, primal, guttural sound.
- Jon: Right. While you're concentrating on something. Well, while the bear concentrate.
- Tim: So this is what the fortunate person does to the Bible. Day and night, they hagah in it.
- Jon: And the word we use is "meditate?"
- Tim: Yeah. "Meditate" it's fine because this is about focus, but what we miss with "meditate" is the idea of quiet reading. What this is envisioning as somebody who quietly reads the Bible aloud to themselves for the purpose of focusing on it. I began this practice too, and I notice it all the times.
- Jon: Interesting.
- Tim: In my habit, times of reading the Bible, I read it aloud quietly to myself, and it engages my whole body and mind in a way that's very different than when I read silently. So you read it aloud all the time.
- Then when you read it aloud all the time, you also begin to think about it all the time. It's what fills your mind. Why did Cain do that and why did Saul do that? Why is Genesis 3 next to Genesis 4 and why is banishment used in both stories? Why is banishment and an image for the consequences of sin?
- Jon: These are the questions that are filling your thoughts during the day. Then when you encounter your own life situation, these are the words and the images and ideas that you have to process your life. Which is what the point is, is not just to read this to read it, but for it to begin to shape you.

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Tim: First of all, Psalm 1 is saying that's the ideal way to engage biblical literature, is to read it aloud quietly to yourself on a regular basis, so that it's what you think about constantly. That's one thing.

The second thing is, also the statement is saying that the Bible has been designed to be the kind of literature that you can read and think about for a lifetime. Implied here is that there's enough to think about to read and think about every day for the rest of your life, and you will not have exhausted the depth and richness of what's going on here. That assumes that the Bible is designed with the kind of depth to it that no one human mind can exhaust it even in the course of a whole lifetime.

I brought this up before in some previous podcast episode, but about the Dead Sea Scrolls community. We have their own literature about their habits and their practices. It's called the Rule of the Community.

Jon: They had to read one passage for like 10 years or something?

Tim: You had to be a Bible nerd already, be like 10 years immersed in what they call...And they called the Bible, "the scroll of meditation," and they used exactly this word from Psalm 1. They got the idea from Psalm 1.

So they were trying to be a community of Psalm 1 type people. What Psalm 1 is telling us as both the ideal readers because the producers of the Bible were, these kinds of people - total Bible nerds. So you both had to have a decade of Bible nerddom under your belt.

Then the life of the community is decades of daily scripture, reading, meditation, and prayer along with other day to day life activities. In their minds, it takes a whole community of people, a lifetime's worth of...not even one human mind can comprehend everything that's going on here. You need a group of people to read and meditate on it together.

The outcome of that is this image of the tree planted by streams of water, which it's the Garden of Eden image of the eternal tree.

Jon: Verse 3.

Tim: The eternal tree, it's an unending stream. The scripture is an unending supply of life and richness which results in a human life that's fruitful. If you think about things like the Cain and Abel narrative, apparently, you'll be—

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Jon: It's a destructive life.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Oh, but if you think about it, it's going to bring you life.

Tim: If you think about it, it's going to bring good things into your life. And that's what the Bible is designed to do. This isn't a paradigm that either of us knew about through our own growing up experiences. Like Bible was just not this.

Then, once you grasp that the Bible is this, then all of a sudden you realize, "Oh, like biblical narrative is going to be a unique kind of thing if it's written in this culture with this set of assumptions and design techniques, and biblical poetry is going to differ from other cultures poetry. Biblical speeches, biblical laws, biblical whatever, it's all going to have a unique flavor that we're calling ancient Jewish meditation literature.

[00:37:36]

Jon: So the idea isn't mastery. It isn't some sort of completeness where eventually you will crack all the codes and have all the answers.

Tim: But you are supposed to grow in your competency and confidence.

Jon: Yes. But won't stay ambiguous and shallow; it'll continue to get deeper and more meaningful and more constructive.

Tim: Yeah, you do grow, you do learn but at the same time you're aware that this is a deep, deep well so there's always more to discover. And that I could always be wrong, probably about lots of things that after another decade of life and meditation on the scriptures, all have an even more developed view of things that hopefully will be more truthful and faithful.

There you go. That's the kind of humans the Bible is meant to produce is faithful humans who rule the world well in partnership with God.

Jon: Because they're of choosing the good and not letting sin devour them.

Tim: Yeah, not letting sin eat their lunch every day.

Jon: Eat their lunch. I love that image. Thank you for listening to The Bible Project podcast. We've got lots of other resources on our website. We've got videos and study notes. It's all on our website, thebibleproject.com.

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If you're new to the podcast, I'd recommend checking out our episode on What's the Story of the Bible. It's a good overview of the entire biblical narrative, and it's not the story you would likely expect.

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