



BibleProject Podcast

Uniquely Biblical View of Grace Character of God E4

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Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins, Tim Mackie, Carissa Quinn

- Jon** Hi, this is Jon at BibleProject. On the podcast, we're in the middle of a series discussing the character of God, attributes God assigns Himself in a really important passage in Exodus 34. Last week, we looked at the first word He used to describe Himself—that He's compassionate. This week, we're going to look at the second word, that God is gracious. Now, when we call someone gracious, we often mean something like courteous. Like, she was gracious with that stranger. But that's not what God means by gracious. 00:00:00
- Tim** So the word the God uses in Exodus 34:6 is *khanun*. The Hebrew word *khanun*. There's a noun "*khen*", which means "grace" or "favor."
- Jon** To be an object or a person who has *khen* means that it's something desirable. It evokes delight and pleasure in favor.
- Tim** The focus of the word *khen* isn't just on the beauty or elegance of the object. But it's about how the beauty or charm of that object is perceived in the eyes of the observer. So *khen* refers to something that's valuable or that generates a favorable response. It generates favor. When I look at it, I'm like, "I like that." It's such an interesting use of the word grace. 00:01:00
- Jon** Now, a very common biblical phrase that appears 47 times is the phrase "to find *khen* in his or her eyes." In other words, to find favor or delight in someone's eyes. This phrase is a request for someone to look upon you as favorable or even desirable.
- Tim** If you go through these 47 examples, you'll see a pattern that when somebody finds *khen* in the eyes of another, it's almost always the person who finds the *khen* is in a subordinate position, they're of low status, or they're vulnerable. So to find *khen* in the eyes of someone means that you are being given a gift of generosity, kindness by someone who you don't properly deserve it or don't necessarily merit it. It's a gift. 00:02:00
- Jon** And for someone to consistently give this kind of favor and delight means that they are gracious. That's today. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

So we're going to continue on our series in Exodus 34. We've been talking about these two verses, Exodus 34:6-7, where God makes a proclamation about Himself to Moses up on Mount Sinai. And He says five things about Himself. That He's compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, full of loyal love and faithfulness. And we're going to walk through all of those. Last week, we talked about the attribute of God as compassionate. And that was a great conversation there. Carissa, you led us through.

Carissa Yeah.

Jon This week, we're going to talk about the second attribute in this verse, which is gracious. So we've got Carissa Quinn.

Carissa Hi Jon.

Jon And Tim Mackie.

00:03:00

Tim Hey, hello.

Jon Tim, you're going to lead us through this word study.

Tim Yeah. I get to play tour guide with the word "gracious." So some interesting things about this word. Biblical vocabulary has worked itself into the English language at such deep levels we forget that it's there. Oh, I was just reading something about this. There's multiple popular phrases that we still use that come from the Bible through William Tyndale in English, the King James Version: "The skin of my teeth."

Jon Oh.

Tim You know that one?

Jon I know that phrase.

Tim The phrase comes from Job. I forget what chapter. But he uses it in the sense of that his body's barely holding together.

Jon So in Hebrew, is it literally skin of my teeth?

Tim Yeah, that's right. It's a Hebrew idiom that's come into English...

Jon Through the Bible.

Tim Through the Bible. They knew teeth were hard. I don't know if they had a figure of speech for tooth enamel. I don't think it means tooth enamel. Anyway, my point is that this word "gracious," both in Hebrew and in its Greek translation have made their way into the English language through names. As we sat down to record, it just occurred to me, Carissa and Jon, both of your names are derived from the Greek or Hebrew word for "gracious" or "grace." Did you know this?

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Carissa Yeah, so cool.

Tim Yes, that's right. So, Carissa, the Greek word is "charis."
I actually knew a charis in high school.

Carissa I've met more Charises than Carissas.

Jon Oh, really?

Carissa Yeah, I have.

Jon I've never met a Charis.

Carissa Maybe it's the Christian circle or something.

Tim Oh, yeah, that's right. And then "John" is, boy, our
condensation of the Hebrew name "Yehokhanan."

Jon Yehokhanan. Which is Jonathan, right? Because I'm a Jonathan.

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Tim Oh, you're Jonathan. You're Yehonatan.

Jon Yehonatan.

Tim Then I was wrong.

Jon But I've been told that my name means "gift from God."

Tim Yeah, it means "Yahweh gifts."

Jon Which is very similar to grace, right?

Tim Yes, it is. Yeah, that's right. And you're J-O-N, which is short for Jonathan. I
forget. I always forget that. You're right. Okay. so, I take back what I said.

Jon But J-O-H-N comes from...?

Tim J-O-H-N is condensation of the Hebrew word "Yeho" - condensed form
for Yahweh, and then "Khanan" is the Hebrew word for gracious. So
Johns and Charises and Carissas out there, high five. You were God's
gracious gift to the world. So the word that God uses in Exodus 34:6 is
"khanun." The Hebrew word "khanun." It comes from the Hebrew root
khanan or (*unintelligible*). So it appears in all kinds of different forms.

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"Khanan" is the verb "to show favor" or "to show grace." What God uses
here is the adjective khanun. And then there's all of these nouns that
spin-off of the root. There's a noun khen, which means grace or favor.
But then there's also tekhen and takhanun. So, all told, these words
add up to...I didn't do the math. I'm looking at it. It looks like about 150
different occurrences of this root throughout the...No, no, way more. 175
occurrences of this word. It's a prominent word in biblical language.

Carissa Yeah, I think compassionate was just around 100

Tim Oh, really?

Carissa Mm Hmm.

Tim What's interesting, I think you noted this, but the two words, compassionate and gracious, first of all, here they rhyme. Here. So rakhum (compassionate) and khanun (gracious). And then they're often used as a pair. You Carissa, you looked this up?

00:07:00

Carissa Yeah. What I just noticed is interesting on here is that "khanun" is used 13 times, and that's the same amount of times that "rakhum" is used. But out of those 13 times, 11 times they're used together.

Tim In other words, khanun doesn't often appear outside of this pair.

Carissa Right. Same with rakhum.

Tim Oh, I see.

Carissa They both occur the same amount of times and 11 of those 13 times they occur together. So they're almost synonymous. After you talk about what grace means, we could talk about the differences too.

Tim Yeah. Okay, that was a bunch of nerdy word study.

Jon So nerdy. I'm lost.

Tim Let's see here. I talked about the root word. Let's go back out to English. "Grace" is a very common English word. However, do non-religious people use it that much?

00:08:00

Jon Oh, boy. I don't know. I would imagine.

Tim I read the Bible too much to know anymore.

Carissa Maybe graceful. I hear the word "graceful."

Tim Graceful is normal English.

Jon Like a deer.

Tim Yeah, like a deer. Or a dancer.

Carissa A dancer, yeah.

Tim You would say dancer is graceful. Gracious is normal, meaning kind, generous. I think it's kind of synonym for kind, isn't it?

Jon Yeah. I feel like when you say someone's full of grace in modern English, you tend to mean that they're gentle and they can read a room, they're delicate,

they're others-focused. There's just kind of this lightness about them. That's, for whatever reason, the things that come to mind when I think of that.

Tim It's interesting you combine a few different things there. One is how they treat other people, like generous or kind. But then a couple words you chose were about how they present themselves, or how they are perceived by others. Like light. 00:09:00

Jon Graceful movement. If you're talking about a basketball player being graceful, they're quick on their feet and their body is moving in such a way that almost feels like it defies physics.

Carissa Maybe in English, there's a sharp difference between "graceful" and "gracious." Like graceful describing the movement, gracious being more the personality or character.

Tim Here's what's interesting. I knew this was a common word in Hebrew before I really studied it for the video. But Hebrew has that same kind of dual nuance of meaning that we use it in English. In other words, in Hebrew, you can use this khaman root in that sense of graceful, just like you can in English. So it can describe somebody's character, gracious, it can also describe how something is perceived as being elegant or charming, or graceful. That's really interesting. So my hunch is that those two meanings came into English actually through the different meanings of this word in the Bible. 00:10:00

Carissa It's interesting.

Tim Yeah, it is. So those are maybe some common uses of the word. We should note also at the beginning, this is a very important religious word in Jewish and Christian tradition.

Jon It's like the first thing you learn as a Christian.

Tim Yeah, salvation by grace. Salvation by grace. By grace alone. And usually grace when we're talking about it in terms of Christian belief, it's set in opposition to works or earning.

Jon Right.

Tim So in other words, God loves you out of sheer grace, meaning there isn't something that you had to do to earn God's love. It's by His grace, meaning free or unearned. I think that's how we usually use the word in religious circles. That, too, is rooted in this concept. So that's an important concept in the New Testament. Famous Bible verses. "By grace, you have been saved. And this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, that no one should boast." That's from Ephesians 3. But that all those ideas about salvation by grace, are rooted in the use of this word and concept for God's character in the Hebrew Bible. And especially right here. 00:11:00

It's not the first time God shows grace right here in Exodus 34, but it is the first time that somebody calls God or God calls Himself gracious. It's as if God is naming here explicitly for the first time a pattern of his behavior that we're going to trace up to this point. So it's an important word. But it can become overused and maybe lose some of its punch.

Jon That's what I'm worried about is that I'm too familiar with the word that I need to maybe start over and pretend I don't know the word at all and then see how it unfolds. 00:12:00

Tim I'm just going to take us on a tour guide through different types of uses of this word. There are some new things I discovered that I have never noticed before. It really helped me to approach the word and therefore the concept of grace in a new way. It was really helpful.

Carissa I think something I'm curious about with the word "grace" is how much we can depend on this characteristic of God. So when we approach God, how do we know that His disposition toward us is grace or not?

Tim That's a great question. So we're back to that my default assumptions about God's character will really shape how I try to relate to God. So if God says He's gracious, can you hold Him to it. He's always gracious well.

Carissa And also depending how the word is used is it's used like people earn grace throughout the Hebrew Bible? Or how to how do people receive God's grace? I think is a burning question. 00:13:00

Tim Yeah. We're going to look at examples. All right, shall we dive in?

Carissa Yeah.

Section Break 00:13:40

Tim Okay, let's start with some examples of this word Grace, khanan, khanun. That surprised me that. When I first started pondering them, I didn't quite know how to make sense of them because it's not how we normally use the word. So we're going to be looking at different uses of the whole word group. Not just khanun that's used in Exodus 34:6, but the whole word group.

Psalm 45 has an interesting use of this word. The poet begins by saying, "My heart is overflowing with a good word I speak my verses to the king; my tongue is the pen of a speedy scribe." So good. Doesn't that sound like somebody standing in a royal court about to read a poem aloud?

Jon Yeah, totally.

Tim I think that's the scene here. So how the poet begins addressing the

king describing this poem by saying, “You are more fair than all the sons of Adam, all the sons of humanity. Khen is poured out upon your lips. Therefore, God has blessed you forever.” So it’s the scene of a court poet. Picture the scene. There’s like minstrels and scribes. 00:15:00

Jon This is a psalm that it sets it to the tune of lilies. It’s actually like something you would sing.

Tim Yeah, it’s a song. Oh, yeah. At least this poem began life as a court poem. Which is different than saying, “Who put it here in the book of Psalms? And how does it develop the line of thought in the Psalms.” But what we’re imagining is a little narrative right here of a court poet before...

Jon The king.

Tim ...the Israelite anointed king. “You’re so Pharaoh King, my heart is stirred with a good theme.” And the first compliment he gives to the king is “you are more fair than all the sons of humanity and khen...” It’s our word graciousness, grace. Khen is poured out on your lips. You are more blessed than any other. So whatever is being said here, to say that khen comes from somebody’s lips is a real compliment.

Jon Well, he doesn’t say it comes from his lips. He says it’s poured out on his lips. 00:16:00

Tim That’s right. That’s right. So you have to get into the metaphor here. What would it mean to say that when I look at your lips, O King, what I see is grace poured out everywhere?

Jon Hmm. Because Grace is coming out of his lips, it’s all over his lips? Is that what I’m supposed to be thinking?

Tim So what do you do with your lips? When you bring up lips, you are usually talking about somebody’s speech?

Jon Speech.

Tim Yeah, speech. So whenever this king speaks, it’s like he speaks khen (graciousness), which means that grace, khen has been poured out on his lips, because his lips just drip grace. I think your lips drip grace.

Carissa So it could either be his words are full of graciousness, or that his words are really eloquent.

Tim What’s interesting here is that the parallel line to it is “you’re more fair, you’re more good looking than other kings.” So we have beauty and value on the mind here. “Your looks and your words, give a gift of khen to the world.” 00:17:00

So let’s just sit with that. It’s just a fascinating use that to me kind of became an icon of like, “Okay, I don’t understand this. Let me look at other examples

that maybe are similar and maybe it might help me understand.” Similar to this is two times in the book of Proverbs when the dad is giving speeches in the opening chapters to his son, he talks about how the wisdom that he and his mom are trying to offer to the son, he calls it a wreath or a crown of khen or a necklace of khen on the neck. In other words, if a son or daughter listens to the wisdom of their mom or dad, they are wearing a crown or a necklace of khen on their neck. Isn’t that interesting?

Jon It is. So there’s something in the Hebrew imagination that connects grace with aesthetic beauty.

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Tim Yeah. And there’s one more example of this where in Proverbs the poet’s describing a deer running up the hill, and it’s called a deer of khen—a deer of graciousness.

Jon And this is what you were saying when you talked about us using the word graceful? That it comes from this Hebrew idea.

Tim In all these cases, something that brings either visual pleasure or in the case of khen poured out from a king’s lips, you know, it brings pleasure to hear yours.

Jon Right.

Tim It’s idea that when something is elegant or beautiful, it can be called a source of khen. But the point is that these are things that make the viewer or the listener respond with favor. It brings favor from the viewer or listener, therefore it can be called a deer of khen. A graceful deer.

Carissa And when you say favor, you’re talking about that same word.

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Tim Yeah.

Carissa Khen can be translated as grace or favor.

Tim Oh, favor. That’s right.

Jon What do you mean by “favor”?

Tim It’s somehow I give you the gift of my attention, of my goodwill or some gift to that I’m going to give to you.

Jon I see. So when I watch a really wonderful basketball player move with grace, and then dunk the ball over someone, that’s a gift to me that I got to experience that?

Tim Yeah. It’s a gift to you. You experience it as a gift.

Jon I experience it as a gift. If I watch someone dance with elegance, it's a gift to me. If someone says something really wise and wonderful and helps me ponder something in a significant way, that's a gift to me?

Tim Yeah, you would call it a slam dunk of khen. 00:20:00

Carissa But then, Tim, what you just said was that when somebody gives a gift like that, then the response is also grace or favor.

Tim Yeah, exactly. Here's how I put it in my notes just because I was trying to understand this and separate it out. So the focus of the word "khen" then isn't just on the beauty or elegance of the object, but it's about how the beauty or charm of that object is perceived in the eyes of the observer. So khen refers to something that's valuable or that generates a favorable response. It generates favor. When I look at it, I'm like, "I like that.? I'll do what it takes so that there can be more of that. When you see a beautiful necklace, you're like, "Ooh, I want to look at that some more. That's really beautiful." You get the idea.

Jon Okay.

Tim It's just such an interesting use of the word "grace." That just really struck me. 00:21:00

Jon But it's consistent with how we use the word "grace."

Tim Graceful.

Jon Graceful.

Carissa Graceful. Yeah.

Tim Yeah. It's like when you see beauty, it both offers a gift to the world, but then it inspires people with a gift-like response. It puts you in a good mood. It makes you want to spread the love, so to speak. I don't know. Even as we go through these examples, I still have a hard time being really precise about it. But this stir my imagination.

Carissa I think that reciprocal response is really interesting. It's also similar to compassion in that way. Like when you receive compassion or forgiveness or grace, then the appropriate response is to extend that.

Tim It poses an interesting question, though. When I show somebody khen, which is the verb khaman, when I show favor or grace to somebody, is that only because they are like an ornament of khen to me? In other words, do I only show favor or grace when somebody warrants that grace from me or generates that grace because they're nice or favorable? Or are there uses of this word when people show khaman or Grace and it has nothing to do with whether it's beautiful or lovely or warrants that 00:22:00

response? So that's the next corner to turn then. What is it that warrants a response of khen from somebody? Does that make any sense?

Jon It does. But I want to make sure though...because you said there's a response to khen but then there's also just an object or a person or an animal having the attribute of khen. And those two things are connected, but separate. In the verses you read, it was always about the object or the person having khen not the response.

Tim I think when you say that there's a necklace of khen or a deer of khen, you're making a statement about the thing, about the beautiful thing. But I don't think you would say it if it didn't generate some kind of favorable response in the viewer. And that's what creates the reciprocation. It's a graceful deer that inspires a graceful favorable response from me. And the question is, well, what about when something isn't beautiful? What about when something isn't that nice looking or seems to warrant favor? Does that mean you don't show favor? That's the kind of question I'm after here. 00:23:00

Jon Yeah. Okay. Well, it seems like you would say intuitively, no, you wouldn't automatically respond with favor to something that doesn't seem favorable. But that you could, by a trick of the mind or by your own will, decide to respond. When I say "respond of khen" or "grace," all I could think of is the meaning of gracious, not graceful. So I want to make sure when we're talking about this, are we separating those two right now? Or are we thinking of them as a package? 00:24:00

Like if I'm responding to something beautiful I experienced, it's triggering in me delight, then I'm saying that thing has khen. And that's because it's triggering this delight, so I'm favorable towards it. But when you ask the question, "Can I still have that response if the thing isn't triggering delight?" it seems like a weird question, because why would you have a response?

Tim Exactly. That's right. That's right. Maybe let's flesh this out, this little parable or something. This is good. There's a lot of children's and young adult theatre in Portland. You know, it's a chance for kids to get an experience of being in a play and so on. So I went with my boys almost six months or so ago to production of Annie. You know, the Broadway. It was from when I was a kid. It's anywhere from 8 to 15-year-olds putting it on. It was very entertaining. Was it always great? No. 00:25:00

Jon They are charming.

Tim But it was. There was a certain amount of khen to it. But of course, it's kids. And so there was an element of khen. So at the end, when they're doing their fundraiser for, "Hey, help us keep the troop going and the theatre space and we're accepting donations so we can keep doing these things,"

it generated a response of khen from me. I wanted to, like, yeah, totally, I'll give, I'll respond with graciousness or generosity because you would say it was the production of khen. Because it both was charming and it generated a response of khen from me. But let's say I went to, not a kid's production, but production by adults of Annie. And let's say it was just really terrible. 00:26:00

Jon Like you were cringing the whole time, Like, "When is this going to be over?"

Tim Totally, yeah. So then the question is, but what if they still do a fundraiser at the end? That's the question I'm after here. What about when something doesn't seem to warrant a response of khen? If you just ask that question, you'll see some interesting patterns in how the word gets used as we move on.

Section Break 00:27:05

Tim Okay. Gracious or grace is used in a relational sense. It's something that one person gives to another or that one person does to another. Most often, it describes actions that display generosity, gift-giving, or favor, is how the English translations throughout history have rendered it. For example, in the book of Esther, there's multiple times where people are coming before a king to seek khen from him. It's a verb *khanun* used in a request form to get his khen. And so usually it gets translated "to seek favor" or "request favor." So for Esther, all of the Jewish people in the city of Susa are going to be killed. So, Esther goes before the king to get khen from him. So there it's pretty obvious what she's asking for. 00:28:00

Carissa Yeah, action on behalf of her people.

Tim Let's go back to our play then. So it's like somebody's soliciting generosity or doing a fundraiser at the end of a play. But in theory, if the king has allowed these people to be decreed to be exterminated, it's the equivalent of a really me sitting in a really bad play. Right?

Jon Right.

Tim I'm not inclined to view this with khen. The King allowed these people to be killed but yet she's going to ask him for khen anyway. So what's interesting is the king doesn't view the Jewish people with khen. But does he view Esther? I guess you kind of have to know the story. I mean, it was this Persian beauty pageant was how she became queen. Anyway.

Jon So she's delightful to the eyes.

Tim Yes. He loves to look at her. She is like a woman of khen going in to ask for khen for people that he doesn't have khen towards. And he says yes. But for example, when Joseph's brothers come and 00:29:00

appear to him years after they betrayed him, they beg that he shows them khen. They begged for favor. Let's see. Proverbs 14:31. Ooh, that's good one. "The one who oppresses the poor insults his Maker, but the one who shows khen to the needy honors his maker."

Jon There isn't anything about being needy that is delightful. Anytime you encounter someone in need, it's not like you feel all this...whatever it is that you feel when a deer pronounces through a meadow.

Carissa Yeah. Or like it's a beautiful thing or something.

Tim Yeah, that's right. On other words, what we're noticing in examples of when somebody shows favor, it's highlighting the disconnect. Or what it's highlighting is that this truly is an act of generosity, of favor, of something that's not deserved. I think we're starting to connect to our word "grace." Now, there are some things that make something worthy of khen. It's beautiful like a deer. Like a beautiful necklace. Like the king views Esther. He thinks that she's beautiful. And you would say the most genuine acts of khen are when you show favor towards something that you're not inclined or wouldn't normally think of as beautiful or favorable. Like brothers who betrayed you or that kind of thing.

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Jon Okay, I think what's clicking to me is then there's this foundational idea that something can have the attribute of khen. I'm doing such a bad job saying this word. Khen.

Tim Khen.

Jon I'm kind of like right at the top of the back of my throat?

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Tim That's good.

Jon Okay. This is clicking into me that some things have an inherent attribute of grace and that they are enjoyable and delightful. And that when you experience those, you respond with favor towards those things. It's just a natural way the world works. However, you can decide to respond to something that is not delightful with delight and you're still showing grace, but now there's this generosity to it. So when someone comes and asks God to have grace on them, or for a person of grace on them when they don't deserve it, what you're asking is, hey, see me as delightful and beautiful even though I'm not.

Carissa Like a perspective thing. To be viewed as something of value or worth even if not.

Tim Yeah, those are great summaries. As I've been pondering this, it's hard to find one English word that can do all these things. To show generosity highlights the fact that it's kind of going above and beyond what is merited

00:32:00

or warranted. But it doesn't speak to the delight factor or the beauty factor. So you could say to show favor, which kind of gets a bit more to that positive disposition or delight. And I guess you can do a favor meaning kind of has generosity in there. Actually, I think favor gets us a lot of the way, which is why it's such a consistent. But favor in English also has this other meaning of like, "Hey, do me a favor." Oh, actually, that works.

Jon That works.

Carissa It's a gift.

Jon Do something that isn't merited right now.

Tim Yeah, that's right.

Jon You don't owe this to me, but can you do this for me?

Tim It's interesting. Our English word favor then has two different nuances then. You can do one of an act for somebody that they don't deserve, or you can say "he had favored towards me," meaning he viewed me with delight.

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Jon Oh, I don't think we use the second really.

Carissa What about like I favor one child over another or something.

Jon Oh, there it is. There it is. We do use it. We do use it.

Tim Yeah. Yeah. He favored. Favorite.

Carissa Oh, yeah.

Tim Well, this just occurred to me in this moment.
Learning things about language...

Jon That you're used your whole life.

Carissa This phrase here, Tim, "let me find favor in the eyes," that's a really common phrase that's used.

Tim Yes. Next step. In this nuance of meaning for the word, the most consistently used phrase is to find khen in the eyes of someone or to give someone khen in the eyes. Joseph is a slave in the house of an Egyptian called Potiphar, but he's hard-working, and he's really smart and good looking. So we're told that he finds khen in the eyes of Potiphar.

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Now you could just think he's good at his job and Potiphar gets the pleasure by watching Joseph do a good job. But then, Potiphar looking, having eyes that see khen in Joseph generates a response of khen, He makes Joseph his personal attendant, he appoints him over his whole house. So Joseph's favorable behavior generates favor and generosity

in Potiphar. This idiom is figure of speech favor in the eyes of his used 47 times in the Hebrew Bible. It's a really, really common phrase.

Jon Well, it's kind of the most common or it's the most used of our senses in terms of how we take in things? So if you're going to delight in what you're experiencing, you're likely taking it in through your eyes. That makes sense. 00:35:00

Tim Yeah. Yeah.

Carissa Is this is still a common phrase in modern Hebrew. Like if you're talking about a city, if you said, "Tel Aviv finds favor in my eyes," is how you would say "I like Tel Aviv." But I don't think it's used with people anymore.

Tim Yeah.

Jon And Old English, I feel like maybe that's because of the Bible. But is just sounds Shakespearean.

Tim What's interesting, if you go through these 47 examples, you'll see a pattern that when somebody finds khen in the eyes of another, it's almost always the person who finds khen is in a subordinate position. They're of low status or they're vulnerable. And so to find khen in the eyes of someone means that you are being given a gift of generosity, kindness by someone who you don't properly deserve it, or don't necessarily merit it. It's a gift. It's truly a gift. That's the nuance of gift-giving that Western culture has really lost. Have we talked about this before? 00:36:00

Jon Gift giving? Yeah, we have.

Tim But it's a big difference between Western culture and most human cultures for most of human history. We think of the ideal gift as a gift given regardless of merit. Also, we think of the ideal gift as being given without any strings attached.

Carissa Right. No obligation to give a gift back.

Tim No obligation. Whereas in most cultures for most of human history, to find favor in the eyes of someone and to be given a gift puts you in their debt. It makes you obligated to them. There are strings attached, so to speak. So in all these cases, to find favor in the eyes of someone usually is connected to status or worth or becoming indebted or obligated to somebody. It's really interesting. So Potiphar gives favor to Joseph. And then Joseph becomes this personal attendant as it were—earning back earning the favor that has been freely given kind of thing. So that's a big category of these. Despite someone's lack of worth or worth, they find favor in the eyes. Okay, so how are we done? 00:37:00

Jon Sorry. Tim, did you say that when the phrase “there was favor in their eyes” that when that phrase is used, that means it’s somewhat of a higher position looking and giving a gift to someone of a lower position?

Tim Correct. In other words, you never find the phrase “give me khen in your eyes” or “and he found khen in their eyes,” you never find somebody in a vulnerable position showing favor to someone of a higher position.

Jon So if someone came into a courtroom like that poet in that Psalm - what was it? 45? and said, “Your lips are drenched with khen,” He wouldn’t say I find grace in my eyes looking at you, O king.” He wouldn’t say that.

00:38:00

Tim Yeah. In other words, he would not say, “O King, you have found khen in my eyes.”

Jon Right. Okay.

Tim What he would say is, “O King! May I find khen in your eyes and dare enter your court.” That would be how you use it.

Jon Okay.

Tim It’s always talking about the favorable response that you are getting or hope to get from a superior.

Section Break

00:39:03

Tim Okay. So all of these examples have been about humans and humans. Humans to other humans. And of all of the 170 uses of this word, the human to human acts of khen account for only one-third of those 170. Meaning two-thirds of those 170, which is going to be about 110—I’m shooting from the hip here—is about God showing khen or people finding khen in God’s eyes. Bible trivia. Who’s the first person who received God’s khen in the story of the Bible?

Carissa Noah.

Tim Did you know that already?

Carissa Well, I did Google earlier today. Oh, by Google I mean BibleWorks.

Jon Wait, what? BibleWorks?

Carissa BibleWorks. It’s like Lagos Bible software. Did a search on “khen” to see because I was curious when Moses says, “I found favor in your eyes, God” I was wondering, oh, did God say that He favored Moses? Which he doesn’t. But He says He favored Abraham, and before that, Noah. That those two found favor in His eyes.

00:40:00

Tim Yeah, the first person to find khen in the eyes of God is Noah. It's in Genesis 6. It's the introduction to the flood narrative. So this whole little opening paragraph is about what God sees the eyes of Yahweh. It begins at verse 5, "Yahweh saw that the ra, the badness of humanity was great on the land. Every purpose of the thoughts of humanity's heart was only ra, only bad, constantly." So God says He regrets making humans, He's grieved in his heart. But we're told in verse 8, "Noah found khen in the eyes of Yahweh." The eyes of Yahweh see lots of badness but then they find one person. And that person generates khen in the eyes of God. And the next thing he says is build an ark as a result. 00:41:00

So what this sets you up to see then is that the providing of the ark and the means of escape is an act of God's graciousness. It's God being gracious because it comes from someone who finds khen in the eyes of the Lord.

Jon Now, is there a distinction between if someone...I don't use the word deserve, but...

Tim Oh, oh yeah.

Jon Because it seems like with Noah, and I'm not the Bible scholar here, but it seems like there was something in his character.

Tim You're right. Actually, the next thing it goes on is to say that in the next sentence, after Noah found khen in the eyes of Yahweh, these are the record of generations of Noah. Noah was righteous and blameless in his generation. Noah walked about with God. 00:42:00

Jon So God's looking across the cast of characters on the planet, and He's like, "This is horrible. Everyone's thinking evil thoughts all the time. And there's violence. This is ridiculous." And then He sees Noah and it's like this shiny, beautiful...

Tim Necklace. It's like necklace of khen.

Jon Yeah.

Tim Ornament of khen.

Jon And then there's favor in His eyes to Noah. And that's not how I generally think of grace. Because you think of it as like Noah didn't deserve it. But in this situation, there's a sense of, yeah, he merited that favor in some way.

Tim Yeah, that's right. It's actually an important part of the story, is the figure who is sheltered from God's grievous...He's grieved, right? He pulls back the bounds of order from Genesis 1 that keeps the waters above up there. He pulls back His power lets the cosmos collapse in on itself. But He spares one. And the one that He spares is righteous and blameless. 00:43:00

And that one finds favor in the eyes...That's a key theological point of the flood story is God spares His blameless one. Problem: there's not that many blameless ones around. Therefore, welcome to the plotline of the Bible. Okay. So here's Noah, and he finds favor in the eyes because he's righteous and blameless. All right. That's interesting.

Let's go to another use of God showing favor. This is story of Jacob and Esau. Let's just do a quick survey of Jacob's character throughout the story.

Carissa Deceiver.

Tim Deceiver. Cheats people, right?

Carissa Complex guy.

00:44:00

Tim He's a complex guy. Sometimes he does right thing, but most of the time he is a schemer. He's a schemer. So after spending 20 years in exile from his brother and his dad because he cheated and lied to them, he goes to a far country to live with his great uncle, a guy named Laban, and his great uncle cheated him out of 20 years of his life. That's the whole story. But what Jacob does is cheat his cheating uncle. They all end up cheating each other, and this whole thing was flocks of sheep and that's the whole story.

Jon Cheat-ception. Does that work?

Tim Inception—cheating within cheating within cheating. So essentially, what Jacob does is he schemes up this way to cheat his uncle out of his flocks. But yet when he talks about it to his family, he says it's God. God is the one multiplying my flocks. But then there's this whole narrative of how he sets up these fake sheep so that Laban sheep will mate with sticks, but his sheep will be the only sheep that actually mate. It's his whole thing. So he multiplies his flocks through this really dastardly scheme, as my son would say.

00:45:00

Jon Your son says dastardly?

Tim Yeah, yeah. I taught him the word dastardly.

Carissa That's awesome.

Tim Yeah. He actually uses it. And I love it. I have never used that word.

Jon I know. I think it's the first time I've ever even said it out loud.

Tim Really? Dastardly. Dastardly deeds. So Jacob comes back and he is trying to reintroduce himself to his brother. So we send ahead of him hundreds of animals as a gift to try to find favor in his eyes. Khen in his eyes. And then when they finally meet face to face, Jacob's urging his brother to take all these animals. What he says is, "Listen, God has shown me khen. I have plenty. Keep the animal."

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So in the story, Jacob is looking to find khen in the eyes of his older brother and he says, "God has shown me khen by giving me all these animals, which...don't ask me the real story." So what's interesting here is Jacob is not a person who deserves anybody's khen. That's the whole point here. But yet he's asking for it, and he says that God has shown it to him. And it's true. In the story, God really does go above and beyond to keep dealing with the deceiver, Jacob, and to bring the Messianic lion and promise through him, despite his dastardly deeds. So Noah and Jacob become contrast characters. Both people end up getting favor in the eyes of God or man. Noah deserves it; Jacob seems to never deserve it. But both receive it. Isn't that interesting?

00:47:00

Jon Yeah. In both instances, the word is "grace."

Tim Yeah, to give me khen (grace) in the eyes of Yahweh. So Noah's life and family being saved is an act of God's graciousness. And Esau forgiving his brother, God protecting and giving Jacob an abundance is viewed as the grace. The grace gift.

Carissa And is this another example then of receiving grace and then giving grace because of that? Since Jacob's saying, "God's shown me grace, and I have plenty. So now I'm going to give you this in hopes that you will also show me grace." There's a lot of different reciprocal relationships.

Tim So I think the key thing here, I think both of you drew attention to it. In English, to show grace to somebody usually means they've done nothing to merit or warranted. And that's not how the word is used in the Old Testament. You can still show generosity to someone who deserves it, and still call it graciousness. But you could say, the most profound acts of graciousness are when somebody doesn't deserve it. You would say that's a more ultimate act of khen. But both are acts of khen.

00:48:00

Jon It's interesting when you put it that way, because you could say the ultimate grace is when you've experienced something with ultimate beauty, and then you respond with this ultimate profound response.

Tim Yeah, that's true.

Jon But what you're saying is the opposite or different, which is that the real ultimate grace is responding to something that doesn't merit that response but you do it anyways.

Tim Yeah. What could be more awesome than to show khen to this thing that finds khen in my eyes? You're saying that that's a noble use act of khen. But there's something about showing khen to someone who doesn't find khen in my eyes but you do it anyway. Actually, you know what? That's a uniquely biblical thing. That's a value.

00:49:00

I've only learned this by learning more about honor and shame. For example, and I know in Roman culture in the 1st century, to be indiscriminant in who you show favor to is to be a sign of a lack of judgment. Because why would you give gifts to somebody who could never give you a gift back?

Carissa Yeah, same in our culture. Like, if I want to give something from myself to somebody else, it's a risk if they are not deserving. Like there's some sort of inherent risk in that.

Jon Or why would you celebrate something that doesn't merit grace? 00:50:00

Tim Yeah, that's right. Because that would just...aren't we then saying it's okay to do bad things or to be in a bad situation?

Tim Here it's a unique contribution I think that the Jewish and Christian story made to the world is to elevate acts of favor and khen and grace to people who not only maybe don't deserve it, but to people who definitely do not deserve it, like Jacob. And Jacob, his name is changed to Israel. He's the foundation figure of this entire people group. So you're telling a story about how the founder of our people group was a...

Jon Smarmy dude.

Tim ...was a dastardly rascal, who deserve nothing but exile and banishment. And the God of Israel just loves to show khen to people like that. That was a scandalous thing to say in the ancient world. And when we're honest, it's still a scandalous thing to say if we have ears to hear. 00:51:00

Jon There is though, and I don't know, this may be inherent to human nature, or may just be our culture, though, that when we see the kind of grace that's undeserved, it does elicit a response of joy and pleasure for us. And maybe not in every situation. Obviously, not in every situation. But if you just think of like Lame is a Rob and you think of just the classic, that that story of (*unintelligible*) getting from the priest something he didn't deserve, it is so moving. 00:51:38

Tim Yes, it is. But the important thing there is lame is a Rob is a deeply Christian work of art. Not that other cultures didn't have or know about the practice of giving, being generous to somebody who didn't deserve it. But to elevate it as one of the ultimate virtues and to tell stories about how this is one of the defining traits of our God, that's stuck out here in the ancient world, and I think still marks the Jewish and Christian God as unique. 00:52:00

This is what God is communicating when he says to Moses, after forgiving the people on Mount Sinai, who just made the golden calf by not walking away from them and abandoning His covenant, it's not just...you get the power of it. What the people deserve is

that the person who rescued them and just made a covenant with them should walk away. And what God chooses not to do is that. He shows grace because He is gracious. It defines His character.

Section Break

00:53:48

Jon You've talked a lot about honor and shame, and I hear that a lot this idea of honor and shame cultures. And honestly, I've never fully understood what that means.

Tim Mm hmm. We should make some videos about it.

Jon Really?

Tim Well, because it's important vocabulary in the Bible.

Jon Just quickly, helped me understand what an honor and shame society is and how they would think about grace.

Tim Oh, I see. Honor shame societies are societies where the social rank and public status of a family and individual is of ultimate value in your sense of worth and value in the world. American culture and European culture has been shaped by an intellectual cultural movement going back 400 or 500 years that has relocated or at least attempted to relocate value and status in the eyes of the beholder. Walt Disney Studios is the epitome of this redefined center value. I mean, just think of every Disney movie made in the last 20 years. It's "be who you want to be. Don't let anybody else's estimation of you determine your value and who you really are."

00:55:00

Jon Where an honor and shame society is "let society decide how valuable you are."

Tim Yeah. Or just the status into which you are born determines your value. And there are ways to climb the ladder of social value through gaining honor. There's all kinds of ways you gain honor. It differs from culture to culture. You could say it's a more externally focused sense of value and public rank. Whereas Western cultures are much more individualistic, and where your honor and value is more subjectively determined.

Jon Okay.

Tim There's fundamental differences between Western culture and pretty much the rest of human history. Isn't that interesting?

Jon Yeah.

Tim But it creates big stumbling blocks when we read the Bible. And I think it prevents us from being able to understand a lot of the grace vocabulary. 00:56:00

Carissa Yeah. So then how does that relate to showing grace? In an honor-shame society, why would showing grace be seen as unwise?

Tim Oh, yes. So when you show favor to someone, what you're doing is you're associating yourself with them and you're declaring them in the eyes of the public they are worthy of my generosity. And you're also putting them in your debt because you think, "That would be a good person to show favor to. Because if people see them showing a favor back to me, that will increase my honor in everyone's eyes."

A lot of the vocabulary of glory or honor in the Bible is all kind of shaped in the storyline. For many, many cultures, to show favor or generosity, when to someone of lower social rank or who doesn't deserve it could be really foolish. The Greek philosophers wrote whole training manuals for teaching young Greek and Roman men who to pick as the recipients of your favor. It was really important to learn how to discriminate. This is why God's grace in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was so scandalous to Paul because it was given to people like him, who is trying to murder the Messiah or the followers of the Messiah. And yet God gave him the gift of grace anyway.

00:57:00

Carissa Yeah, Paul's a really good example of grace being unmerited because he was killing Christians. In the Hebrew Bible, it seems like people when they pray for grace at least they're turned toward God. They're asking for a favor. But Paul wasn't even turned toward Jesus. He was killing his followers.

Tim Yeah, you could say he becomes the herald of radical scandalous grace.

Carissa Yeah.

Tim And again, what Paul's experience of that radical generosity that has no regard for someone's value or social rank is it's like the blossoming of this character trait of God all the way back here in the Hebrew Bible. That starts with the Noah story. It's where for the first time this word occurs. But it's a pattern that God is continually more patient, more generous with people than they deserve. So that's why the golden calf story, the Exodus 34:6 becomes another iconic narrative of that. And then that moment of asking God for grace, "show grace to me," it's repeated so many times. I have all these psalms posted here in the notes. 00:58:00

Psalm 4, "Be gracious to me when I'm in distress." Psalm 6, "Be gracious to me, O Lord, I'm languishing. My bones are troubled." I like that. Psalm 25, "Turned to me, be gracious to me. I'm lonely and afflicted." But then you could say the more scandalous acts of grace are like Psalm 51. When David, after raping a woman and killing her husband, says, "Be gracious to me,

00:59:00

according to your loyal love, or according to your compassion, blot out my rebellious deeds,” he’s just quoting three of the five from Exodus 34:6.

Jon Now, in all those Psalms, it seems like the word “mercy” would be more appropriate. Is there a Hebrew word for mercy? And does that mean more that I don’t deserve it?

Carissa Well, I was just thinking how the word “compassion” in the Greek New Testament is often translated as “mercy.”

Tim The emotional response, yeah.

Jon That’s kind of pity.

Carissa Yeah. Well, there is a word for pity (*unintelligible*) But mercy, it might be compassion or gracious depending on the context. 00:59:53

Tim My observations about your word, Carissa from the previous conversation, compassion was that it can refer to actions or behavior, but really focusing on the emotional response generates a behavior. Gracious is not tuning in to the emotions. 01:00:00

Jon No?

Tim I don’t think so.

Jon Well, if you see something beautiful, I mean, that’s an emotional experience.

Tim Oh, I understand.

Carissa Maybe more perception oriented than emotion-oriented.

Tim There you go. I guess that’s what I mean to say. When you view something as beautiful, it generates responsive khen. But when you will, and choose to show into something that doesn’t have value to you, that’s not highlighting the emotion as such. It’s highlighting that you are treating someone as delightful even though you don’t have reason to view them as delightful.

Jon So where compassion you have this emotion of I want to help, I want to protect—motherly kind of attitude. Versus with grace, when it’s undeserved, you actually don’t have that feeling of... 01:01:00

Tim It’s not that you don’t have it, it’s just the word doesn’t focus on. The word is focused on the behavior of generosity. The act of generosity is mainly what this word gracious refers to.

Carissa So could you say that being gracious is a choice to view somebody in a certain way? Would you say that’s true? It’s a choice? I’m just thinking about how we would extend grace to other people. Is it a choice to put on a certain lens to view people as valuable and precious despite anything else?

Tim To answer that, let's go back to Noah versus Jacob. Noah is righteous and blameless. It's as if it wasn't that hard for God to show khen to him. Jacob's another matter. That truly was an act of the generous will of God to show favor to someone who didn't deserve it. But what's interesting, remember, is the words the precise words from excess 34:6, compassionate and gracious, they almost always occur together as a pair.

01:02:00

Carissa Yeah. Right.

Tim Which means that it's as if the compassion is telling us that this is about an emotional care from God—compassionate—displayed with actions of generosity that may or may not be deserved. And that's graciousness. So as a pair, it's really a kind of complete idea of God's character.

Jon And it's probably why it's paired so much then.

Tim I think so.

Section Break

01:03:05

Tim Should we do one last little nugget? Because our word studies often retell the whole story of the Bible through the lens of maybe one word, this concept of Jesus as the expression of God's grace is explicitly picked up on in the introduction to the gospel of John. We may have mentioned this, that Exodus 34:6 is quoted explicitly one time and then testament. And it's in the prologue to John.

So when John says that the pre-incarnate Jesus, this verse 14, chapter 1 one of John, when the Word became flesh and set up a tent, a tabernacle among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the only the one and only from the Father. So when he talks about "we saw His glory," he's echoing the story of Moses seeing God's glory on Mount Sinai. So that God's glory on Mount Sinai became human and set up a tabernacle among us. "And that one," he says, "is full of grace and truth." And he's quoting here from two of the five character traits of God. From the second and fifth.

01:04:00

Jon Last.

Carissa Is that meant to encapsulate all five?

Tim Yeah, that's interesting.

Carissa Do you think it's highlighting grace and truth specifically?

Tim Oh, that's interesting. Well, you know, I think his choice of grace might be determined by what he says next. He goes on to say, "For from his overflow, his fullness..." And here he's quoting from excess 34:6 again, because he's full or overflowing with loyal love and truth. So he says,

“From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.” The father has been giving grace over abundantly, just overflowing with it. Everybody is a recipient of God’s grace whether they know it or not. Grace upon grace.

01:05:00

The Torah was given through Moses; grace and truth are realized through Jesus the Messiah. Some people see those two things in contrast to each other. Our English translations put the word “but.” The Torah was given through Moses but grace and truth... But there’s no, but they’re in Greek. I think it’s actually building one act of grace on top of the ultimate act of grace. Because what he just says is “We’ve been receiving grace from this God all along. Grace upon grace.” The Torah, through Moses...

Jon That was a gift.

Tim That was a gift of grace. And the fulfillment of the Torah in the storyline of the whole thing, ultimate grace upon grace is that grace and truth became human through Jesus. I think that’s what his point is here.

Carissa Well, that also makes sense in light of Moses receiving this revelation of God’s character and communicating it to the people. And now these are the same characteristics that are communicated through Jesus.

01:06:00

Tim Well, I’ve never thought of that. You’re saying the reason John brings up Moses also is because Moses is the one that these words are first set to?

Carissa Yeah, maybe. He’s like the intercessor of those words or the communicator? Yeah, mediator.

Tim So what he’s asking us to see is just as God viewed these covenant violating idolaters at the base of Mount Sinai, who deserved what they merited was that God gives up on them and walk away from the covenant. But God continued to pursue them in covenant partnership to fulfill His mission among the nations. And what John is saying here is that it’s that character trait of God become human. The name we have for that character trait “become human” is Jesus of Nazareth. That’s such a beautiful thing to ponder.

Jon It is. Do you think a way to paraphrase this verse then, to not put these two things at odds is to say there’s this grace upon grace. The first Grace is the law. The law was the beginning of God’s grace and truth. But then Jesus is the realization, like the culmination of grace and truth.

01:07:00

Tim Ooh, we could even get make these into points of a sermon. The Torah is the revelation of God’s grace and truth. Jesus is the realization.

Jon That’ll preach.

Tim One of the most important treatments on grace in the Old and New Testaments in an ancient world was actually released and written up by a scholar John Barclay a couple of years ago, called “Paul and the Gift.” It is majestic. And it is like 600 dense pages.

Jon That’s the book you read and then you wanted to talk a lot about gift-giving.

Tim Totally. Yeah, I learned so much. So two things. John Barclay is releasing in November 2020 a smaller, much smaller, condensed version of the whole thing called Paul and the Power of Grace. It’s going to come out. And if you Google “John Barclay and grace,” you’ll find a number of times he’s given one-hour talks where he summarizes the whole 600-page book. It’s powerful stuff, man. It’s both intellectually exciting and you learn so much, but it’s deeply moving. He really ponders the scandal and the power of God’s khen. The fact that God loves to give gifts to people whether or not they deserve it. 01:08:00

Jon Pretty cool. All right.

Tim I think that was it. Yeah. Yeah.

Carissa Cool.

Jon Thanks for listening to this episode of the BibleProject podcast. We want to let you know we’re collecting questions for upcoming question response episodes in this series on the character of God. If you want to have a question on the episode, please record yourself asking question, try to keep it around 20 or 30 seconds, and then transcribe your question and send that to info@bibleproject.com. Again, record yourself, transcribe it, send it to info@bibleproject.com. We also want to let you know that our video on the word “compassion” is out on our YouTube channel. This is the first attribute of God that He gives Himself in this passage in Exodus 34. You can find it on our website, Bibleproject.com, and on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/thebibleproject. Next week, we’re going to be back talking about the next attribute of God, that He is slow to anger. 01:09:00

Tim It’s the only one that isn’t positive as such. It’s addressing something about how God responds. He does sometimes get angry. I’m going to just call this the problem of God’s wrath for modern readers of the Bible. This language has caused modern readers of the Bible enormous challenges in trying to read the Bible. There are some narratives where God gets angry, and then He acts in some way that’s terrifying. And when you start to stack up these stories and take them out of context, you can end up with a pretty distorted portrait of God. 01:10:00

Jon Today's show is produced by Dan Gummel, show notes from Camden McAfee, and theme music from the band Tents. We're a crowdfunded nonprofit. We're in Portland, Oregon, and we make free resources to show the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Thank you for being a part of this with us.