

H2R Prophecy E2 Final

Prophets as Provokers

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Jon: This is Jon at The Bible Project. Today on the podcast, we're going to continue our conversation on how to read the prophet. Typically, we think of prophets as people who predict the future. But...

Tim: ...that's a part of what they do. However, that is not what the word "prophecy" means in the Bible nor is that the primary role of prophets in the Bible. Future prediction is something that some prophets do sometimes, but it is not near the heart of the core biblical definition of prophets.

Jon: Prophets in the Bible act as covenant watchdogs. Their goal is to make sure that Israel is faithful to Yahweh. Oftentimes, in order to get Israel attention, they do some crazy things.

Tim: A huge amount of what's in these books is long, detailed accusations, often full of sarcasm, often full of offensive, drastic, extreme imagery. These are parts of the Bible that kind of offend any modern religious sensibilities.

Jon: Today on the show, we dig into the extreme language in the biblical prophets, and we learn some tips on how to understand what they're actually talking about. We'll see how the role of the prophets doesn't stop at the end of the Old Testament.

Tim: The role that these speakers played in ancient Israel is precisely the role that Jesus was playing. He's depicted as playing the Gospels as these kind of public figures who create a popular base outside the institutional system. And their poets hustling, they perform these public symbolic act that gets them in trouble, but they critique the people on the top.

Jon: Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're talking about how to read the prophets. It's part of our How to Read series. So we're talking about 15 books in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tim: That's right, that are almost matching in size of the whole New Testament.

Jon: A lot of material.

Tim: A lot of material.

Jon: You mentioned once how they're big three main big ones, and 12 minor prophets. Those numbers are no coincidence.

Tim: Oh, yeah, totally. It's for sure mapped on to the three patriarchs and the 12 sons of Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then the 12 sons of Israel. Totally.

Jon: That's why we have 15.

Tim: That's why the collection has been given a three plus 12 shape. Almost certainly.

Jon: Almost certainly.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In the last episode, we talked about how confusing, random these books seem, and then we talked about how they were put together, and who the prophets were that made them, or who were the ones who would speak on behalf of God. Now we're going to jump in, and we're going to talk about what were the things that they were most interested in.

Tim: That's right. They were God's lawyers, essentially, representing God's interests in the covenant with Israel. We talked about how these works are anthologies representing, for some of these figures, decade's worth of speaking and writing on the public stage of Israel. As we moved to talk about what the main themes of these books are, that has continued to help me understand how the books are put together.

In other words, when you read an anthology, an anthology of public writer, speaker, it can be organized many different ways actually if you actually think about it. You could organize somebody's writings or speeches—

Jon: Oldest to newest.

Tim: Yeah, you could go chronological. You could go thematic, like different speeches around different themes.

Jon: You could go shortest to the longest.

Tim: Yes, many different ways.

Jon: It's how Paul epistles are ordered, right? The longest to the shortest.

Tim: Paul's letters are organized out of chronological order from longest to shortest. Totally. Romans, which is many ways the capstone document is the thing you read first.

Jon: Because it's the longest.

Tim: It's the culminating one. Anyway. What seems to have happened is that there is a rough chronological shape to some of the books. Like Ezekiel's poems and essays are mostly ordered chronologically by little notes, but some of them are out of that order. For most of the books, they seem to have been ordered thematically. In other words, this poem is next to that poem because they are focusing on the same core themes. So learning how to trace repeated words is really key following the logic of these books. And then also learning how they work cyclically.

Often the first few chapters will give you the core themes of that particular prophet. And then what the rest of the book will do will be collections of poems and speeches that just develop each of those themes at length.

Jon: This is the symphonic nature.

Tim: Yeah, that's right, like a symphony introduces the melody in the first movement. And then you go off and all of these other movements and you explore the melody and that key and then in that key again. It's very similar. It's like music.

Jon: Now the clarinet.

Tim: Different instrument. That's right.

Jon: Now the trumpet.

Tim: That's way more helpful analogy for how these books are compiled. They're not compiled like one of Paul's letters, tracing a set of ideas through a linear kind of argument.

Jon: If Beethoven was a lawyer.

Tim: If Beethoven was a lawyer.

[00:06:31]

Tim: What I have found, if you can boil almost any passage in the prophets down to just a few core main themes, and if you can lock into these themes...do you remember them? I call them buckets. Just a few buckets. If you know what the buckets are, you can know within just a few lines of the poetry the speech what theme your riffing off.

Jon: Prophetic themes are buckets.

Tim: Prophetic themes are buckets. Let's just talk about the big three.

Jon: Big three.

Tim: Think again, covenant lawyers. If there's a wrong that's been done...

Jon: They're going to point it out.

Tim: The first thing you're going to do is name and expose and accuse - form your accusations about everything that's been done wrong. This is a huge, huge, whole poem - whole speeches.

Jon: Just accusing.

Tim: Yeah. Remember those little editorial introductions?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Then we're being asked to imaginatively enter into—

Jon: Sorry, I remember, but that was the last episode. Every prophetic book, it begins with "here's who wrote it, here's when they wrote it, and here's the king..."

Tim: Here is the narrative from earlier in the Bible that you're supposed to have read that will help you see the setting out of which all this material arose. So accusations. There will be accusations pointed towards Israel. And it's actually a pretty short list of the normal things they've done. So breaking the covenant, how?

Jon: Well there's like 613 ways they can do that.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Plus, or minus.

Tim: Plus, or minus. That's right. But the basic ideas are like worshiping other gods - giving allegiance to other God.

Jon: That's part of the big 10.

Tim: Big one. Allowing social injustice, or just injustice.

Jon: There's a lot in there.

Tim: A lot. So much. Treatment of the poor was like a barometer. The fate of the poor and the orphan and the widow was like a barometer for how...

Jon: How well they're doing with this covenant.

Tim: That's right. And then...

Jon: My wife calls that the love tank. In our marriage, not with the poor. The covenant relationship, that's her barometer. How well you're doing is how full is the love take.

Tim: That's good.

Jon: It's kind of this. I can't see the love tank, but she feels it, and that's her barometer. But the barometer for Israel was how well are the poor taken care of.

Tim: And then there are concrete ways that you can fill the tank. Then there are concrete ways you can drain the tank. So it's the same thing. Allegiance to other gods, letting the poor suffer and being taken advantage of with no advocate in the palace of the king. Another theme that comes up is forming military alliances with other nations.

Jon: That's a big no, no.

Tim: Big no, no. Again, it's all comes back to the Exodus. Yahweh, "I'm the one who rescued you from Egyptian slavery."

Jon: No other gods.

Tim: Not any other gods. You were poor, mistreated immigrants so don't ever treat immigrants and the poor like that here in Israel. Then third, "I rescued you from a military machine of an ancient Empire..."

Jon: So don't be part of that.

Tim: ...don't you dare become one of those.

Jon: Wow. Keeping it simple, God. Those are really easy. It's like that's what everyone wants to do. Everyone wants to become the military power and then—

Tim: Make our nation into its own God.

Jon: And then take care of ourselves, and let everyone else fend for themselves.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Again, a kingdom of priests, a nation that exists in the world like no other nation had ever done. That was their calling.

Jon: It is interesting that we think of their laws as so barbaric because there are things, just a handful, you wouldn't do. The ones we pay the most attention to. But in reality, as a whole, these were very, I mean, even in modern standards, like pretty progressive.

Tim: Yeah, totally. That's why we'll do a whole video on it.

Jon: On what?

Tim: Reading biblical laws.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: Reading the laws of the Bible.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: But the law of the king in Deuteronomy is like, "Don't amass huge amounts of wealth, don't do a lot of political marriages, and don't build a huge army." And you're just like, "Oh, that's what everything ancient kings ever did, and it's what almost all the kings of Israel mostly did."

Jon: If I was king, I would probably do those things too.

Tim: Totally. Just going through as ideas, can we just read a sample to see it at work?

Jon: Yeah, let's read one.

Tim: This is from Hosea 4. I can just read it. Hosea 4. It's a classic example of what you call the poetic or a lawsuit poem. It's shaped like a lawsuit accusation.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: Hosea 4: "Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land because there is no truthfulness or covenant loyalty nor is there knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, violence, bloodshed follows bloodshed. And the land grieves, everyone

who lives in it languishes, along with the beasts of the field, and the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, they've all disappeared." That's the first stanza of the poem. So good.

Jon: Why are the animals disappearing?

Tim: Oh, that's a good question. Also, did you notice that list? Beasts of the field, birds of the sky, fish of the sea?

Jon: The three....

Tim: Genesis 1. It's the three tiers of the universe.

Jon: The sky, the land, and the sea.

Tim: The sky, the land, and the sea.

Jon: God populates them. We're to rule over them, and now they're just going away.

Tim: So the logic is that's the case against you. There's no truthfulness or covenant loyalty. Lying, stealing, murder, adultery. Does that list ring any bells?

Jon: Ten Commandment stuff?

Tim: Seriously, he lists five of the Ten Commandments. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing adultery. So he lists half of the Ten Commandments, and saying, it's just violence follows violence. That sounds just like the introduction of the flood narrative. The land is corrupted by violence. So the land grieves. Notice the logic here. You have a whole nation of people...

Jon: NIV says the land dries up.

Tim: Oh, yep, I bet it does. And what is it saying in the line after that?

Jon: "All who live in it waste away."

Tim: I see. Oh, I see. Yeah, I got it. I bet it's Umlal (*ʿūm·lāl*)

Jon: I bet it's Umlal. The Umlal.

Tim: So it's kind of a wordplay. The point is the land itself is negatively affected by the people's covenant behavior. So when humans are distorted images of God, it results in the land itself—

Jon: Getting distorted.

Tim: Grieving - having to put up with all bloodshed. This is about bloodshed - innocent blood being spilled on the land. This Cain and Abel too.

Jon: The blood cries out.

Tim: Blood crying out. So if creation itself is being defiled by human corruption, then this image of all of the animals fleeing—

Jon: "Let's get out of here."

Tim: And it's like the humans are disturbing the cosmic order. They're creating chaos through their violence. All of this is in the opening of the poem about Israel isn't being faithful to the covenant.

Next stanza of the poem. "But let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse each other, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother—my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. 'Because you have rejected knowledge, I'll reject you from being my priests; and since you have forgotten the Torah of your God, I will forget your children.'"

Jon: I am so lost.

Tim: Remember Martin Luther?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He's just like, "What is happening?"

Jon: I'm really lost.

Tim: This is meditation literature.

Jon: Let's meditate on this.

Tim: Okay, all right. We've just made this case: land's corrupted because of your bloodshed, creation itself is suffering. New idea. But let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse each other.

Jon: So right off the bat, he's like, "Listen, here's my accusation. You guys are blowing it." And then he's like, "But let's not blame each other."

Tim: Or it could be, what he's describing is the fact that no one is actually bringing any charges or accusations for any of this. For your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.

Jon: What does that mean?

Tim: Well, priests were the symbolic, blameless representatives. The point of the poem here seems to be something along the lines of "you guys you think you're my priestly representatives to the nations."

Jon: "So you can't be blamed."

Tim: "And you think you're blameless, and no one's pointing out what's wrong. No one's bringing charges and accusing one another." It's almost as if he's quoting them.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: "Let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse. That's like making fun of the priest. Don't do that. He's God's representative. Yeah, that's who we are to, by the way." And then he says, "Now, you're stumbling by day and night. Your prophets, the people you think are representing me to you, they are sham, and so I will destroy your mother."

Jon: What does he have with their mother? What's going on?

Tim: Well, keep going. "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge because you have rejected knowledge, you're not going to be my priests; you have ignored my Torah, I'll ignore your children." There are all these layers here of the people of Israel come from one mother, Sarah, the matriarchs. Yet they have ignored the laws of the Torah, which means you've disqualified yourself from being my priests to the nations. So in allowing the people to be destroyed, it's as if he's destroying their mother. I'm sure there's actually more going on here.

Jon: Sure. Like your heritage - what makes you important is your family line. The logic might be something like announcing the downfall of America, and "I'm going to destroy Martha Washington's house. The armies are going to invade and burn Martha Washington's house to the ground and I'm going to allow it."

Jon: Got it.

Tim: "I'm going to destroy your mother."

Jon: "I'm not just destroying you; the whole thing is going down."

Tim: That's right. And then that destroying is saying, "But listen, you're doing it to yourselves. My people destroy themselves by their lack of knowledge, by ignoring the Torah. So you ignore the Torah, I'm going to ignore you." It's all these words plays. This is like the stuff of intense spoken word.

Jon: It feels very spoken word.

Tim: Yeah, totally. It's kind of enigmatic little puzzling. You have to reread it multiple times. Hosea. Let's keep going on. Vs 7. "The more the priests multiplied - lots of priests go to Jerusalem. Tons of them. The more priests they had, the more sin there was. They exchanged their glory for shame." He's talking about idols in the temple.

Jon: NIV says they exchange their glorious God for something disgraceful. I will exchange their glory is the Masoretic text.

Tim: Yeah, their glory. "I will exchange their glory for shame."

Jon: And their glory is being children of God.

Tim: The glory is the divine presence in the whole Holy of holies. But it's where many Israelite kings set up other idols and other gods and so on. Vs 8: "They feed on the sin of my people..."

Jon: That's the same NIV by the way.

Tim: ...they direct their desire toward their iniquity." So the image here is the more Israel multiplies and the more its priests multiplies the place that should be the holy space becomes the den of iniquity, the greatest place of distortion. "So it will be: like people, like priest. I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. They'll eat but not have enough: they'll play the harlot or commit adultery." And that's a key metaphor in the prophets.

Jon: Is committing adultery.

Tim: It's a metaphor for idolatry - forgiving their allegiance to other gods. "Because they've stopped listening to Yahweh." And then what goes on in the next poem is talking about they start consulting wooden idols, they're going to sorcerers, the nation's falling apart. And where do they go? They go to sacred mountain tops and burn incense to foreign gods. There you go. That's a good example. It's a covenant lawsuit poem. It's just accusation. I mean, this makes up like a full 50% of what's in these books.

Jon: Vs 11 says, "Old wine and new wine take away their understanding." He's talking about getting stupid drunk. Is that what he's talking about?

Tim: Yeah, alcoholic epidemic in ancient Israel.

Jon: That's good.

Tim: Actually, it's a theme and in Jeremiah and Isaiah, here, Habakkuk. They nail Israel's leaders for being a drunken lot and not being able to lead well because they're just living high on the...

Jon: Sloshed.

Tim: Let's just take that on board for a second. A huge amount of what's in these books is long, detailed accusations in poetic form, often full of sarcasm, often full of offensive, drastic, extreme imagery.

Jon: "I will destroy your mother."

Tim: Yeah, totally. Ezekiel writes almost pornographic in some of these scenes. He takes this metaphor of idolatry as adultery.

Jon: Oh, and just runs through that.

Tim: Oh, yeah, he'll depict the scenes and you just like, "I'm uncomfortable right now." Ezekiel 16 or 23, he retells the whole history of Israel as these metaphorical women. It makes you uncomfortable. But I guess here's my point is that these are parts of the Bible that kind of offend many modern religious sensibilities.

Jon: It seems a little mean spirited, dramatic.

Tim: Yeah. So you got to reckon with that. There's a passion to these prophets that you have to just ponder and —

Jon: They didn't read the book "How to Win Friends and Influence People." I don't think that was on their Amazon wish list.

Tim: No. It's important to recognize they are critiquing are social ills. The equivalence to this would be...Do we use the word prophet in this way? I think we still do. Like culture critics.

Jon: Yeah, we do. And when we do, I'm always like, "Oh, that's interesting we would say that's a prophet." Because the paradigm of prophets is being fortune tellers.

Tim: That's right. But we do. We call someone a modern day prophet, and often what we mean is somebody outspoken social critics. They'll expose things on leadership level, they'll expose things on community level, policy levels. That's totally how these figures are. That's the role they play is that of these cultural commentators and critics. It's interesting.

I actually had a friend tell me once that they think actually the most similar role that a public voice like this is in our culture are comedians because they're creative artists who create short-ish pieces.

Jon: They're trying to expose.

Tim: A lot of what they're doing is they're using humor.

Jon: They're using humor. Humor goes off a lot better than threatening people's mothers.

Tim: Totally. Hosea could have tried another tactic.

Jon: Come on, Hosea. Comedians, totally

Tim: One of my favorite - I don't know about favorite - I just really like it. Introduction to the prophets helping you grasp this role of the culture critic is a Hebrew Bible nerd named Walter Brueggemann. He has a book called "The Prophetic Imagination."

Jon: You know what? I own that book because it has such a cool title.

Tim: Oh, really?

Jon: But I haven't gone through it. It's one of those books that's like, "I need to own that because it sounds awesome." I want a prophetic imagination. It turned out it wasn't a manual—

Tim: He's really interesting. He's kind of both a philosopher and a biblical scholar. But what he shows is the role that these figures played in ancient Israel is precisely the role that Jesus was playing. He's just playing with the Gospels as these public figures who create a popular base outside the institutional system. And they're poets and puzzling, they perform these public symbolic acts, they get them in trouble, but they critique the people on the top.

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Jon: You know who this is in modern day? Sacha Baron Cohen. You know that guy?

Tim: I don't know who that is.

Jon: You probably know who that is. He's a comedian. I don't think I said his name right. Sasha.

Tim: Sacha Baron Cohen.

Jon: He has these characters that he plays. One is this rapper, and the other is this...

Tim: Oh, Borat?

Jon: Yeah, Borat. He plays Borat.

Tim: And Ali G.

Jon: And Ali G. It's this big public stunt. He's not doing it just to be funny. He's always showing the underbelly of society while doing it.

Tim: Whoa, fascinating. Sorry, he becomes these public characters to critique Western culture?

Jon: Totally.

Tim: Fascinating. You know what? I think he came out and was really popular when I was in the thick of my Hebrew nerd years.

The early 2000s. I was tuned out from anything in the popular culture. But I remember when Borat came out because everybody was talking about it. That's interesting. All right.

Jon: Well, I was just thinking that because I was trying to imagine someone who isn't part of the establishment, on a public stage, gaining a following, and critiquing culture. For some reason, he came to mind.

Tim: Got it. Actually, this is the whole thing. This isn't in the notes. But there are multiple narratives in the big three, where they perform what's called sign acts or symbolic acts. They will go out in public and do something crazy that God told them to do. And God tells the prophet the meaning, but it's not always clear that the prophet went about telling everybody, "Hey, here's what this means."

Jon: He just wants people to be like, "Do you remember when that guy did the thing?"

Tim: Totally. Here's my favorite one. You want to know what's my favorite one.

Jon: Yeah, I do want to know.

Tim: Isaiah 20. The Assyrians who are going to become God's instrument to bring pain on Israel because of all of this stuff, he was not long after Hosea. So Assyria is going through and starting to pick off all of Israel's neighbors that they've been depending on for military help. So what he tells Isaiah to do is go loosen the sackcloth from your hips, take off your shoes from your feet, and go about naked and barefoot.

Jon: Go streaking.

Tim: The Lord said,...

Jon: I think Sacha Baron Cohen did this once, probably.

Tim: ..."As my servant Isaiah goes about naked and barefoot for three years as a symbol and sign of Egypt and Cush, two nations that Israel was relying on to prevent themselves from being destroyed by Assyria, so the king of Assyria will lead away the Egyptians and the exiles of Cush naked and barefoot with their buttocks exposed."

Jon: Three years in the nude?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's a dedicated streak.

Tim: This would be like, if America has some key ally and some public figures saying, "Listen, whatever other nation, nation x is going to take us out, and then they go about naked as the image of how that nation x just took out our allies, and it's going to happen to us too." That's what he's doing.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. He was like a part of the upper tier. It's so gnarly.

Jon: It's really gnarly.

Tim: Ezekiel went out in the streets and built a little Lego model of Jerusalem getting destroyed.

Jon: That's a little more tame. But still, to walk by that, you'd be like, "Come on."

Tim: Totally. This is the role of public art.

Jon: Yeah. It's like Banksy.

Tim: Yeah, totally... Figure like that.

Jon: He'll go and he'll make a point in public with some spray paint.

Tim: Totally. That's the point. These books are doing a lot more than just putting a few predictions for the Messiah out there for the new testament to come to say they were fulfilled. This is a huge, huge part of these books. I think it's a part of being

stewards of the Scriptures. Jewish and Christian communities means carrying on this voice. Carrying the voice.

Jon: I don't know, man. I don't want to see any pastors running around naked. Really. No, I totally get your point. We should have a prophetic voice. Oftentimes, and this is my personal opinion - the voice of the church in America is more about status quo.

Tim: Sure. The Bible gets appealed to primarily to defend a certain view of culture.

Jon: Instead of pointing to this potential future.

Tim: Yeah, that's true. These are people taken with...I mean, what they're inspired by is biblical story of the ideal, and of the Exodus narrative, which is huge inspiration

Jon: It's radically disruptive stuff.

Tim: These are disruptive figures who would be uncomfortable to run into at a party. You like, "Oh, they're always talking about that thing."

Jon: It's Shane Claiborne. That guy.

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: He's uncomfortable.

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

Jon: It's like that kind of stuff.

Tim: It's that kind of stuff. So we ignore these parts of the Bible to our own detriment, I think. That's a really important role.

Jon: So accusation is the main theme. Was that all about that?

Tim: Yeah. We've just been...

Jon: We're riffing off of that?

Tim: Riffing and reflecting on that.

Jon: That's the main thing for the prophets.

Tim: The first main bucket is when you're reading the prophets, the moment you hear lawsuit language descriptions of what's going wrong...

Jon: Or a guy streaking through Jerusalem, they're accusing you.

Tim: That's right. That's one whole bucket accusations for breaking the covenant of God.

[00:33:01]

Tim: The second big bucket will be, call for repentance. It's not too late. We can turn the ship around. It doesn't have to be this way. There's still hope. This goes all the way back to Moses, the challenge he gets to the Israelites before they go into the land.

Jon: Life and death.

Tim: Life and death. Choose life. Be faithful to the covenant. Here's a classic one. You actually probably know this one. This is in Isaiah 1. He says: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves pure. Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight; stop doing evil. Learn to do good; seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan; plead for the widow." So stop being lame, start being covenant faithful people.

Jon: Stop it.

Tim: Then look at this. He says, "Come now, let's reason together. Let's be reasonable," says the Lord. "Your sins are like Scarlet." That's premise, right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow." What does that mean? I mean, you hear what it means, but in light of what he just said, you like, "How's that going to happen?"

Jon: I guess, why is this reasoning together...? Anyways, that does not really matter.

Tim: Come. Let me just make this crystal clear to you.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: There are two options here. Here's the reality. Your sins are a deep or a bloody stain on the land, but here's another potential option.

Jon: They could be pure white.

Tim: They could be pure white even though they're red like crimson.

Jon: A new snow is very beautifully white.

Tim: Yeah. What a great metaphor - blood-stained dirt. Which to be honest, other than maybe my own blood from a cut on the dirt, I've never seen a huge puddle of blood on the dirt.

Jon: I've never really seen a big puddle of blood, but I've had a blood stain on a shirt.

Tim: That's right. Though they're red like crimson, they will be like wool. You have these two options. And then the choice is before you. If you consent and obey, if you listen and are faithful to covenant, you'll eat the best of the land - Garden of Eden around here. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be eaten by the sword. Mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Jon: This is like Moses says, "You have two options, life or death."

Tim: Yeah, totally. That's right

Jon: "Choose to do good and things are going to be rad."

Tim: That's right. A lot of poetry in the prophets is these persuasive do the right thing or beckoning a call back to covenant faithfulness, or forcing the choice - the moment of decision. This is carried forward into the new testament too where Jesus and the apostles are going out and they have this message about The Day of the Lord, where the Messianic salvation has taken place, and you need to figure out what you're going to do in response to it. All of that comes back to this prophetic issue of the call to decide. So that's next big bucket.

Jon: Call to repentance.

Tim: Call to repentance. The first one is accusation, itemizing everything that's going wrong, a call to stop it, a call to change, calling people to make a decision. Then the last is about as big as the first one. If accusations is big, it's pretty easy to spot when you're in a poem for people to make a choice. Then the third one is actually the biggest one, which is announcement of The Day of the Lord.

[00:37:08]

Tim: This is where future predictions often come into play. The Day of the Lord. It can be both light or dark as Amos talks about the Day of the Lord. It will be good news for some, but it will be badness for others. And each one has its own little list of images.

Jon: We did a whole long conversation on the Day of the Lord. What would be your quick 30 seconds summary?

Tim: Oh, well, there were moments in Israel history on the horizon of each prophet, where they said, "God isn't going to allow this to continue, He's going to bring the train crashing down." That happened to two really significant movements of when the Assyrians came and shut down the northern kingdom, took them into exile...

Jon: That was called the Day of the Lord?

Tim: There's a lot of poems pointing to that event in the books of the prophets, but they use cosmic language to talk about it. Then that was eclipsed even by another empire coming about a century after - Babylon. Both of those are talked about in cosmic day of Yahweh...

Jon: World ending kind of—

Tim: World ending kind of language. What they also announced is that on the other side of that, God is going to bring about a new Jerusalem which will be a new garden city temple. A New Eden.

Jon: Which will be ushered in by a new day.

Tim: The Day of the Lord brings both judgment and the undoing of the cosmos, so to speak. But that's an act of purification so that what can emerge out the other side of

that destruction is a new covenant people led by a new king and priest who will live in the New Jerusalem and a new creation.

Jon: So the prophets are particularly interested in talking about this happening?

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Whether it is going to be a little D-Day of the Lord, in that it was an event of Babylon or Assyria taking over Israel, which would feel if you were living in Jerusalem at that time it would feel like the end of the world.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Or if it's then culminating to the big D-Day of the Lord, the recreation of everything, the purification, and justification of the whole world.

Tim: That's right. We've talked about this before. We've used different metaphors. Here, let me just use an example. This is in Jeremiah 4. Let's start in vs 19. It says: "My innards..."

Jon: NIV says anguish.

Tim: My anguish?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's all?

Jon: It says: my anguish, my anguish.

Tim: My anguish, my anguish. Literally, my guts, my guts. He's sick to his stomach.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: "O, my heart pounding, I can't be silent. Because, O my nephesh, myself, I've heard the sound of the trumpets, and the alarm of war. Babylon is coming." He's describing what it's like to hear an army come to set up a seed ramps against your city. It's horrific.

"Disaster on disaster; the whole land devastated. My tents devastated: my curtains. My tent. It's like an image for my own little home crashing in. "I look over the city walls. How long do I have to stare at these Babylonian standards and hear their trumpets? For my people are foolish, they don't know me. They're stupid children, no understanding. You know what? they're really skilled at? Doing evil. They don't even know how to do good."

Jon: That's God quoting them?

Tim: Yeah, exactly. At first, you have Jeremiah talking about his experience. Then he just

Jon: So he's talking on behalf of God.

Tim: He's talking on behalf of God. Vs 23: "I looked at the land and behold—

Jon: Tohu wa-bohu.

Tim: Tohu wa-bohu.

Jon: Formless and empty.

Tim: "I looked up at the skies, no light."

Jon: Uncreation.

Tim: "I look at the hills, quaking. I looked and no human. All the birds, gone. All the garden land, wilderness. All the cities pulled down before Yahweh in his fierce anger." So powerful. For him, it sounds like the book of Revelation.

Jon: This sounds like the end of the world.

Tim: It was literally and symbolically the end of his world.

Jon: Everything was undone. His world was being undone.

Tim: That's right. So he describes to follow Jerusalem as the dissolution of the cosmos. This is how they talk.

Jon: I mean, it'd be bad enough if your house caught on fire and you come out barely alive. You're would be grieving all of your memories, everything. It would feel like the end of the world. That's bad enough. Now imagine like an enemy nation coming in and laying waste your city in your neighborhood and your tents.

Tim: Let's turn it up even more. The city that he's living in is the city that has the temple in it. And the temple, you believe is the place where heaven and earth meet. It's the little micro Eden. So when the temple is destroyed, the world is destroyed. It's a little microcosms. That's what the temple represents. So Genesis 1 language is the only language appropriate if it's the city of Jerusalem being destroyed.

This is an example of the Day of the Lord that happened in 586 BC. But then, remember how the books of the prophets' work, though. For the Prophets, and the biblical authors who treasured these texts and compiled them into the collection we have, they lived through that, and then they continued to suffer under the oppression of more empires afterwards. So for them, it actually didn't end.

So they see, in these words a kind of cosmic disruption that didn't just happen in Jeremiah's day, it kept going. And so, their conception of the Day of the Lord wasn't just linked to one time in history, it became a way of thinking about many events where God allowed evil to crash in on itself, which kept pitching their hope for the future out even further and further.

Until you get the final shaping the Hebrew Bible, just a couple hundred years before Jesus, the biblical authors from that period are still studying. These are the text that they're praying over. So the flip side of that is then all the poetic depictions about what comes out the other side of the destruction. Just like if Jeremiah narrated the undoing of Genesis 1, then what happens when God redoes Genesis 1?

Jon: Because the two things are connected? God isn't going to come with the Day of the Lord just to undo things.

Tim: No.

Jon: It's to undo things in order redo things.

Tim: That's right. Actually, this is the logic of the flood story in Genesis. If humans want to sink creation back into chaos and violence, and God will allow it, but He won't allow them to bring history to an end. His covenant commitment is greater than human evil, and so He will rescue out a remnant and deliver them to a New Eden and commission them to start over. That's the image here. That brings us to the flip side of the day of the Yahweh through this whole lot of descriptions of the bad...

Jon: Bad part of it?

Tim: ...it's just...

Jon: Mountains quaking part of it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And sometimes it's local, is talking about the invasion of local armies. Sometimes it's cosmic language. The flip side of that is the hope for restoration. Again, in all the prophetic books, there's a core set of themes here.

Jon: These are sub-themes within this theme.

Tim: What kinds of things fall into the good news of restoration on the other side. You can kind of anticipate based on the covenant story. You have image bearing royal priests in the garden, abundance living with the animals, living long lives, fruitful and multiplying. So it's going to be recapturing all that. So that will populate the list of the hoped-for things. So the righteous remnant theme returns from Babylon back into the New Eden - Promised Land. You probably know this line.

Let's look at Jeremiah 31. We're doing lots of Jeremiah today. Jeremiah 31:31: "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord when I'll make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers when I brought them out of Egypt." So, oh, a new relationship.

Jon: Yeah, new terms.

Tim: "But it's not going to be like the old one." Then you're like, "Oh, well, how's it going to be different? Say more."

Jon: I'm listening.

Tim: Then look what he says, "Not like the covenant I made with them when I brought them out of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, even though I was their husband," says the Lord. You're just like, "Oh."

Jon: I get it.

Tim: "This is the covenant I'll make with the house of Israel after those days, I'll put my Torah inside of them." So I'll put my Torah inside of them. "On their heart, I will write it. I will be there God; they'll be my people." That's marriage formula. My beloved, and he is mine.

Jon: That's not different than the first covenant.

Tim: I'll put my Torah...

Jon: That part is different.

Tim: Totally. That's right. Here's what they won't need. They won't need Torah teachers. They won't need people to teach about the laws and how to be faithful to the covenant.

Jon: Tim, you're out of a job.

Tim: I know. Totally. They won't need teachers. Each person to his brother saying, "Hey, you know what? You should acknowledge Yahweh. You should have a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Because they all will. They all will..."

Jon: It'll be the norm. The status quo.

Tim: "...know me from the least of the greatest, and I will forgive them." So there's an intimate knowing and being known with Yahweh, and it's motivated by grateful hearts that know they've been forgiven. And that will motivate a passion and a faithfulness that you don't actually have to even write down the rules of the relationship.

Jon: Nor do you even have to remind someone about it.

Tim: Totally. They just know.

Jon: It's kind of like breathing at that point, where you don't have to go to a friend and be like, "Remember to breathe today."

Tim: It's a depiction of the new humanity. That's why he says it's a new covenant, but it's not like any of those other covenants. The whole point is to write out the rules of the relationship. "Here's what I'm going to do."

Jon: You're almost anticipating that someone is going to breaking it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. The reason you write rules is you anticipate they're going to be broken or they have been broken. It's kind of like these rules at the pool.

Jon: It's when you run into a rule that it's like, "Please do not defecate on this."

Tim: Totally.

Jon: And you're like, "Why did they have to write that down?"

Tim: Well, apparently, little Jimmy did it one day. You don't even have to say what the expectations are because you have such eager...

Jon: People will just naturally do it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. You get poems like this. This is similar to Joel talking about the spirit being poured out on all people.

Jon: As I wrestle through and think about the story of the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and I think about what does it mean for humans to live in such a way that they're not relying on their own ability to discern good and evil, but they can live in a relationship with God in such a way that they just will know from God. They'll just know. It'll be natural. Because they're not then discerning, it's God.

Tim: Or they're submitting in God's wisdom about good and evil.

Jon: They're submitting in God's wisdom. And there's a sense of that here of kind of like, everyone just kind of knows, we don't have to write it all down. It feels very relational in a way.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. I think that's right. That's intuitive. Back to your life's love tank conversation...

Yeah, it's very intuitive. In any close friendship relationship, the moment that I have to tell you what I need from you, that's a letdown. Where like if we were really close, you would just know what I need right now. I need you to say this kind of encouraging thing to me because I'm just feeling down. But then when the other person just does it, you don't have to ask them. They just can sense what you need and do it without you having to tell them. That's powerful? Those are good people to have in your life?

Jon: Do you think that was the ideal then for Adam and Eve to be in that kind of relationship where they just know what's the next right thing to do? Well, they know because of the relationship with God, and they can they know, what brings Him pleasure or not and versus having their own ability to figure that out.

Tim: I mean, I think the seed of that idea is in the Garden of Eden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But what it means to live that way is actually you have to wait for later narratives to flesh that out in design pattern form. So when you get a Solomon saying, "I don't know how to lead these people," and so he asked for wisdom to know good and evil.

Jon: Holy cow.

Tim: Totally. He's a new Adam. Solomon's a new Adam, setting himself up in a new Eden.

Jon: He asks for wisdom.

Tim: He gets through a couple of chapters. It's actually one of the few places the phrase "know good and evil" is used outside of the garden narrative as Solomon's request.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: That's a good example. This is why I'm in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is about fearing God, shunning evil. And if you fear God and shun evil, you will gain wisdom, which in Proverbs 3 is a tree of life. The way to the tree of life is to submit to God's wisdom of good and evil. So the whole book of Proverbs is about every person sits in front of the tree of knowing good and evil and the tree of life. You have your own opportunity to blow it or do it right. So I think that's right, submitting God's wisdom.

[00:52:34]

Jon: And there will be a time where the covenant is such that you don't have to explain yourself or write down any rules. Everyone will just know. Humans will know what is good and what is not good intuitively.

Tim: Yeah, the divine will and the human will have come together. And what are we talking about except Jesus of Nazareth right here? A human whose will is completely joined the divine will. I think this is what in the Gospel of John when Jesus talks about I do the will of my Father, he's committed everything to me, and I do exactly what he tells me to. It's a depiction of Jesus as the true Adam.

Jon: He's listening and he just obeys.

Tim: Yeah. He has the Torah written on his heart, and he becomes the model for the new humanity, who just does God's will. You don't have to be told. You just do it. What a powerful image. Of course, because Israel didn't do that, that's why they're in the situation that they're in. And so for the prophets, everything that's broken has to become fixed.

What is Samwise Gamgee famous line in The Lord of the Rings? "Is everything sad going to become untrue?" Well, I think that's it. You know what I'm talking about?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's like when Minas Tirith is getting besieged by the Orc world.

Jon: "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?"

Tim: That's a cool scene. That's the prophets about the good news, the day of Yahweh. Everything sad that they've just itemized and all their accusations, they provide a reversal of in the new creations. They have corrupt humans, they become faithful humans. You have the wilderness and exile becomes a new garden of Eden. Babylon falls so that the New Jerusalem can be created.

- Jon: Everything said becomes untrue. Cool. That's the themes in the prophets.
- Tim: Yeah, those are the themes. We could spend more time looking at different texts, but yes, that's the core idea.
- Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Next week, we'll be diving into a new How to Read the Bible series. We're going to look at how to read the law.
- Tim: The laws have throughout history in Judaism and Christianity created different crises of biblical authority.
- Jon: Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel. We're a nonprofit organization in Portland, Oregon, and you can learn more about us at thebibleproject.com. Thanks for being a part of this with us.
- Man: Hi, this is ... from France. I am excited to be a part of making The Bible Project video in French. Thank you for your support, and let all your friends know this video is available.

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