

H2R Wisdom E1 Final

The Quest for Wisdom

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Jon: In the beginning, God created the heavens in the earth, and He said it was good. He created man, Adam, and woman and placed them in the garden. Their job was to be His image - to carry on His creative force and to rule the world, expanding the garden. All of this goodness, all of this potential, but there's still something missing.

Tim: For humans to rule the world well as God's partners, they need wisdom to discern between good and evil. But the question is, how? How are they going to get that wisdom?

Jon: And so the humans are faced with a choice. They can either take from the tree of knowing good and evil, the tree that God told them not to take from, or they can trust God's command and live by His wisdom. That decision is the core decision for every human every day. This scene here in the first pages of the Bible is crucial to understanding a whole section of books in the Bible that are often called the wisdom books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Job.

Tim: Each of these books explores from a different perspective what it means to be a human sitting in front of the tree of knowing good and evil, and how do I navigate knowing good and evil in a way that leads to life and not exile and death.

Jon: I'm Jon Collins, and this is The Bible Project podcast. Today we start a new series talking about the wisdom literature. There are a handful of books in the Bible all about man's quest for wisdom. What is true wisdom, how do we find it, and how do we live by it. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're beginning a new series of conversation...

Tim: Yes, we are.

Jon: Which is for video in the How to Read the Bible series or at the part of the Bible that we call the wisdom literature.

Tim: In how to read series, this is Episode 14. We're taking our time.

Jon: It's been a while. A couple of years.

Tim: It's going to be I think a 20-part series.

Jon: Sometime in 2020 it'll be finished.

Tim: Sometime in 2020. That's right. In the series, we're trying to assume a viewer with basically no knowledge right from the beginning.

Jon: It's a brand new book.

Tim: So what is the Bible, where did it come from, what's the main storyline, different types of literature in the Bible, and then how to read. All those different types of literature and then the different main sections of the Bible. We are diving into what is often called the wisdom books of the Old Testament.

Jon: The wisdom books.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: What are the wisdom books?

Tim: That's a wonderful question. I have here with me three of the kind of main introductions to Biblical wisdom literature. If you were to take a religious studies class at university, biblical wisdom literature, or in seminary, odds are you'll be assigned to read one of these. One is by Derek Kidner called "The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes." That's pretty clear from the title.

Jon: Yeah, car to the chase.

Tim: So he has an introduction to what is the wisdom literature. He isolates these three books and then thinks of them as three different perspectives on wisdom that are in dialogue with each other. And that inspired our—

Jon: Our wisdom series video.

Tim: Yeah, that perspective.

Jon: Which we two years ago, maybe two and a half years ago made a series of videos - three videos - one on Proverbs—

Tim: Yeah, these three books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and then Job. I love those videos.

Jon: It's a great set in how they all work together. They're filling out in their own unique way what does it mean to live the good life.

Tim: That's right. So Kidner was a real helpful resource in that. I liked his way of framing it. Roland Murphy has an excellent introduction called "The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature." What he covers is Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes. Then he's also writing thinking of the whole Jewish literary tradition. So he includes two later wisdom works from the late Second Temple period, The Wisdom of Ben Sira, and a work called The Wisdom of Solomon. Both of those are in the deuterocanon or apocrypha in Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

Then he also has a chapter about wisdom's echoes, and it's a chapter on the Song of Songs. And then also later, other books of the Hebrew Bible that have key wisdom themes in them. But the main feature there is Song of Songs. And that raises an interesting issue. What is the criteria...

Jon: To be a wisdom book?

Tim: ...for including a book within the wisdom literature. and I recommend all three of these. The last introduction is by William Brown called "Wisdom's Wonder." He includes Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes. That's it. He's kind of like Kidner.

The different table of contents of those three introductions to wisdom literature points up something, namely, the difficulty of knowing what makes something a wisdom book. Is it just you count the number of times the word "wisdom" appears?

Because you're going to find "wisdom" in all the books of the Bible. The word "wisdom" appears everywhere.

Jon: But the book in question it seems like is Song of Solomon?

Tim: Oh, right now the difference. That's exactly right. Here's two criteria you could go with. One is, two of the wisdom books that they talk about are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. They're both connected to Solomon in some way. Let's go with Solomon. He's the king who prayed for wisdom, and he was said to rule with greater wisdom than any of the kings of Israel, than any of the kings in the world. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs. The account in 1 Kings says. So if we make Solomon the common denominator. Then Song of Songs. There's three books of the Hebrew Bible that are connected to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Songs of songs.

The thing is Song of Songs, actually doesn't have the word wisdom in it. So then it makes us ask, like, is that a wisdom book? Is something a wisdom book because of its association with the wisest king or does the book have to be about wisdom as such? Let's say we do make Solomon key criteria, then we have to figure out how Song of Songs fits into the wisdom literature.

But there's also another book in the Hebrew Bible that's usually included because one of its main themes is wisdom and the fear of the Lord. And that's the book of Job. But the book of Job isn't connected to Solomon at least explicitly. So you see, this is kind of a conundrum. Nations will not rise and fall on the balance of this question. But it's an interesting question. What counts as wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible?

Jon: When we tackled this before, we did Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, and we didn't talk about Song of Solomon.

Tim: We did not. We didn't include it in the series.

Jon: We didn't include it. Where would you put that book in the Hebrew canon...how would you categorize it if it wasn't in the wisdom literature?

Tim: The Song of Songs?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Oh, well, right now in the Jewish tradition in the organization of to Tanak - Torah, prophets, and Writings - it's among the writings and it's among a five-part collection of short books in the writings called the megillot. It just means scrolls. But it's five short books: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther.

Jon: Oh, yeah, Lamentations.

Tim: Interestingly, all five of those books have either a title that is a feminine noun or a main female character. Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, which is beloved.

Jon: What about Ecclesiastes?

Tim: Ecclesiastes begins with a feminine noun.

Jon: What do you mean?

Tim: The title of Ecclesiastes is the words of a figure called Koheleth.

Jon: The teacher?

Tim: Well, we've called him the teacher. I'm going to problematize a little bit when we get to Ecclesiastes, but it's a feminine noun. Grammatically feminine noun. Remember grammar in languages that have—

Jon: Male and female.

Tim: That's right. It doesn't always map on to the actual gender of the thing in question. Sometimes it does. Sometimes not. And then Lamentations, the main character is Lady Zion or Lady Jerusalem. Anyway. On that organization, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes are in a little hub in the writings, but Proverbs is also in the writings and so is Job.

Jon: But those aren't in the megillot or whatever it was called.

Tim: They are not in the megillot.

Jon: Megillot.

Tim: That's right. But here's the thing. In the organization of the Tanak, Genesis through Kings is all one sequential narrative from creation to exile. Then the Prophets come in, and they all have those little headings that are hyperlinked back into that narrative. The last section, the Ketuvim, is really—

Jon: The writings

Tim: Yeah. In the sequence, it matters at some points, but it's really by that point in the Hebrew Bible, you're just supposed to know where things fit. And so by the opening lines of each of the books in the Ketuvim, you're meant to follow the hyperlinks to attach it to its appropriate place in the narrative, so to speak. Three of them begin with the Solomon connection: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Jon: I don't want to get bogged down, but I just want to make this clear in my mind. In the Tanak, which is how the Hebrew Bible was traditionally organized, there is three main sections: the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy, and then the prophets, which starts in Joshua - and goes to where?

Tim: Malaki.

Jon: Which is through the Bible.

Tim: That's right. Prophets have two sections.

Jon: What we call historical books.

Tim: What we call historical books in the Christian tradition or in Jewish tradition called the prophets - Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

Jon: Because all those stories have been told from the perspective of the prophet.

Tim: Corrects.

Jon: And then you've got the major prophets...

Tim: 15 books of the prophets.

Jon: ...and the minor prophets were the 15 books.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So that's the prophets?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And the Hebrew word for that is?

Tim: Nevi'im.

Jon: Torah and Nevi'im. Now you've got this third section, which feels like a grab bag in a sense, which is...You said that the megillot is in there?

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: And then there's all sorts of other books.

Tim: Yeah. Psalms. Proverbs, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Chronicles and then the megillot.

Jon: When you get to the Ketuvim, you are supposed to have just understood the story so much that when you're in there it's hyper linking back to all sorts of things.

Tim: The opening lines of each one of the books in the Ketuvim, and actually, the whole of all the books is hyperlinking all the way back into different parts in the Torah and the prophets. So you're meant to mentally link them into different points of the narrative before. And there are three books in the Ketuvim that begin with hyperlinks to Solomon.

Jon: That is Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Songs of Solomon or Song of songs.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: But tell me what's the tradition behind doing the three-parter with adding Job in there.

Tim: The tradition of saying, "Here are the wisdom books of the Bible - Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes," is a modern construct. It's a modern invention.

Jon: How modern?

Tim: There's a scholar, Will Kynes who actually just wrote recently. I actually put off launching this video until I could read that. It's called an "An Obituary for 'Wisdom Literature'". He has traced the origin of treating Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes as a little island of books called the wisdom literature that are really separate from the rest of the Hebrew Bible in terms of theme and tone to - I forget his name - to a German scholar in the mid-1800s. Before then, people didn't talk about the wisdom literature. His case in the book is actually that it's a modern invention that has distorted our view of these books.

Jon: We're perpetuating that, though.

Tim: No, nope, because we're going to include Song of Songs. What this video is going to be about actually is a reframe. It's going to be a different perspective than our current wisdom series. His point in the book, and he's right, is that what we call the wisdom books are books that are anchored in the Eden narrative and the Abraham narrative and the drama of wisdom and the knowing of good and evil that leads to life, and learning how to know good and evil by living by the fear of Lord. Wisdom that is the fear of the Lord, which is a main theme in all of these books. But if you begin with the Eden story, then all of a sudden Song of Songs fits right in at home with these books.

So this video that we're going to make, I'm not just taking Will Kynes book on board, but that was very helpful, it's going to be about how the wisdom literature is actually playing...it's universalizing the garden narrative.

Jon: Universalizing the garden narrative.

Tim: The wisdom books of the Bible are inviting readers of the Bible to see themselves and their own life stories as reenactments of the Adam and Eve story. So when you finish the book of Proverbs, you see yourself standing at the foot of the tree of knowing good and evil, with a decision of how you're going to learn good and evil by your own wisdom and taking it and what good in your own eyes or living by the fear of the Lord, which means doing what he says even when it doesn't seem intuitive or wise to me. So I'm excited about this video.

Jon: Cool. So as we talk about how to read the wisdom literature, we're not talking about like a genre, per se as much.

Tim: No.

Jon: Because they're written in different genres, like say some poetry, there's some narrative, there's Proverbs.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So as we talked about how to read them, we're going to be thinking more about what?

Tim: This video is going to be about the narrative framework within which these books make sense and make their contribution. It's going to be about this. It's about each of these books explores from a different perspective, what it means to be a human sitting in front of the tree of knowing good and evil, and how do I navigate knowing good and evil in a way that leads to life and not to exile and death. The wisdom books do that primarily through the lens of the Solomon story, which is why three of these books that we will be talking about in this video are linked to Solomon.

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Tim: For the record, as you get later in Jewish tradition, the entire Hebrew Bible is conceived of as wisdom literature. Not a section within the Bible, but the entire thing.

Jon: What does that mean?

Tim: Here. One is Psalm 119, which is a very late meta-reflection on the whole Hebrew Bible. So it's a Psalm. It's the longest chapter in the whole Bible, Psalm 119. It's like a hundred and seventy something lines.

Jon: Is it the alliteration or the alphabet poem?

Tim: Yes, one big long alphabet poem. And every single line contains some kind of reference to the scriptures - God's word, God's instructions, and commandments, your precepts. It's a part of the Scriptures that are reflecting on the nature of the scriptures. It's meta-reflection. It's a chapter in the Bible that's reflecting on the significance and meaning of the Bible. It's awesome. Psalm 119.

But Psalm 119:98-99 say this, "Your instructions - this is the word Torah - your instructions make me more wise than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers because your testimonies are my meditation." This is envisioning the entire Hebrew Bible as meditation literature. That the longer you sit with it, and by longer meaning years, your whole lifetime, it gives you wisdom and insight such that you'll be more wise than your teachers. So that's interesting. The whole thing is wisdom literature.

Jon: The whole thing is wisdom literature.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: By that do you mean that's the main kind of purpose of the Hebrew scriptures?

Tim: Yeah. And it's all rooted in the Garden of Eden story. For humans to rule the world well as God's partners, they need wisdom to discern between good and evil. But the question is, how? How are they going to get that wisdom?

Jon: Not the tree in the middle of the garden.

Tim: And who gets to define what that wisdom is? Dude, welcome to the story of the Bible. Just one huge train wreck of people doing what is wise in their own eyes.

Jon: There's been a number of conversations where I feel like we reflect on the story of the Bible through a different question. And I think the question here is, how do you become wise?

Tim: How do you become wise so that you live and don't die? How do you become wise so that you experience the good life instead of destroying...?

Jon: Well, so that you can rule with God.

Tim: So that you can rule with God and be His image bear in the world.

Jon: Right. Which we would then assume is a good life.

Tim: Correct. The Good Life is living in covenant partnership with my Creator, submitting to his guidance and wisdom so that I can gardenize the world around me.

Jon: You were designed to rule and...

Tim: ...and to create Eden in the world. To spread the goodness of Eden in the world.

Jon: To create.

Tim: To create.

Jon: And we've talked before about you could talk about the story the Bible as what do you do with power. Because to be created to rule means you have power. And that's an interesting way to talk about the Bible. But this, we're talking about how do you attain true wisdom or to rule.

Tim: How do you know what's the right thing to do, and the right decision to make as you go about building your life, which affects other people's lives? Right?

Jon: Yeah. It's hard to know what the right thing to do is sometimes.

Tim: Where do you get that wisdom?

Jon: I think most people would say, "No, I know what the right thing to do is. I might not always do it, but I could tell you what it is."

Tim: But then think about life scenarios where you did what you thought was the right thing and it turned out to be the wrong thing. And maybe it was the wrong thing because you just were short-sighted, you didn't have all the information, or things didn't go the way you anticipated, or you realize later on that you had motives driving you that you could not discern at the time.

Jon: How often does that happen?

Tim: And you look back and be like, "That was actually a real selfish act and I was so deceived about my own motives that I couldn't see that I was acting out of some terrible place in my heart."

Jon: That's the truth of the matter is we are easily deceived by ourselves and by the powers.

Tim: Interesting. Using the word "deceived," we're starting to use the language of the Garden of Eden story. But some people might want to frame it differently. They might want to say, "Well, you just didn't have enough information."

Jon: Sure. "You didn't know your biases."

Tim: "You didn't know your biases. You didn't know all the factors and the complexities." And the biblical story is saying, "No, there's a moral element to it. Our knowledge isn't morally neutral, and our desire to know some things rather than other things, our desire, when we make a decision, I'm going to account for these factors and these people, but I conveniently happen to not think about those people with the decision and take that information on board." We're always sifting information when we make decisions.

Jon: Totally.

Tim: When I make a decision, let's say I make a decision about...this is silly. Let me just think this morning. Jessica and I tag team breakfast for our boys. They are little still learning. They don't make their own breakfast yet. And so I made a decision this morning, because we were coming here to have this conversation, that I was going to be laser focused. I'm going to wake up, make coffee, and then I'm just gonna make my smoothie and get out the door.

Jon: That's what I did this morning. I got out before the family was up.

Tim: I made a decision to prioritize this conversation right here over what I often do, which is start making something for the boys so that Jessica doesn't have to, and my wife experienced that as a moral decision. Because she was like, "You left me to make their lunch and their breakfast, and get their clothes out?" And I was like, "Oh." I couldn't even see it because I woke up thinking, "I have this conversation with Jon today. This is awesome. I need to get to work a little bit sooner." And I was neglecting her and it affected her negatively.

Jon: Define morality for me real quick.

Tim: Oh, well, sheesh.

Jon: It sounds like what you're saying is a decision that affects someone else.

Tim: Correct. How my decisions are going to affect other people?

Jon: Or is it, how do my decisions bring justice and peace and love or bring chaos and destruction?

Tim: Well, there's that. I guess if we're talking about a moral decision is a moral decision that somehow in alignment with the cosmic principle of justice and goodness rooted in God's character. On that account, my decision to prioritize this conversation over my wife was a failed moral decision. I wasn't loving my neighbor as myself. I wasn't

loving my wife as I love myself. It was wise in my own eyes until I was ready to walk out the door, and I realized that just left her hanging with all this extra stuff that normally we share. That's what I mean.

Jon: The point of the story is that any decision we make is a moral decision. Would you say that every decision we make is a moral decision?

Tim: Maybe different layers.

Jon: There are different layers of morality?

Tim: Every decision we make affects not just ourselves but other people. Some of our decisions are small, but they're cumulative because they're habit-forming. And so, it might not be till the thousandth time that I make a certain decision that it affects somebody else. But yeah, none of our decisions are made in a vacuum. They all affect the people around us.

Jon: And that's the thing. It's the butterfly effect problem, which is, how do you know what you're doing right now, even though it's so small, what's the effect that's going to have on you and the people around you? We try our best to project that forward and imagine what that will be, but life is just way too complex. How could you know?

And so we have these guidelines, we kind of, you know, this is good, this is bad, these are good habits, these are bad habits. But even as best as we try to create these categories, just life is really messy.

Tim: Yes, it is.

Jon: And so how do you know what the right thing to do is at any given moment?

Tim: What is the book of Genesis except a cascade of poor decisions of parents that get passed down to their children who themselves inherit the mess of the previous generation and then make their own short-sighted poor decisions that hurt them, the people around them and then pass on to their children? It's four cycles. Main cycles in Genesis. That's it.

How do you know what is the wise thing to do that will lead to life in the garden versus exile and pain and death? This is the drama of the garden narrative, and this is the drama that the wisdom books are trying to help you see. This is the drama of your own life. Your own life is playing out of the Eden story is the goal of these books.

Jon: The deceptive nature of our nature, there's another layer to which, when we are good at projecting things out, we could actually use that for our advantage. So just because you are good at knowing what's good and evil. Like, I could actually be really wise and know, "If I do this, and this will likely happen and this person will think this, then I'll be able to do this." And you can project out like yet a whole scenario, and then you can go, "I'm going to use this to my advantage."

Tim: That's right. That's why wisdom is not a morally neutral thing. You have really bad people in the biblical story who are wise. The snake is the first wise one. The snake is the first wise character.

Jon: Arum.

Tim: Is arum. wow, good job. Humans are clever. There's this huge cranium for this amazing thing in our heads.

Jon: We're kind of balancing these two ideas, which is, one, we're incapable of truly being able to do all this 3D chess kind of stuff. But in the other hand, we actually have large brains.

Tim: Remarkable creatures.

Jon: And can do a lot with our imagination and our rationality, and we can use that for evil or good.

Tim: That's right. So the question is, how? What's the mode of our learning wisdom and making wise choices? We can do it in submission to the fear of the Lord and His wisdom, or we can do what is wise in our own eyes. Here we go. Actually, here. Can I read a paragraph from Roland Murphy, his introduction to "The Tree of Life"?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: This is great. "Within the Hebrew Bible, the wisdom literature is exciting because it deals directly with life." We have some friends who run the Bible app, the main Bible app.

Jon: YouVersion.

Tim: YouVersion of the Bible app in most people's smartphones. Remember they told us that one of the most searched for terms for Bible searches and reading plans within the app is the word "wisdom." And this was years ago they told us this.

Jon: That's right.

Tim: But the wisdom literature, these books are some of the more accessible books of the old testament.

Jon: Oh yeah. I think many, especially men for whatever reason, make it a habit reading through the proverbs.

Tim: Chapter a day.

Jon: Chapter a day. They're very accessible and practical.

Tim: That's right. Roland Murphy says, "Wisdom literature is this way because it deals directly with life." He goes on, "The sages of Israel were concerned with the present, how to cope with the challenges provoked by one's immediate experience. The choice between life and death that Moses dramatically places before Israel in

Deuteronomy 30 - remember, choose this day, life or death blessing curse, when you go into the promised land - he says that choice is re-echoed in the sages' emphasis on the wisdom that leads to life.

The Life and death situation is expressed in the image of the tree of life. Proverbs 3:18 wisdom is a tree of life to all who grasp it. Think of Genesis 3. "How fortunate are those who embrace her." He goes, "This image is well known from its appearance in Genesis. The first dwellers of the garden were kept from that tree, the tree of life, lest they live forever." Remember they took from the tree of knowing good and evil, and then they're prevented from taking of the tree of life. "In a vivid turn of metaphor, wisdom, and proverbs has become the tree of life and is personified as a woman. Proverbs 8:35 "Long life is in her right hand, in her laughter, wealth and honor. She boasts the one who finds her finds life, and the one who fails to find her is ultimately in love with death."

Jon: In love with death.

Tim: That's what she says in Proverbs 8. He concludes, "One must hear wisdom obediently, but one must also pray for the gift that she is. Embracing the gift of wisdom is precarious, however, because according to the sages, we are easily deceived. Proverbs 26:12 There is more hope for a fool than for those who are wise in their own eyes."

Jon: That's a good proverb.

Tim: It is. So he's saying the drama of the garden is being represented to us in the wisdom books. And anyone can be wise. The question is, will you be wise in the way that leads to life as opposed to self-deception?

Jon: Wise in your own eyes is an idiom?

Tim: Wise in your own estimation. It's what we're talking about earlier. It was seemed wise in my own eyes to prioritize getting to work a little earlier so we could have this conversation, but I was not taking into account the people that I live with.

Jon: And the opposite of that in this proverb is that the fool, and that's to really make a big hyperbolic point. But what would be the opposite of wise in your own eyes?

Tim: Those who are wise by learning the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 1:7.

Jon: So we're going to talk about that - this fear of the Lord?

Tim: In a way—

Jon: I'm asking that question.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The story of the Garden of Eden is of humans being wise in their own eyes leading to exile and death. And so the drama that's played out has a turning point in the story of Abraham, who is the first character to make a decision not based on his own wisdom, but based on the fear of the Lord. Abraham's the first character who lives by the fear of the Lord. And when he does it releases the blessing of eating out to the nations. Genesis 22. Living by wisdom that's submitted to the fear of the Lord is the way to the life of Eden. That's one of the main arguments of the book of Genesis, and of the wisdom books.

[00:31:50]

Tim: We've talked about Genesis 1 through 3.

Jon: A lot.

Tim: A lot. And here we are again. It's all in here, man. The whole Bible springs out of these first few pages. We're going to do some things that we haven't quite done before, nail some things down that we've done intuitively. But I want to nail them down. First, the concept of good and evil. The tree of knowing good and evil.

First, let's back up. Sorry. You remember how do I know what is good? The Hebrew word for good is tov. Before I even learned what evil is, that Hebrew word for that is ra. So tov and ra. Page 1, Genesis 1 has tov all over the place. There in the seven-day structure, and then "God saw that it was tov" is repeated seven times in the chapter. I finished Genesis 1, God's provided—

Jon: I've seen a lot of good.

Tim: God has provided what is good. Without God doing what He does in Genesis 1, it would just be...right? It'll darkness and disorder if God doesn't create in Genesis 1.

Jon: So goodness came because of God.

Tim: God is the author of goodness. He's the provider of tov in that narrative. But also, He sees that it's tov. If you watch God make something, He provides it, but then He evaluates it. Which requires knowledge. To see it means to be like, "Ah, that's what's good," meaning "I know the opposite of good, and I don't want that. I want what is good."

Jon: It's interesting how much you learn about the character of God. Like, if you know nothing, no category for God, and you start here, you're like, "Okay, well, he's powerful." But the things I was just picking up on is, when He creates, His propensity is to create goodness.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: I mean, that's not necessarily—

Tim: Yeah, that's not a given.

Jon: It's not a given?

Tim: No. No. There are many religious worldviews where both good and evil are contained within the ultimate deity, especially Eastern worldviews. That's like yin and yang. Both good and evil are contained within ultimate being and so on. Different than the depiction of God in Genesis 1. He provides what is good by containing and removing what is not good.

Jon: And after He does that, He reflects on it, and defines it, and evaluates it. That's also not a given. I guess you could just have a God who...Some force, some whatever, some force that just creates good. That's just how it's wired.

Tim: Or you could have a deity who is subject to forces greater than even themselves. In which case, they're not the ultimate wise one.

Jon: But this deity has this consciousness, whatever - that's our word - that can then reflect.

Tim: Correct. He's both powerful and He's wise.

Jon: I think that's what we're saying.

Tim: In Genesis 1, God is both powerful, He can create life and good out of death.

Jon: He's powerful and He's good and He's wise.

Tim: And he's wise. That's right. I go into Genesis 2 and God is also the first one to identify something as lo tov "not good." God provide and define good on Genesis 1. Genesis 2, God identifies, also He knows what is not good. And what it is, is a human alone. So Genesis 1, God created the image bearers. Male and female, He created them. And says, "Be fruitful and multiply."

Genesis 2, you have a single human. It's the word "adam" human. And a single human is not good. A single human cannot accomplish the ideal for humanity on page 1, which is to be fruitful and multiply and rule the world together. You can't do that alone.

Jon: No. You could if you're an earthworm.

Tim: What's that Polly...?

Jon: I don't know the technical word.

Tim: There's a technical term.

Jon: Both male and female?

Tim: Yeah, of species that can self-generate. Anyway.

Jon: Because an earthworm you could also cut it in half...

Tim: That's right.

Jon: ...and then they can be whatever they want to be. We were made different.

Tim: That's right. In other words, if I'm following the repetition of the word good, God provides it. He has the wisdom to evaluate it and know it as such, and He has the wisdom to know what is not good, and then remedy that. He splits the Adam.

This is significant. The first thing He does is He forms the animals - this is Genesis 2 - he forms the animals out of the ground, and He brings them to the human to see what the human would name them. Now, what God did in Genesis 1, which is to bring life and order out of darkness and nothingness, and God names. God's the one naming in Genesis 1.

Jon: He calls things sky and land and day and night.

Tim: He calls it day, He calls it night, He calls it sky, He calls it the seas. So God's organizing and naming, and providing what is good. Now, God says, "Here's something that's not good. A human can't do what I called him to do alone, so He needs companions - co-workers. In Hebrew, it's ezer kenegdô "a help that corresponds to him." That's what God says. He needs help that corresponds to him. The English word "help" does not help us. "Helper" or "help" gets us into like assistant world. The only other character that's called an ezer, a help—

Jon: Let me guess. Holy Spirit.

Tim: Is Yahweh himself. David will say, "You are my help. You are my ezer." It means salvation. Salvation.

Jon: That's a help.

Tim: Help in Hebrew means to do for someone what they cannot do for themselves.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's what ezer means.

Jon: We must have a word for that.

Tim: Oh, man.

Jon: Help I guess just can do either. Like it could just mean like—

Tim: "I need some help." Usually, if I need help, it's "I can't do it alone or I don't want to do it alone."

Jon: But you could think of like kindergarten class where it's like, "Who's going to be my helper today?"

Tim: Totally. This phrase "helper" in our English translation in Genesis 2 loads all kinds of gender issues into that story of "Oh, yes, woman is the helper." No, dude, woman is salvation for this lone human. Another who is different from but corresponds to is salvation for the lone human.

Jon: Salvation in that it wasn't good.

Tim: Lo tov. Not good. A human alone can't do what God called humanity to do. David will say, "I cried out ezer as my enemies were against me. You are my ezer." God makes an ezer corresponding to...I mean—

Jon: Praise God for women.

Tim: But even that, it's not just like, "Oh, because women are great." The introduction of the woman is to provide for humanity what humanity cannot do by themselves. It's remarkable.

[00:40:28]

Tim: It's interesting. He brings the animals as the first, like, trial companion. But one layer of what God's inviting human to do is to start exercising His own wisdom. God was naming and identifying. In Genesis 1, God identifies what is not good. So let's fix that around here. "Hey human, will you share with me?" In beginning to organize and order?" God is the one who provides the dry land in the garden. Then He put the human in the garden and says, "Join me. You work it and keep it too." That came right before this.

And then God and Genesis 1 was naming and organizing, and now He's giving to the human the chance to name and organize. So He's inviting humans into the divine project of bringing order. But it can't be done without an ezer. It can't be done. Humans can't be fruitful and multiply alone. So what God does—

Jon: When you say "humans" plural, I mean, there was human, Adam.

Tim: Human. That's right. So what God does is He splits the Adam. I already used that one. This is interesting. The word "rib" in Hebrew, this is a very common word and it's the word for side.

Jon: Right, right, right.

Tim: Meaning the whole side of a building. It's a very common Hebrew word for "the side of a building" "the side of a tent" "the side of a rock." So He took from one of his sides—

Jon: To cut them in half.

Tim: I think that's what we're supposed to imagine. And then He closes up the flesh in its place. That's what it says. He took from one of his sides. How many sides does a human have? That what it says in Hebrew. And then "He builds" - is the architectural word. He builds the side from which he had taken from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam.

Jon: Bone of my bone, flesh of my fresh.

Tim: And then he says, "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh." Get this. Gods now made two. In God's estimation, it's lo tov, not tov to have one. We need two for humans to

be what I called them to be on Genesis 1. But those two have to become one so that as one, who is yet two, can do the thing that I called them to do in page 1. So unified. The two unified as one can do what they are called to do.

Jon: Can be the image of God.

Tim: There it is. That's right. And then becomes man and woman. Again, this is all going to be crucially important for the wisdom literature. Trust me.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the two as one, tov, garden, we can make babies.

Jon: We can multiply.

Tim: We have an ezer for the man, the one without which he cannot do what he's called to do, that kind of thing. There it is. There it is. This is awesome. And they're naked and there's no shame. This is important for a Song of Songs. The man and the woman together in the garden, naked, completely vulnerable and open to each other, no shame. One with God, one with each other. This is Eden. There you go. It lasts two pages.

Jon: It doesn't last long.

Tim: No, it doesn't.

Jon: Is nakedness in their culture shameful - to be naked?

Tim: I think it is in many cultures.

Jon: I would say it is in many cultures...

Tim: It is in the biblical tradition. It's not in all cultures. Certain parts of the body being exposed activate different things in different cultures. But in the biblical tradition—

Jon: To say they were naked and not ashamed, they'd be like, "What?" Of course, you'd be ashamed if you're naked.

Tim: Correct. To be naked and vulnerable to someone who's not my family is publicly shameful. That's Step 1. Next step is how it all goes terribly wrong.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. This conversation on wisdom is part of a longer set of conversations on how to read the Bible. You've got a whole list of videos, podcasts and other resources, helping you understand all the different genres of biblical literature. You can find all those resources at thebibleproject.com.

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