

Tree of Life E3 Final

The Tale of Two Trees

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The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: On page two of the Bible, God plants humanity in the garden. The Garden of delights or what we call the Garden of Eden. God also plants many trees there. Trees that are good for food, trees that are good to look at, and one beautiful cosmic tree at the center of the garden that represents God's own life - the tree of life. And God says to Adam and Eve, "Eat of any of these trees." Except there's one tree they're forbidden to eat fruit. It's called the tree of knowing good and evil. Eat of that tree and you'll die. And this has bugged me and a lot of people. Why would God put in this good garden such an incredible test,?

Tim: The reason that the tree is there in the garden, it's a powerful image of the nature of all human experience. Every good thing in my life is also matched by an equal or greater number of opportunities to ruin it. So these two trees are intertwined. The tree of life and the tree of knowing good or bad, how you relate to one determines how you relate to the other.

Jon: And God doesn't put the tree in some obscure place that's hard to find. He puts it right in the middle of the garden right next to the tree of life.

Tim: To experience and eat from the tree of life, you have to walk by the tree of knowing good and bad and not take from it. Avoid it. It looks good but God said that will kill me. That's a thing that will kill me and hurt myself and others. It looks awesome, but I'm going to avoid it so that I can keep enjoying access to life. That's the way these trees relate to each other. It's the tale of two trees.

Jon: So today on the show, we'll dive into the meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're working through a theme in the Bible, and the theme is trees.

Tim: I'm pretty sure it's going to be the tree of life.

Jon: Yeah, the video will be about the tree of life.

Tim: The tree of life theme video.

Jon: But in order to talk about the tree of life, we got to talk about trees.

Tim: Ah, the meaning of trees in the Bible in general.

Jon: In the first episode of this discussion, you brought up that trees are talked about a lot in the Bible. After God in humans, they're the most talked about organic living thing.

The Tale of Two Trees

- Tim: That's right. And they have a particular kind of symbolism and meaning in the biblical story. And that meaning is introduced in Genesis 1 and 2 where trees are a real focal point.
- Jon: And one of the things that trees do in the Bible is become a metaphoric scheme for thinking about what people are like. People are like trees.
- Tim: Correct. People are trees. Yeah.
- Jon: People are trees - to be a metaphor?
- Tim: That's right. Correct. The way trees exist in the world and the way that trees exist in this narrative is very similar. It shares lots of similarities to what people mean and how they are and the role they play in the story. So in Psalm 1, you can be a tree planted by streams of water. That is this ideal state of being human.
- Tim: Yeah. Psalm 1 which is part of a package deal or Psalm 1 and 2, are composed as a literary whole introducing the book of Psalms. And what you get is a human soul connected with the will of God, that Psalm 1, they're like eternal tree planted in Eden, Psalm 2, ruling over the world and undoing all the evil and chaos in the world to bring about the new Eden. People are trees.
- Jon: People are trees.
- Tim: That's the tree of life imagery. Trees are an image of perpetual life of continually bearing new life from within themselves. And humans are like that, too. They have the next generation within them. So there you go. Trees provide life for the creatures around them. Humans can spread and create more life for the creatures around them. It's another way they're similar.
- Jon: The trees were a big deal because the place and time this was written, they have people that's dependent on the land - we still are but I don't farm - and they lived in a place that had a lot of kind of deserty plains.
- Tim: The Bible came into existence within a culture that existed and lived and traveled between the Mediterranean Sea on the eastern end and the Persian Gulf across the desert. So the ancient Near East is what that refers to. So from Egypt, down Northern Africa, up into the Middle East, the Fertile Crescent, and then all the way down. If you just look on a satellite image Google Maps today, you'll see a big brown stripe through that section with occasional spots of green and blue that are either mountains, oases, high places or river deltas.

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: So trees were a big deal. Lots of life around trees. Now in the next episode, we talked about there are two specific trees in the garden narrative in Genesis 2. God plants a bunch of trees.

Tim: God plants a garden in the midst of a wilderness. That's Genesis 2. There's wilderness and nothing cultivated, and God plants the garden.

Jon: God plants the garden. There's trees that are good to look at, there's trees for food, and then in the middle of the garden...

Tim: It's on a sacred hi place...

Jon: Oh, the garden is?

Tim: ...with one river flowing out and then flowing down to become the four rivers that water all the corners of the earth so to speak. So the high mountain, trees, and the river flowing out of it.

Jon: In the middle of this which then you would realize it's kind of like the top of the mountain is the tree of life? And we talked about that tree. And we talked about how picture of a tree of life was a very common image for the imaginative palette, as you will, of the ancient Near East neighboring stories. They would talk about such trees.

Tim: Yeah. Sacred trees, the top high places where either the gods are the tree, like in Egypt or Canaanite culture, Asherah, (fertility goddess) symbolized by ritual trees on high places. Or human kings can be depicted as sacred trees. And then in Genesis 2, the tree of life is riffing off of but also contrasting with both of those ideas.

Jon: You're familiar with those ideas? Here's a biblical way...

Tim: A biblical take on the tree of life.

Jon: Yes. That God planted it.

Tim: It is not a god, but it is a gift of God.

Jon: It's a gift.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's something that we can take and experience eternal life.

Tim: Because the author can assume that a cultural understanding that, okay, in biblical faith that God isn't a tree, but the tree is a place where humans meet God because it's in the middle of the garden. And so a human meeting personally becoming one with the presence of God in the middle

The Tale of Two Trees

of the garden is depicted through this image of eating from the tree and it's as if the fruit conveys God's life to the human through that proximity and intimacy.

Jon: And where this really landed for me was making the connection between Eden and the temple which is a whole nother conversation, but there is a parallel direct parallel between river at Eden and the tree in the middle of the garden to the temple and the Holy of Holies in the middle of the temple. And it's where His throne is. And if you go into the temple, you see imagery of the garden and of fruit tree and the cherubim and all that. And so it's about living in connection with God. That was a great conversation.

Now, there's another tree. We're not told that's in the middle of the garden but we can assume that's also there in the middle of the garden.

Tim: The tree of life was in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowing good and bad.

Jon: And the tree of knowing good and bad, it was there too. Two trees.

Tim: Two trees. So we're going to talk about a second tree and then what happens as a result of that second tree - the tree of knowing good and bad. In brief, we have had many, many conversations about the meaning of the tree. So knowing good and bad is a phrase used in the Hebrew Bible like three or four times. It's always connected with children in a state of moral immaturity or just inexperienced in life. Good and bad representing not just good and evil as philosophical moral categories, but good and bad in terms of...

Jon: Things that create life and things that break things down.

Tim: Beneficial things and harmful or terrible things. Humanity is in an infant state.

Jon: Things that build up.

Tim: That's right. And so God wants to shelter and protect the humans from good and bad until presumably they can learn wisdom from Him to become wise rulers over the garden. That's an inference.

Jon: Yes, that is an inference.

Tim: But I think it's one that becomes much more clear as you go throughout the story. God doesn't want to keep humans in an infant state. He wants them to rule.

The Tale of Two Trees

- Jon: They got to rule with Him. And to rule, you need wisdom. And so the question is, how are you going to get wisdom?
- Jon: How are you going to get the wisdom. That's one layer of this. The second layer is that when the command about the trees is given in Genesis 2, we're going to look at it here in Genesis 2:15 and 17, the wordings important here, it says, "Then Yahweh God took the human, put him into the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it." We've talked about this before. Those two verbs, that's avad in Hebrew and shamar. In combination, there's only one other group of people in the Hebrew Bible given that job description, and it's the Levites who work in the temple precincts. So we're back to Adam and Eve as royal priests.
- Jon: And Eden as a temple.
- Tim: Yeah. And the middle of the garden as the Holy of holies - the throne of God.
- Jon: Where they're supposed to go and eat of the tree of life.
- Tim: Meet with God and ingest His divine life. Vs. 16, "Yahweh God commanded - first divine command - commanded the human saying, 'From all the trees of the garden you may eat eat (in Hebrew).'"
- Jon: Oh really?
- Tim: It's "surely eat" in English.
- Jon: It put emphasis on it.
- Tim: It's emphatic Hebrew turn of phrase. You just repeat the verb twice. You shall eat eat.
- Jon: Let us eat eat.
- Tim: That's the first command actually. This is very important. The first command is to eat of all the trees.
- Jon: The first command is to eat eat. I love it.
- Tim: Yeah, eat eat. So what's all the trees? That includes the tree of life. So it's very important. The first command it doesn't place the tree of life off-limits, and then if you obey the command, then you get to the tree of life.
- Jon: Oh, interesting.
- Tim: That's not the storyline.

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: It's very important for especially modern misunderstandings of this story.

Jon: It's not a reward for doing good.

Tim: No. The reward is given before the humans have done anything. Because it's not a reward. It's a gift. It's the gift of eternal life is there. So the first divine command is to enjoy the gift of eternal life. It is yours. So this reframes what the command about the tree of knowing good and bad is then. What these verses don't say is Yahweh God commanded the human saying, "You may eat from all the trees of the garden including the tree of life if you don't take from the tree of knowing good and bad." I think that's how many people read it. But that's not. The tree of life is already there. So the warning about the tree of knowing good and bad is eating from the tree of knowing good and bad will result in forfeiting the thing that is already yours. That's the setup here. I think that's an important difference.

Jon: It is, yeah. I like that. I also like that by lumping it with all the other trees you can eat from, it kind of helps me think about it more as a daily thing. I guess I've always pictured the tree of life as the prize at the end. Like you're just saying, like, you beat the game, you get the prize. You followed all the God's commands, now you get the reward. But it's with all the trees and it's part of just nourishment.

Tim: That's good.

[00:14:19]

Tim: So getting back to the wording here, first command is "from all the trees of the garden you may eat eat but from the tree of knowing good and bad you shall not eat because in the day you eat from that tree you will die die."

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: It's "surely die" but in Hebrew, it's die die. So it begins and ends with a double emphasis. Eat eat from all the trees. One tree is going to make it all fall apart. Don't eat from that because you'll die die. I want you to eat eat. I don't want you to die die. This isn't a warning. It doesn't say "if you eat from the trees of knowing good and bad I will kill you." It does not say that. It says, "it will lead to death." Death will be the consequence. And that's what's going to happen in the narrative. They eat from the tree, the first thing they do is mistrust each other and hide their bodies and then blame each other. Then you watch two brothers divide, and then one kills the other. The first death in the Bible is not from God killing somebody, it's from a human who's taken the knowledge of good and bad

The Tale of Two Trees

into their own hands. And then you get the outbreak of violence which leads to the flood.

Gary Basheers [SP], one of my theological mentors, many years ago, he first pointed this out to me. It doesn't say "if you eat from the tree and wrong about I will kill you." He says it will kill you. It's a paraphrase, but that's the idea. So when this hit me, and I realized I've been reading a different story into these words, and not letting the words say what they actually mean.

Jon: A different story being that God's kind of judgment against humans for disobeying was that He would kill them.

Tim: Correct. I'd always assumed that's the nuance at work and you will surely die.

Jon: Instead of a warning that there is a reality which the humans can live which will lead to death.

Tim: That's right. And God plays a role in that He exiles them from the garden so that they can't eat from the tree of life which means that they'll die. But that's a secondary response to humans taking. And it's the taking that leads them to start killing each other in the next chapter.

Jon: And even that, we talked about last episode, I see is like a mercy.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Keeping up the tree of life while living in a state of death means that they don't have to live forever in death.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah, totally. Let's pause. Think of it this way. This is a way you and I talked this through actually a while ago but we were saving it for this conversation. Think of these two trees as being next to each other in the garden. The command is eat from all the trees which includes that one in the middle - the tree of life. However, to experience and eat from the tree of life, you have to walk by the tree of knowing good and bad and not take from it - avoid it. It looks good but God said that will kill me. That's the thing that will kill me and hurt myself and others. It looks awesome but I'm going to avoid it so that I can keep enjoying access to life. That's the way these trees relate to each other. The way to eternal life is by keeping my hands off the tree of knowing good and bad. I don't have to earn eternal life, it's already a gift to me, but I can forfeit my chance and access to it by choosing my own knowing of good and bad. That's the dynamic at work. It's the tale of two trees so to speak.

Jon: And it's helpful to frame it that way because often the question becomes, why did God even put this tree with all this danger?

The Tale of Two Trees

Tim: Sure. I got it. Yeah, we try and blame God for putting a choice in front of the humans.

Jon: And when you frame it that way, my thought isn't "why did God do that?" My thought is, "Yeah, that really does help explain the human condition."

Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: That what I experience.

Tim: It's an image of the human condition.

Jon: I can see, "Oh, that's life. God's pointing me towards life." He said, take life and then all around me I see these branches and this other fruit and it's constantly drawing my eye to it saying like, "well, this is actually looking pretty nice, too. You could have life this way."

Tim: I could do the thing.

Jon: The branches of the tree of knowing good and bad hang a little lower than the rest of the tree of life.

Tim: They often do. It's what looks like the easier way and then what I'm not seeing is that it's easier for me, but I'd actually make it harder for others to have access to the tree of life.

Jon: I guess the other interesting thing is that it's about the knowledge of good and bad, not like a specific moral choice. It's not like, "Oh, man, I would really want to eat of the tree of life, but I think I want to hate my friend. I'm going to choose hating my friend." It's actually a step before that. It's a step of going, "You know, as it pertains to my relationships with others. I'm going to know what is good and what is bad, what kind of things will build up and what kind of things will destroy. I'm going to take that power and authority on myself for myself."

Tim: Yeah, yeah. So the gift of a tree of life is something that's like the goodness of God in creation. It's the gift of life. It's a wonderful friend that I've had since childhood and it's just awesome. And then we're such good friends, we start a small business together because our ideas work well and we love it. Then you start ruling. You're ruling the world together. You're creating a new value in the world that didn't exist before. But then you get into situations and you have some choices to make. And those choices could affect your friend - maybe what you do with the money may split up resources or how you apportion vacation time off. And then all sudden...

Jon: That's how you communicate.

The Tale of Two Trees

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And I start to feel like I deserve some more time off. I work harder than them. And then I start making decisions that seem good in my eyes. I start redefining it as good and I don't even know that I'm beginning to slight another person and neglect their wellbeing as much as I care about mine. And then all of a sudden, I'm eating from the wrong tree and it seems like the right thing to do.

Jon: And I think what's good about the way you talk about that is that it's not like, "Oh, man, am I going to eat of that tree or not?" Well...

Tim: Yeah, there is a choice involved.

Jon: There's a choice involved. But the choice is, am I going to define good and evil, good and bad?

Tim: I see. That's not how it presents itself to us, right?

Jon: Yeah. That choice is done almost unconsciously. Like we take that just naturally. It's like, yeah, that kind of speaks to just the human condition. We just come into the world and just gorge on that fruit.

Tim: That's right. The reason that the tree is there in the garden is it's a powerful image of the nature of all human experience. Every good thing in my life is also matched by an equal or greater number of opportunities to ruin it by taking my own knowledge of good and bad. But I take it often without knowing it. I just make what I think it's the right decision but I don't recognize it has all these screwed up motives underneath it. So that's all the way back to one of our first videos. The tree of knowing good bad represents a choice. That's before us perpetually. That's why it's right next to the tree of life.

Jon: If you've been to Sunday school, you know how this ends.

Tim: Yeah. The good times last in two pages.

[00:23:20]

Tim: We have in other videos and conversations talked about the scene. The first movement of Genesis 3 introduces a snake in a positive way. He's sharp. He's shrewd.

Jon: He's crafty.

Tim: Does shrewd have a negative connotation?

Jon: I think shrewd is neutral.

The Tale of Two Trees

Tim: Is it? Okay. So the first sentence of Genesis 3, "Now, the snake or the serpent was more arum than any beast of the field.

Jon: That's the Hebrew. Arum.

Tim: Arum. Which is every other time it appears in the Hebrew Bible it's a positive. Actually, don't quote me on that. In the book of Proverbs, every time it appears in Proverbs, it's a positive trait of the righteous and the wise.

Jon: It's the ability to be able to creatively use wisdom?

Tim: Yeah, but specifically in a situation I can identify all the factors find the solution forward and act on it.

Jon: Strategic.

Tim: Strategic. Oh, there you go. Strategic. Shrewd. But it's like you're making the best decision with the least amount of unnecessary stuff leftover. The point is the serpent sees this is an opportunity.

Jon: We talked about this when we did our question response on the Satan. Was it a YouTube question and response? And used it for making the point that the use of the word "arum" is not negative.

Tim: It's not negative but it does say the serpent has the capabilities. Remember, just like wisdom, you can be wise to terrible ends, you can be wise towards good ends. That's always the choice. So I think it's introducing this creature having two possibilities before it.

Jon: It's interesting you have humans who are kind of in their infancy and then you have the serpent who is arum. So the humans, they still are kind of childish in their ability to know good from bad. But this creature knows what's up. He does been around the block.

Tim: That's right. He has knowledge of God's words, claims the privileged knowledge of God's divine council decisions. "No, you won't die. No, here's what God knows. Let me tell you what God knows because I've heard Him talk about it." That kind of thing. Which starts makes you think, "This is more than just your average snake." That's a whole nother conversation. What I want to focus on is the tree moment which we focused on that too on another conversation. But the point is that in this conversation between a woman and a snake says, "Oh, so God said you can't eat any of these trees?" So he inverts the gift. Just blatant inversion of God's words.

Jon: Because God said you could eat from any of them.

The Tale of Two Trees

Tim: God commanded them to eat from all of the trees. That was His command was, "Enjoy it all."

Jon: The snake is like, "Wait, God said none of the trees?"

Tim: The woman's quick on that. She's like, "No, it's ridiculous. We can eat from the fruit the trees of the garden but there's one tree in the middle where God said, 'Don't eat from it or touch it or you will die die. You will surely die.'" And then the serpent say, "You won't die die. In the day God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened." Enlightenment.

Jon: Wisdom.

Tim: Wisdom wisdom. Yeah, brightening of eyes. "And you'll be like Elohim knowing good and evil."

Jon: Good and bad. Tov and ra'.

Tim: Tov and ra'. Thank you for that correction. Good job. You're helping me be consistent. So the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, one is, hey, I'm hungry, that'll satisfy my desire, but it was also beautiful. It's attractive. "That's weird that God would say don't eat from that because..."

Jon: Having the ability to no good from bad is an attractive proposition?

Tim: Well, yes, correct. It is attractive. It seems like that would be a good thing for me to have. And remember this is going to be a motif then that these test moments that biblical characters come before are sometimes between a good choice and a evil choice. But often it is between a good choice and "Well, that seems like a good choice too, but, well, it might hurt somebody or..." But it's usually between good and I think that's good too. That's once again true to the human condition.

Jon: Right. That's totally true. There are times where it's really obvious that's the bad thing. And the struggle is kind of like, am I going to let myself get away with the bad thing? But more often, it's just, "Man, there's two routes. I don't know."

Tim: Or I don't know.

Jon: I don't know. Or my intuition is this one but my intuition is going to be clouded by all my biases and selfishness.

Tim: But usually they are invisible in the moment. We've talked about this many times. We both had seasons in our lives where we made significant decisions, which at the moment seemed neutral. But then the just like the hindsight of a year or two to realize like, "Oh, man, all these other

The Tale of Two Trees

motivations that work that I can see now, but I couldn't in the moment. That's weird to realize.

Jon: So tricking ourselves into thinking we can know good from wrong but in reality we are unable to.

Tim: We shoot in the dark a lot of times. That's relevant to the last thing that she sees, which is she sees that it's desirable to make one wise. I'm hungry, it'll give me food. Second thing. It's beautiful. It doesn't look bad. It looks beautiful. Third, it gives me something that I want. I want to be wise. I desire that, and that will give it to me. God said that it will kill me but I think that it will actually make me wise and I want that. So I will take what I want. That's the image here. So the tree will spoil the gift. The gift is "eat from all the trees, but the moment you eat from this one, it will ruin everything. So just don't do that. And enjoy all the rest." And then there you go. She took from the tree, and she ate. And so the eyes are open, all right. So in that sense, the snake was telling the truth. "Your eyes will be opened."

Jon: Meaning?

Tim: Well, what he says is "Your eyes will be opened," meaning you'll be like Elohim knowing good and bad. And what actually happens is their eyes are open and they realize that they are vulnerable for each other.

Jon: And what am I supposed to be thinking about what actually happened? Like what in our psyche, or they're like...like what clicks on or...?

Tim: Ah, I see. Well, in a way they do become like Elohim knowing good and evil. That is true. Because remember, when they're exiled in vs. 22, God says, "No, they become like us Elohim knowing good and bad. So the snake was telling the truth. But what the knowing of good and bad did, especially because they took it in a way that God told them not to take it, the first negative consequence is they realize their otherness from each other. They were naked, and then they hide their bodies. Such an important but rich detail worth pondering. They realize they're no longer one. The two became one. They're different. But in full vulnerability and intimacy, their otherness becomes mutual and one. Now their otherness becomes a sense of alienation and division.

Jon: That's a consequence. But indulge me for a second. What actually happened?

Tim: I don't know what actually happened.

Jon: Because you think about like if...let's take children who don't know good from bad. So you've got a 3-year-old. I don't know what age works. But he's just living out of impulses. He's just doing his thing. And then you

The Tale of Two Trees

got, let's say, now a 12-year-old. And what's the difference between a 2-year-old a 12-year-old? Well, it's all of the accumulation of life experiences and now the ability to understand how the world works more. So there's this progression in their just mental ability. So I kind of can understand that. But what is it like for just something to click on all of a sudden, it's like, I don't know good from bad like a child, and now all of a sudden, I'm like Elohim? When I ask you a question, I'm not supposed to be asking it this way?

Tim: No, no. I think the reason why it's so ambiguous, this biblical narrative in general, these ambiguities are there to make you ponder and reread and then go read the rest of the Bible, and then bring what you learned back to bear on those ambiguities and so on. So you're doing what you're supposed to do? You're meditating.

Jon: I'm meditating on it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Good job. This why we've shifted from using the word "evil" to the word "bad." Because good and bad doesn't just mean philosophical morality. It's also beneficial and harmful, life-giving, catastrophic, harm, death-bringing kind of thing. So to not no good and bad also means I've never had anything bad happen to me. I only know good. And that's true in this narrative. So to know is to experience life versus death. That's one. That's one layer of it.

But then another layer of it is, we've talked about, I think, in a different series, I think in our most recent wisdom series, where it is a state of moral infancy. And so what is moral maturity? It means responsibly making moral decisions and being responsible for them, which is a good thing. So then we're to the moment of God said no, but is that implied in the narrative that what He means is not yet. He wants to make them know what is good and evil but on His clock not by their covetous desire. That's where I'm at. Because that's a good thing to be wise so that you can know good and bad. That's a good thing. That's the whole point of being wise.

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Jon: Another thing is there's something very corruptive about eating of this tree where it's not like God can say, "Hey guys, bad idea. Let's get that fruit out of your system and then let's try again."

Tim: Yeah, correct. This is going to be illuminated by what happens especially at Mount Sinai, where you're going to have Israel at another Eden high place where their representative Moses is meeting God up on the top by a tree, the bush...

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: The burning bush.

Tim: ...and he's going to receive the commands of the Torah - the covenant terms of the Torah.

Jon: That is analogous to...

Tim: And Moses will go on to say in the book of Deuteronomy, "These commands are life. Today I set before you life and good, blessing and curse and death. Choose life." So Israel at Mount Sinai is a replaying of this moment before the tree. Will they obey? Will they disobey? To me that gives a helpful retro commentary on the tree. God wants His people to have the knowledge of the right thing and the wrong thing, but it has to do with listening to God's voice first and foremost. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowing. We did a whole series on that. So these two trees are intertwined. Now, the tree of life and the tree of knowing good and bad...

Jon: They're both there.

Tim: They're both there.

Jon: They're paired.

Tim: How you relate to one determines how you relate to the other kind of thing. And so they make the wrong decision, God shows up and it's like, "Oh, no, really, you ate from the tree I commanded you not to." And it all hits the fan.

Jon: You have chosen to gain wisdom on your own terms.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Which means that eternal life for a creature that has coveted wisdom by my own taking...

Jon: Bad news.

Tim: ...that wouldn't be a curse. It would be a curse to have eternal life for that kind of creature. And so he exiles them from the garden. Once again, the garden narrative in Genesis 3:22, God says. "The humans become like one of us knowing good and bad because they took from that tree. So Let's send them out so they don't take from the tree of life and eat and live forever."

Jon: Game over.

Tim: Game over. No, no, no. Actually no. Oh, really?

Jon: At this point in the narrative you're kind of like, "Uh."

The Tale of Two Trees

Tim: Except God made a promise that a seed, back to tree and plant imagery, a seed would come from the woman who would undo all that has just been done in the garden. The snake's head will be crushed. But yet this seed will also suffer by the snake striking in some way. It's such a rich, multi-layered, little poetic line. So yeah, I walked out of the garden, which was a high place with the trees at the center on top failure. Humanity fails the test of listening to God's voice at the tree on the high place. But I trust that there is a seed coming who will undo what has been done.

And true to Biblical theology style, the way that biblical authors work then, what they're going to do is put all the key characters in the stories to follow at moments where they're at literal and symbolic high places with trees, facing their own tests. Welcome to the story of Abraham. Welcome, especially to the story of Moses. And I think these will be two good moments for the video to track Moses and Abraham before high trees will be able to compositionally to replay that pattern. It's pretty cool.

Jon: The pattern is being in front of a tree, and having a choice of how you're going to find wisdom.

Tim: Yeah. Respond to the test. Whatever the test is in that character's life, the question will be, will they do what Adam and Eve did or will they resist the temptation to do whatever their version of taking of the knowledge of good and bad?

Jon: I mean, kind of you're going back and forth between referring to it as a test and referring to it as just kind of the human condition. Kind of the like just the reality of being in this situation.

Tim: I see.

Jon: Because they have different connotations for me.

Tim: Oh, interesting.

Jon: A test is like, I need you to prove your character. Seems like "I'm going to test you."

Tim: Oh, right, right, right. Okay, yeah, thank you. The word "test" in Hebrew, it's verb *nasah*. There's overlap in that the point of testing in biblical Hebrew is to expose the truth about what something really is. And for some reason in English, and it might be just from like grade school, we often experience tests as prove your worth. Well, ideally what tests are is they're showing what needs to be corrected. They expose the truth of what I really know so that I can make up for it and keep learning. But usually, we just highlight the negative nature of the test.

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: But If we put that then construct onto this narrative of Genesis 2 and 3, I don't know, it feels strange to have a test. It's a pass-fail test and the consequences are pretty massive. It feels not a test I would want give anyone.

Tim: I see. Well, if the point is to say, "Can humanity fulfill its calling in its current mode of existence?" No. We need to have a souped-up upgraded version of humanity that can truly partner with God and bring about the new Eden.

Jon: So okay, so you walk away from Genesis 3 thinking, "Okay, this makes sense of the human condition."

Tim: They failed the test. That helps me understand how I keep failing my test.

Jon: God wants to rule with us, we're incapable of doing it, we've failed the test.

Tim: Though sometimes some people pass the test. It can make me feel like, "Oh, I could pass the test too."

Jon: Yeah, at times.

Tim: If I was like Abraham in that one moment when he did nothing but looked up in the sky and just trusted God, that was when he passed the test.

Jon: But there will be a seed who will somehow deal with evil. But then you also said, which is really interesting, we need some sort of new mode of being human.

Tim: Yeah. I think that's what the story is reaching at. The dirt creature isn't in a mode to pass the test or the dirt creature as presently, what you need is a dirt creature who's infused not just with the life-breath of God, but with the very life presence of God Himself, a divine human. A human one with the Creator. People would say that's reading the New Testament back into the Old, but I think it's the opposite. I think the garden narrative is telling you what we need around here is a human who's one with the Creator who can truly become that partner. But that's not just from the garden narrative. That's actually you read on to the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Anyway.

Jon: So a test in Hebrew is the idea of a moment where your true quality is exposed.

Tim: Yeah. The truth about you becomes known so that you can do something about it. Something can be done about it.

The Tale of Two Trees

- Jon: What could Adam and Eve do about it when their truth about them was exposed?
- Tim: That's a great question. There's actually a long-standing conversation going back to second temple Jewish literature about if Adam and Eve blew a chance to repent.
- Jon: Interesting.
- Tim: Because it's their blame-shifting that's highlighted. When God shows up and says, "Hey, have you eaten..." He asked them a question. Why do you ask questions? To invite a response. So God said, "Have you eaten from the tree?" And what the man says is he blames the woman. "It was the woman's fault. She gave it to me." God addresses the woman. He gives her a chance. "What did you do?"
- Jon: "Are you going to own up to it?"
- Tim: "It was the serpent. He deceived me..."
- Jon: Which is true.
- Tim: It is true, but it's passing the buck. So what nobody does in the story is say "I did it and I'm sorry." Because the first question God asks is, "Where are you guys? We usually meet right here. You're not here. It's time for a walk. Where are you?"
- Jon: But then God says, "You can't eat of the tree because now you know good from the bad because you are like me. So that's why I'm kicking you out of Eden."
- Tim: Oh, I see.
- Jon: It's not kicking you out because you didn't say sorry.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. This is back to that mercy. It's a mercy to them.
- Jon: But is there some sort of then conversation you said about there was a chance for repentance?
- Tim: Yeah. Well, God three questions: Where are you? Who told you naked? And have you eaten?
- Jon: So as people have thought about that, what do they think...
- Tim: Why is God coming asking questions? He's inviting a moment.

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: And then they play that forward. And let's say that Adam and Eve responded correctly. Would they...?

Tim: It creates a what-if possibility. What if they had repented? Maybe. Who knows.

Jon: Can God just be like, "Okay. We'll back to health. We'll start again."

Tim: I see.

Jon: There just seems to be and this comes also from just how I grew up learning about the Bible, this was the fall. There's something that critically broke in the human condition that can't be fixed.

Tim: And this is where I might be pondering the story for the rest of my life. This story is doing a balance between placing an event before time before normal historical time, saying something happens, something in our roots and how it all began helps explain why things are the way they are. But also this narrative is explaining my experience. It's narrating the story in such a way that every human finds their own life experience within these representative characters. So it's doing both.

It's also about me and my failures and how my failures participate in the whole human species failure as far back as we can tell. And that's where the what-ifs become unhelpful because they're interesting. I've never existed in a state of pure moral innocence except maybe in my infancy. But David looks at his life of failures and says, "It's like I was born a failure here." That's what he says in Psalm 51. I think there's an element of truth. I think there's a powerful truth to that. You're born into a scene where you're already set up to fail.

Jon: Total depravity.

Tim: In theological lingo, it'd be total depravity but in a sociological way, and the way the biblical narrative works, each generation inherits not of their own asking, they inherit the mess that their parents created and it predisposes them to fail in same way and in more grievous way.

Jon: So the degree that the story is about true innocence coming into wisdom and knowledge by their own terms instead of the way God wanted to, to that degree, yeah, we can't really relate and all the what-ifs kind of become kind of dead ends.

Tim: They're not inheriting somebody else's mess not ahead of them. That's right. So that's a way they're different from the other human in history and in the story.

The Tale of Two Trees

Jon: But to the degree, this story is illuminating what it's like to be a human and having a choice between "am I going to listen and obey to the voice of God and what He wants or am I going to decide what's good in my own eyes?"

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Then it becomes very illuminating to...

Tim: And once again, we're back to that little reframe about the tree in this conversation that we're having. The thing that he asked them to do was to enjoy eternal life. That was the command. It's so important to me. Just as it sinks in over time, the command is to enjoy the good thing I want to give you. And then what happens is what humans take is the paltry alternative. It looks good, it meets a need, and I want it. That is the good thing for me. And then to C. S. Lewis' thing of eating mud pies while you sit at the foot of a table full of cherry pies and apple pies and you think it's good, and you love it. That's where we're at.

Jon: Thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast with us. Next week, we're going to continue to talk about trees. We're going to talk about a couple of the main characters in the Old Testament narrative and their relationship with trees, Noah, and Abraham.

Tim: If you just go through the Abraham stories in Genesis 12 to the end of his life in chapter 25, and get a green marker and a brown marker and highlight trees and mountains, they're everywhere. This guy's constantly having significant moments of his life in front of trees on top of really tall hills.

Jon: Today's show is produced by Dan Gummel. Our theme music comes from the band Tents. We're a crowdfunded nonprofit in Portland, Oregon. And you can find out all that we're up to on our website, thebibleproject.com. Thank you for being a part of this with us.

Man: Hi, this is Caesar Valgela. I'm from Valdivia, Chile. I first heard about The Bible Project as a YouTube recommendation, and then I hooked on it. I use The Bible Project as part of my teaching projects and with the youth conference that I'm also participating on. And my favorite thing about The Bible Project is that it brings the academic language to the regular people, I guess. We believe the Bible's a unified story that leads to Jesus. We're a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos study notes, podcasts and more at thebibleproject.com. [foreign language 00:49:05]