

God E11 Final

God's Word, Spirit, & Wisdom

Podcast Date: October 1, 2018

(68:42)

Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

Jasmine

Tim: God's glory, God's word, and God's Spirit. These are some of the most religious sounding words in the entire Bible. If you've ever heard religious people talking, ever gone to church, you're going to hear these words used. And they're used so often that their meaning can get pretty confusing.

Today on The Bible Project podcast, we are going to dive into these and a few other strange phrases in the Bible. I'm Tim Mackie at The Bible Project. In this episode, Jon and I are going to finish our conversation discussing God's attributes in the Bible. If you're just joining us, here's a quick recap of where we've been.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God is complex. He's both above all and transcendent, but then also depicted as present, close, interacting relationally with his world. He often does that through human mediators. We talked about the person of Moses and his role, we also talked about spiritual beings through whom God interacts with the world like the angel of the Lord.

Last week, we started looking at how God interacts with the world through his attributes, specifically God's name and God's glory. This week, we're going to look at God's word, God's Spirit, and God's wisdom.

And our first one, when you hear the phrase God's word, most people think of a written text. But here's what's fascinating. The first time that the phrase the Word of God appears in the Bible, it's in the story of Abraham in Genesis 15, where we read "After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision." So when we meet God's word for the first time, it's something visual. It's something Abraham sees. That seems so weird to us, that in our minds, we often paraphrase it and think like, "Oh, well, God appeared to him." But it doesn't say that. It says, "The word of God was visible to Abraham."

Jon and I are going to explore this theme through the stories of Samuel, the story of Jeremiah and it's going to land us all the way in the Gospel of John 1 where we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Just like God's name and God's glory in the scriptures, God's word is something that is God and distinct from God. And the gospel of John is, of course, going to claim that that word was Jesus. We're going to explore all of this and more on today's episode. So thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Jon: We're talking about God. We've covered a lot of ground, but right now we're focusing on talking about God's attributes, specifically, His glory, His name, we talked about last time, and then we're going to talk about His wisdom and His Spirit and his...what's the other one?

Tim: Word.

Jon: The word of God, and how these attributes kind of get really...they become almost like more than attributes in a way.

Tim: There's language to use about them that they become distinct characters in the stories where they appear where they can do stuff. Sometimes it's just a figure of speech. It seems, like God puts His name in the temple, and it lives there. And you can seek it. Yeah. But then other times, it's God's glory which appears, and it's a human-like figure that appears.

Jon: And it's described as God's glory.

Tim: But it's described as God's glory.

Jon: It's not described as God, but as his God's glory.

Tim: As God's glory.

Jon: I guess the reason why we're talking about this in this conversation is because the bigger context is, how does God interact with humanity?

Tim: We're looking at depictions in biblical stories of how God interacts with the world. And there's a variety of ways. One of them is through these personified attributes.

Jon: Personified attributes.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Meaning the attributes get a personality of their own.

Tim: They come to take on personality.

Jon: God has attributes, like anything has attributes.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Anyone or anything.

Jon: This table is wood and it's flat, but I wouldn't ever start talking about the flatness of this table as its own distinct object. Right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The table is an object; the flatness is an attribute.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: The same with people. Like I would talk about you and your intelligence, but your intelligence wouldn't become a character. I don't interact with your intelligence, I interact with you.

Tim: Right.

Jon: But there's something unique about God's personhood, his identity. God's identity is unique in such a way that when you start talking about his attributes, his attributes kind of get a life of their own.

Tim: That's right. And not just any attributes. Much in the classic tradition of Christian theology, there's a certain set of philosophical attributes. Like he's omnipresent, all-knowing.

Jon: Yeah, we're not talking about those.

Tim: So these are actual biblical vocabulary. It's not an infinite list. God's name, God's glory, God's word, Spirit or wisdom, are the ones we're talking about. And these all have in common that they become entities that they are attributes of Yahweh. But then again, language is used about them that gives them their own kind of function distinct from Yahweh.

So we've already talked about God's name, his reputation, but then his reputation can live in the building.

Jon: Can live somewhere, can be given to someone.

Tim: Yeah, it can be placed in someone else. And then Jesus says given to him - God's glory. We looked at a handful of visions that different prophets have. What all these visions of God's glory have in common is that they see a human figure or a human-like figure sitting on an exalted throne that's on some kind of platform. It's very much what you'd see if you'd go into any ancient Throne Room. So this is like what they see.

What is Ezekiel sees is a mobile...I call it the God mobile. I didn't make that up - some friends of mine in grad school in the Hebrew department. But what they see is one of these same things, but mobile on it with four chariot wheels and so on. And they call it the glory of Yahweh. And it can move around. The glory of Yahweh comes to Ezekiel. And of course, it's God's glory. So when a voice comes from the throne, it's Yahweh speaking but it's Yahweh glory moving around. It's the subject of the verbs. There's other biblical passages that talk about God living in the temple.

Jon: The only time that's referred to as his glory though is in the Ezekiel passage. These other ones in Exodus at Mount Sinai with the 70 elders, they didn't talk about God's glory being there. They just talked about—

Tim: Yeah. The glory is used in Isaiah passage, "the whole earth is full of his glory" of which I'm seeing the epicenter right here. But remember this is all hyperlinked.

Jon: It is connecting all these because they're all connected to this image.

Tim: Yeah, they're hyperlink because they're all seeing the same divine reality. And so, what is said in one biblical passage informs how you think about all the others.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Certainly, that's the case for readers of these scriptures once they're reading them all in light of each other. In Jesus' time period, they are connecting all this. Oh, just like in the book of Revelation, the vision that John sees in chapters 4 and 5 is a brilliant copy and paste weave of Exodus 24, Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6. All the visions of

the Divine Throne in the Hebrew Bible, John's just selling them altogether and then put a slaughtered lamb next to the throne.

Jon: Next to the throne.

Tim: Yeah. That's Daniel 7.

Jon: That's a new edition by John.

Tim: Yeah. Anyway, so that's God's glory and it'll come into play. Because it's similar to the angel, to human figure.

Jon: So I always just imagine this was God, but you're saying God's not a human figure so it must be something different.

Tim: Where else have I seen a bright, shining human figure that's merged with God's identity? Oh, the angel of Yahweh.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: So God's glory is apparently a human form of an exalted king. A human-like King figure.

Jon: Or that's God himself there saying, "Yahweh Himself."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. We could draw this. It's like, when does God appear in human form in Hebrew Bible as the angel of the Yahweh, as God's glory?

Jon: Okay. So are these two different things or are they the same thing?

Tim: That's the question. For our reader, of all these texts that have been collected are meant to be read as a unity. That's a natural question that being put to you is, Oh, that's interesting.

Jon: All right. Now, we can go to God's word.

Tim: Now we can go to God's word. These all build on each other.

Jon: All right.

Tim: First time that the phrase "the word of Yahweh came to so and so," it's a very common phrase, especially in the prophets. "The word of the Lord came to Isaiah. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel.

Jon: Now, I just always imagine that just must be a common Hebrew idiom or phrase.

Tim: Turn of phrase.

Jon: Turn of phrase.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Like if I was a king and I said to someone, "The word of the King is here."

Tim: Correct. It's like you get a message.

Jon: It is.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And that's what it seems to mean in a lot of these cases where it's Ezekiel wakes up, and he's just got a heavy sense of what God's saying to him. It's a psychological cognitive experience they're waking up with. Sometimes it's because they've had a crazy dream and then they wake up and be like, "Oh, here's what the message is."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Here's what's fascinating. The first time that that phrase appears as you're reading through the Hebrew Bible isn't in the prophets. It's in Genesis in the story about Abraham. Genesis 15. "After these things, the word of Yahweh came to Abraham in a vision." The unique thing here is "in a vision." A vision is not something you hear, it's something you see and hear. It's chazon. It's the word "to see." Something that you see. Are you with me?

Jon: Abraham's having a vision in which he experiences Yahweh who's going to come and talk to him. And the way it's described is that the word of Yahweh came to Abraham in a vision. So not Yahweh came to Abraham. But the word of Yahweh came.

Tim: That's right. This is a standard phrase. Like Jeremiah 11, it's one of seriously 40 examples I could show you. "The word of Yahweh, which came to Jeremiah saying, 'Here are the words of the covenant.'" So it's the Prophet wakes up to a message or an idea...

Jon: And he calls it the word of Yahweh.

Tim: ...and he says, "Oh, the word of Yahweh came to me saying." It's a verbal message. It's an idea and a verbal message. What's unique about the story of Abraham and the first time this phrase appears is that the word of Yahweh came to Abraham in a visible form. It's something he sees.

Jon: So it would be normal to talk about the word of Yahweh coming in this audible sense because that's how you would describe. If you're hearing from God, you're hearing His words.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So you're hearing the words of Yahweh. But it's awkward, it's weird to say, "I had this vision of God," but to say, "I had this vision of the Word of God."

Tim: Well, you'd expect us to say, "Yes, Yahweh appeared to Abraham in a vision saying."

Jon: Or giving his word.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It sounds awkward, but its plain sense is relatively clear. What the sentence is saying in its simple face value meaning is, the word of Yahweh, the Hebrew word for word—

Jon: Became visible.

Tim: The Hebrew word for word is *dabar*, and it will get translated as *Logos* in Greek in the Septuagint. It's depicted as a character that can appear to someone visibly. That's what the sentence seems to mean. Now it sounds odd, so usually, we paraphrase it in our minds as, "Oh, well, God appeared and spoke."

Jon: Just a weird turn of phrase.

Tim: But that's not actually how it's phrased because prophets were very capable of putting things that way.

Jon: They didn't have to say it in an awkward way.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So, not to jump the gun, but when John in his gospel talks about the Word of God, Jesus being the Word of God, he's drawing on this?

Tim: Yeah, that's we're going. That's where the train is heading.

Jon: That's where the train is heading.

Tim: Yeah. In other words, as you're reading through, this is how the Hebrew Bible is designed. Very often... Just like in our conversation about the Cain and Abel story in meditation literature, things will be worded intentionally in an awkward or strange way to make you pause and then go, "That's a weird thing to say."

Jon: It's weird to say that the word of God showed up.

Tim: Invisibly.

Jon: Invisibly. What does that mean? Is the word of God an actual thing that can show up?

Tim: Exactly. That's what you're supposed to ask and it's the natural question that arises. And then, you're supposed to tuck it away. And then the collectors, the authors, the prophetic spirit guided people who put the whole thing together have planted breadcrumbs all throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible to keep developing this theme.

So let's look at another one. It's not far away. It's in the book of Samuel. Fairly well-known story when Samuel was a little boy working in the temple at Shiloh. Here's how the story begins. "Now, the boy Samuel was ministering to Yahweh before Eli the priest." So Eli is in charge he's just a little kid. He's like the altar boy. "Now the word of Yahweh was rare in those days - same phrase in Genesis - and visions were infrequent." Once again, the same phrase as in Abraham's story.

"Now, Samuel was lying down in the temple of Yahweh where the ark of God was." He apparently had a little room near the—

Jon: Sheesh.

Tim: "Then Yahweh called Samuel. Samuel wakes up and says, "Here I am." and he ran to Eli saying, "It's me. You called for me." But Eli said, "No, I didn't call you. Go lie down boy." So he goes and lies down. Then verse 7, "Samuel did not yet know Yahweh nor had the word of Yahweh, and once again, been revealed or been made visible to him. Then Yahweh came and stood and called, like at the other times, 'Samuel. Samuel, speak.'" And then Samuel says, "Speak for your servant is listening."

Once again, it's the word of Yahweh was rare, visions were infrequent, Yahweh comes and speaks to Samuel and then the vocabulary of Samuel didn't know Yahweh nor heard the word of Yahweh been made visible me.

Jon: That's the strange yeah phrase here, that the word of Yahweh had not been made visible to him.

Tim: Been revealed. Been seeable.

Jon: You could say, "Well, that's just a metaphor."

Tim: It's a turn of phrase. What he means is God hadn't showed up to speak to him. But once again it's the word of Yahweh, and what's connected to it is a verb that means to be seen. There it is.

Jon: There it is.

Tim: Just keep reading, whatever, you just tuck it away like, "Oh there's another one of those things." That reminds me of Genesis 15.

Jon: Meditate on it.

Tim: The next one where this happens is Jeremiah. I'll let you read it. And I put in bold the phrases.

Jon: Jeremiah 1 from the very opening verse. "The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, to whom the word of Yahweh came." Which is the same appeared?

Tim: Was.

Jon: The word of Yahweh was. "Now the word of Yahweh came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Then I said, "O Yahweh Elohim. I don't know how to speak, I'm just a youth." Then Yahweh said to me, "Don't say, I'm just a youth." Then Yahweh stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. Yahweh said to me, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth."

Tim: Again, the narrative sequence is important. So what comes to Jeremiah?

Jon: The word of Yahweh came.

Tim: The word of Yahweh. Then the word of Yahweh starts speaking and speaks as if it's Yahweh. "Before I formed you in the womb, I..." Then in verse 6, who does Jeremiah respond to when he addresses the word of Yahweh?

Jon: He response to Yahweh Elohim.

Tim: He's talking to God. Then Yahweh stretches out a hand. Now there's been no visionary language here, like, "I saw Yahweh on the throne." Are you with me? So it's just "the word of Yahweh came to me."

Jon: Which could have been an audible thing.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. But then all of a sudden, he's seeing, he's interacting with a person. This person has a hand that he sees. And then hand touches his mouth and says, "My word is in your mouth."

Jon: And then it gives Jeremiah the word.

Tim: Prophetic word to speak on God's behalf. So again, this isn't so explicit. Actually, it's so subtle. We mostly read over these types of passages. But when you stop and look, plain sense, ponder, you go, "Oh, the word of Yahweh is Yahweh and it has a hand." Do I have a category for Yahweh coming in visible form, talking, interacting with people, and that figure is Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh? Oh, yes - it was the angel of Yahweh. But in all these passages it's the word.

Jon: And also the glory.

Tim: And also the glory appears as a human figure. There we go. So these are the texts that caused Jewish readers in the pre-Christian period before Jesus to go back to the opening sentences of the Bible and began noticing things. And they're not the things you would notice when you are reading the Bible for the first time. But of course this is meditation literature, so it's designed so that when you finish reading it, you go back and read it all over again and notice things that have been put there intentionally to not be noticed on the first time, but on the 14th time and on the 28th time.

So just think about the first sentences - and this will open up - of the Bible. "In the beginning, Elohim..."

Jon: A spiritual being.

Tim: ...created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth, the land was wild and waste."

Jon: Tohu wa-Bohu.

Tim: Tohu wa-Bohu. "...darkness over the surface of deep and the spirit of Elohim, the Ruakh, the invisible personal presence in life energy of Elohim was moving - literally hovering, fluttering..." It's a bird word. "...Moving over the surface of the waters. Then God spoke, - God speaks a word - let there be light and there was light. God

saw the light was good, separated," and on it goes. Then the whole chapter gets divided up into 10 acts of God speaking a word.

So right here in opening sentences, you have Elohim creating. How? By what means? Well—

Jon: The spirit is hovering.

Tim: The spirit. And so, think, spirit is breath. To develop the metaphor, where does breathe come in and out of human? Nose and mouth. And when I speak, what's coming out?

Jon: Words.

Tim: Breath, spirit. One of the ways spirit can come out is in the form of words. And so, this all seems intentional. You have God speaking and what comes out is the spirit. And what happens when God sends out his word by means of the Spirit out of wild and waste comes the garden. So this all seems very intentional. They're all God, but I've read through the Hebrew Bible and been paying attention all this, now I have three shelves. I have multiple shelves on my mind that are—

Jon: We haven't talked about the Ruakh of God in this.

Tim: No. We will. We will right after. It's kind of God's word transitions us into God's Spirit. That's because they're related in the first sentence of the Bible. Elohim, Elohim's breath and Elohim's word. And in both cases, they are active. They are Elohim's way of being personally even physically present within the world. And they have physical visible results in the world. It's Elohim but it's distinct. There you go.

Jon: So in Genesis 1, we get Elohim who's creating everything, who we know is Yahweh but that's just referred to as Elohim.

Tim: Yeah, on page 1.

Jon: And there's a complexity in his identity right away.

Tim: Right away. Right from the first.

Jon: Because it's Elohim creating. But then what's actually out there doing anything? That's the Ruakh of Elohim, the life energy, the spirit, the breath. And it's hovering over the surface the waters. And then what does God do? God then speaks, "Let there be light."

It's really easy to just jump over that be like, "Okay God's just speaking." But now if we take this shelf off, we know we've seen over and over this time where the word of God the word of Yahweh comes, and it seems to be something...It is Yahweh, but also distinct in a way. So now you're like, "Well, this Ruakh of God here seems the same, but also distinct." And then we got the word. And then having meditated on this, you go, "Wow, there's three kind of distinct things, persons that all make up Elohim."

Tim: Three entities by which God relates to the world in the opening sentences of the Bible. In case you're worried that we're just making this up, we know that later biblical authors reflected on this and drew attention to it. I just have one example from Psalm 33 and its sort of paired poetic lines. Psalm 33:6, and then later on the poem in verse 9. "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made. All their hosts, all their armies, by the Ruakh of his mouth. For he spoke and it was. He commanded and it stood."

The poetic parallelism is usually trying to help you draw connections between the two things in each poetic line. So obviously, the word and the breath are related because you speak out words as you breathe out, but then at the same time, they're distinct entities in the poetic lines. So here's the biblical poet who is tracking with this - aware of these different ways that God interacts with the world on page 1. Which then leads us to ask. "Okay, so let's talk about spirit. Now we're talking." They all lead to the next one. It's really interesting how they are all hyperlinked.

Jon: We could have done spirit first and then word.

Tim: I thought about why did I do that. Oh, yes, I did that because then spirit connects you to wisdom, which is the last one.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We spend a lot of time talking about—

Jon: We have a podcast series on spirit. We have a video on spirit. The Hebrew word is Ruakh. It has many meanings - breath, wind. But all in common it seems to be this energizing life force which then when applied to God becomes actually very personal attribute of his.

Tim: Visible energy moves the trees but then when biblical author starts talking about the invisible energy that moves and animates me, they speak of it as a person. They use verbs and language as if it's a person. You can offend the Holy Spirit.

So in Isaiah in a poem...I should have put this down. I don't think I did. In a poem in Isaiah 63, we're reflecting back on the wilderness wanderings. They rebel against God and grieve His Holy Spirit. You are like, "Well, wait. They grieved God?" Yes, they grieved His Spirit.

Jon: Yeah, His Ruakh.

Tim: His personal presence that was there. But once again, like the angel, it's Yahweh and it's Yahweh's spirit. It is Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh. I have some examples here that are interesting. One is from the prophet Micah, where he's reflecting back on his experience of being called as a prophet. It's in Micah 3. He says, "I am filled with power, with the Ruakh of Yahweh, the spirit of Yahweh, and with justice and with courage." So you've got somebody who's full of justice, courage, and power, and he attributes all this to the empowering personal presence of Yahweh, the spirit - to do what? To go launch a major social critique on Israel's leaders for neglecting the poor mostly is his message.

So here's the point that he made is that when the spirits talked about by people, it's an experience of God as they are experiencing him. So just like glory, to say, "That's the glory of God," they use a distinct word glory. This is a particular physical manifestation. But that's not all of who God is like. Just like your teenage room you just blaze your glory, now, that tells me some things about you. But it's not you. It is you. You made it through where you live, but then it's also distinct from you. You are more than just the posters on your wall.

In the same way, glory, and spirit, it seems are ways that biblical authors talk about how these biblical prophets and so on, they experienced a real experience of God. They call it spirit. They call it glory. But at the same time, it's imminent. But at the same time, they want to protect that God is more than that.

Jon: That makes sense. Yeah, that God's identity is such He's so much He is, you know, that when you do encounter him, you would be encountering an aspect of Him. And that aspect would be so full and so complete in a way because He is, so He is. So if you're just like his spirit or his word, it would seem like it is...it appears like a complete entity, which is Yahweh.

But then to say, "well, that's Yahweh," would be shortchanging what Yahweh actually is. So you'd have to say both. "Well, that's Yahweh, but that's also the word of Yahweh."

Tim: Yeah. It's an aspect of Yahweh. It's the communicative aspect. It's the word. It's his majestic aspect, the glory.

Jon: So by nature of the transcendence of God, you have to then create a category in which you can experience God in a distinct way from God?

Tim: Yeah, in a way that's God but also an aspect that is distinct from Him. It's not the whole Him. This is actually pretty intuitive.

Jon: It is a bit intuitive.

Tim: But even like if I were to show up to work one morning and I haven't had any coffee and I'm just not fully present, and maybe even feel crappy or something, then you and I tried to have a conversation, you would put that into a context of the Tim.

Jon: "Tim, you don't really seem like you are here."

Tim: We would talk about that Tim as a different Tim.

Jon: "Tim, where are you?"

Tim: We have language. We say, "I'm not myself today." So even we relationally have a framework for interacting with the person, and we'd say, "Wow, that's not really them." Or you introduce somebody to a friend and they make a bad first impression and then you're like, "You didn't really meet him." It's that same type of thing that when you meet somebody, even in a moment, you're not meeting the whole them, you're meeting an aspect of them. And we have language that makes it seem like it's them and distinct from them. I've never thought of this before.

Jon: It's really interesting. But I think the difference and an important difference is that on your best day when I'm hanging out with you, I'm hanging out with Tim.

Tim: Yeah, that's true.

Jon: And you'd be like, "Oh, man, I feel myself and I'm experiencing you as yourself." Whereas there's something about the nature of God, which is so transcendence that I'm not going to be able to hang out with God when He's fully himself.

Tim: That's right. It's more about my finite limitations as a human.

Jon: It's my finite limitations.

Tim: My experience of God will always be partial than limited.

Jon: So let's use kind of classic example of like I am a gerbil, It's not classic.

Tim: I've never heard you say that before.

Jon: I'm a gerbille, and hanging out with Tim, right? You and I hang out, I'm your favorite gerbille. And I'm experiencing Tim and I'm experiencing maybe you're like grooming me or you're playing with me and I'm playing on a wheel and I'm experiencing the love of Tim. Right?

Tim: I can't get over this. I'm going to try and take this seriously. This is serious.

Jon: This is serious.

Tim: That's right, a serious conversation.

Jon: Do you want me to use someone else?

Tim: That's fine. Go ahead.

Jon: And I'm experiencing the love of Tim and my gerbil brain, my jumble size brain, I'm experiencing that, but I couldn't ever say as a gerbil to my friend's I'm like, "I experienced Tim." I probably would say that, but if I was like, sophisticated enough of a gerbil, I would realize like, "What I experienced was just an attribute of Tim. There's no way I can relate to Tim like another human could relate to Tim."

Tim: Sure.

Jon: So another human could see Tim fully. I can experience you fully, in a way, but if I was a gerbil I couldn't. And so, you have Yahweh who is a divine being, who's transcendent. And by that we mean so other, it'd be like us hanging out—

Tim: The only Elohim who can generate a universe and provident...

Jon: We're like gerbils in that regard. Less so even.

Tim: Highly exalted gerbils.

Jon: Gerbils with the image of Yahweh. It's actually very I guess highly aware of these biblical authors to be able to realize like, "You know, I'm not actually experiencing Yahweh for holy – or completely - I can't; he's transcendent. When I experience it though, it feels very real, it feels like I'm coming into contact with someone. But it's not Yahweh completely. It can't be. But it is Yahweh."

So if you wrestle with that, suddenly you have this category that we were talking about.

Tim: Yeah. And if you were to develop language for it, you get these personified divine attributes.

Jon: If I was a really astute gerbil talking to my other gerbil friends about the ways of Tim, I'd be like, "Guys, Tim's ways are above our ways."

Tim: Oh, my God. Now I'm extremely uncomfortable.

Jon: Well, just as a human. Right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's like, "Why is Tim making all those weird noises with his mouth talking with someone else?"

Tim: "His ways are above our ways."

Jon: "His ways are above our ways. Why does he have clothes on his body?" "I don't know. His ways are above our ways."

Tim: "It's the thing he does." That's great. That's very helpful analogy.

Jon: I don't know if it is completely helpful.

Tim: No. It's imperfect in some way I'm sure.

[00:33:23]

Tim: The spirit. The spirit of Elohim, God's personal life-giving presence. When biblical authors and Israelites saw individuals acting Moses' style, Moses said—

Jon: Reflecting God?

Tim: Yeah. Remember that story where he said, "The spirit of Yahweh came on a bunch of those other elders"? It's a story in Numbers 11, and it's awesome. Then Joshua was like, "Hey, there's a few too many elders who are empowered. There's two other guys, Eldad, and Medad who are outside in the camp and they're acting like it too." And then Moses was like, "Oh man, I wish everybody, I wish all these people because I wouldn't have to put up with their crap."

Jon: We all just know what to do.

Tim: So biblical authors, the Israelites were aware when they saw unique humans in this Moses mode of an exalted truly image of God human. So Micah is saying, "That's what I feel like when I speak the word of Yahweh. That's the power to speak justice, to speak through the power." It's God's own life-giving presence.

David - actually most of the kings, but David in particular - was aware of this empowering Spirit to rule Israel well in 1 Samuel. Joseph - we actually talked about this in the video - and actually Pharaoh and people around Joseph we're aware that he was somebody in whom the spirit of Elohim was.

Jon: That seems like then that's a normal category for ancient thinkers, that you can be filled with the spirit of Elohim.

Tim: Yeah, it's an exalted human who becomes energized and therefore are instrument of God's purpose.

Jon: That though it seems like we have categories for this kind of transfixed. Like this person is possessed.

Tim: We talked about this when we talked about spirit. This is actually a cross-cultural idea that leaders and specifically artists and craftspeople—

Jon: The Muse.

Tim: We talked about the muse or genius, idea of genius originally comes from spirit that communicates creative ideas to you. And that's connected. So Joseph is said to have wisdom and understanding through the Spirit of God. So David rules in the power of God, Micah speaks justice filled by the Spirit, Joseph is a really good administrator in federal government. Then the last example that we also talked about this in the Holy Spirit video are those artists, Bezalel, who like Joseph is filled with the Spirit of God with wisdom and understanding.

So this connects us now to...we talked about this also, that the Spirit can come to be used for meaning to talk about your mind, the invisible thoughts and ideas that you have that become visibly effective in the world.

Jon: In Hebrew, I would go, "Oh, I'm going to call that my Ruakh." In English, we would call that our mind.

Tim: Yeah. In Isaiah 40, then God's Ruakh is his mind. This is Isaiah 40. "Who's measured the Ruakh of Yahweh? Who's informed him with advice? With whom did he take counsel and gain knowledge?" So Yahweh's Ruakh is his purpose, is his thought. And then those can meld with human purposes and thoughts in which case you would say, "Those people are filled with the Spirit."

So we got the name, God's glory, God's word, and then God's Spirit. And the whole point of God's Spirit is actually it doesn't ever appear as a physical entity.

Jon: It just embodies people.

Tim: Yeah, but it's always a human involved. So the name can be put in that angel, and that's a human figure when the angel appears. When God's glory appears, what they see is the exalted human royal figure. When God spirits in the—

Jon: Sometimes.

Tim: Sometimes.

Jon: Glory in the tabernacle or glory in the...?

Tim: But the glory in the tabernacle is the glory of God over His throne - the ark of the covenant.

Jon: Which when Ezekiel sees it is...

Tim: He actually sees a human figure.

Jon: Human figure.

Tim: That's right. In theory, if you go in there, the whole point of the icon of the art is that you see nothing, because you can't limit Yahweh to any one visible thing. That's why you make no idols.

Jon: But if you're just talking about the glory of God, then all sudden you can.

Tim: Yeah, apparently.

Jon: It's interesting.

Tim: It is interesting. But then when we are talking about Spirit, there's always a human involved. But it's another human who becomes like Moses. An exalted human. An instrument of God. I'm trying to think about two shelves that we started with. There's one where it's kind of this being that appears as a human that Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh, and then there's humans that become these elevated humans who truly image God.

Jon: That was our first one.

Tim: That was our first one. When the Spirit's at work, it's Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh working through an exalted human or a human that's become the perfect conduit for God's purpose. We're going to have to find ways to draw this in the video.

Jon: I know. We have like four shelves that I'm seeing and they're kind of connected a little bit.

Tim: Four shelves?

Jon: Yeah. You've got the image of God, kind of shelf of here's a human being, fully human connected to God. Then you've got the shelf of here's the angel of Yahweh

who is distinct from Yahweh but also Yahweh. That's a shelf. That's a crazy shelf. Then you've got now the shelf of divine attributes: the word, the name, the glory.

Then, I guess when I say the fourth is kind of like we're calling the spirit an attribute. And maybe that's where I'm getting caught up a little bit because I guess I don't think of my mind as an attribute. I don't think of my—

Tim: I see. Your presence.

Jon: Yeah. I think of it as more of just like another part of me.

Tim: A way of talking about you, yourself.

Jon: Yeah. I guess what's the difference between an attribute and... because an attribute is a way of talking about you. But my mind is the way I interact with everything. Right?

Tim: Yeah, I hear that.

Jon: So an attribute of mine might be that I'm friendly but I can never be friendly without my mind.

Tim: And you can't, as human, be present without your body. Your body is equivalent to your presence.

Jon: Right. Yeah, exactly.

Tim: But the whole point of an Elohim, whether it's the chief Elohim Yahweh or the other Elohim, is that they're not embodied. They're disembodied.

Jon: Right. But the mind, I know I have a mind but it's not a physical thing.

Tim: Well, this has been a debate in philosophy for a long time. Is the mind simply an emergent entity from all the synapses firing or is it a nonphysical entity that emerges?

Jon: When neuroscientists talk about the mind, they separate it from the brain. So the brain is the physical thing - the neurons, the electricity firing through the neurons, the whole structure of the brain and all the other systems in your body that are connected to it. But when they talk about the mind, they're talking about this nonphysical abstract idea in which it's the way that, it's the patterns of electricity, and it's the information that is stored...

It's like a computer program. It's like a software. It's like, what is a software? It's just information, but it creates an environment for which things to be understood and processed and executed. But it actually physically doesn't exist. Software doesn't. So that's why they talk about it that way.

Tim: Okay, really. So even like a material naturalist, somebody with a material naturalist worldview would say that our mind is distinct from the brain or is our mind simply our experience of our brains?

Jon: I don't know.

Tim: I don't know either.

Jon: But I think a naturalist would say that the mind comes from...

Tim: It emerges?

Jon: It emerges from, but is distinct.

Tim: But it is distinct. Interesting. I wish I knew more. Another life I would want to go into neuroscience.

Jon: This is all connected to like just information, theory of information, which is that, what is information and how is it passed along? And so a computer uses ones and zeros, and then it can create any sort of information with that, and then stores it in the hardware silicon.

Our hardware is carbon and then formed in neurons and then the electrical currents that go through that, but we are processing the same thing - information.

Tim: I see.

Jon: This abstract idea of information. Which does not exist physically, but we're computing it in a different way with our brains that we don't even really understand how we do it. We have no clue. Quantum computers that they're developing is a different type of hardware that would require different type of software, but it's still just computing information.

Tim: We live in a land much stranger than Oz. Yeah, that's really fascinating.

Jon: So I think when you're talking about your mind, you're talking about this abstract structure, that you are consciously aware of, that's processing this information.

Tim: That's right. This is what makes it difficult for modern people who have a more materialist or naturalist worldview to conceive of a being with a mind, with no hardware.

Jon: Right, with no hardware.

Tim: Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Because the whole point of this concept of God's Spirit with a mind and purpose is, there's information processing happening with visible effects but no visible hardware.

Jon: Yeah, that's interesting.

Tim: So it's either a really advanced form of technology, which is entirely possible or some other category. Or it's made up.

Jon: Or it's made up. Or it exists in a dimension, or a mode that we just don't understand.

Tim: A dimension or mode that's not detectable by us, yeah. That's right. And then you get into string theory. Holy cow. How did we get here?

Jon: We're talking about the mind of God.

Tim: Yeah, we're talking about God's Spirit. There are biblical passages that use the word "spirit" to talk about God's mind or purpose that can influence another mind, a human, and work through human mind. Kings, prophets, and artists.

Jon: And I think how we got there was just saying we understand that the mind is something physical. And you were like, "Do we?"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I think that's true.

Tim: So what's interesting in this connection about God's Spirit is it's God, but it's also the way that God is experienced in certain moments by these people. So it's not all of God, to go back to that analogy, it's an aspect of God. It's His mind and purpose. But the visible effect of that is all kinds of things: justice, insight or wisdom. Actually, spirit and wisdom are really connected throughout the Hebrew Bible.

When you see somebody acting under the influence of God's Spirit, one of the most common things that they're doing is doing something that requires wisdom or insight. It happens with Joseph first time it appears. It happens with artist Bezalel the second time it appears. And then interestingly, that leads us to the last divine attribute that I want to talk about and it's all interconnected to the word and the Spirit.

Jon: God's wisdom.

Tim: God's wisdom.

[00:46:23]

Tim: So, let's start with a couple of statements. One from the book of Proverbs 3:19. "By means of wisdom, Yahweh founded the land. He established the heavens by his understanding." So, Earlier we had that poem that was reflecting on Genesis 1 that said, "By the word of Yahweh and by the Ruakh of the Spirit, the heavens were made.

Jon: And here in Proverbs, it's saying that the wisdom of Yahweh created.

Tim: I mean, it's a wisdom. And I already know if I've read through the Hebrew Bible a bunch of times—

Jon: When I'm full of the Spirit I'm full of wisdom.

Tim: Yeah. One of the most common things that people have, when they're full of the Spirit, is wisdom. So it makes perfect sense that you can say Yahweh's word, Yahweh's spirit, Yahweh's wisdom. They're all different ways of saying how God made the universe.

Jeremiah 10 is another, just classic example. "He made the land by his power; He established the world by his wisdom; by his understanding, stretched out the heavens." This is clearly a common category the biblical authors have - Yahweh's wisdom. The biblical book where wisdom takes on a life of its own, we've made multiple videos about and talked about in length, Proverbs. And how wisdom is depicted as a literary person, a influential urban woman who goes out throughout the city, calling out the people who find her embrace her and listen to her. It's interesting she's depicted as influential urban woman and she's depicted as a prophet, because she goes out and speaks with divine authority. If people listen to her, they're listening to God.

Jon: In Proverbs 8, talking about wisdom, it doesn't say God's wisdom, it just says wisdom.

Tim: Well, it just says wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Fearing Yahweh. So yeah, it's clear that this is another way of relating to Yahweh, but it's by listening to her - lady wisdom. So she gives a speech in Proverbs chapter 8. It's a whole persuasive speech to get you to listen to her. The last card she pulls to try and convince you, one card is, "Hey, listen, anytime you see a king doing justice, he's been listening to me. Anytime you see just laws—

Jon: Pulled out a Rolodex here.

Tim: Totally. She is like, "You know who I work with?"

Jon: Yeah, you know who work with? So my clients, wise kings.

Tim: Yeah, the wisest kings in the world. All that. That's good. And then she pulls out the ultimate card, the Yahweh card and she says, "Actually, you know who I worked with."

Jon: My biggest client.

Tim: My biggest client. Then she uses the first word of the Bible. "In the beginning," she says, "Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his way. Before anything, I was there with Yahweh. From the ancient times, I was appointed." Then in Proverbs 8:30 she uses a unique Hebrew word that Bible nerds have been debating about for millennia. She says, "I was beside Yahweh in the beginning as a man delighting day by day before him." I put a couple different English translations in front of you.

Essentially, the word could mean some kind of apprentice or trusted person in training. And so that comes out in some English translations. Or it could mean someone entrusted to you like a child or an infant who needs to be cared for.

Jon: It can be either of those things.

Tim: There's pros and cons on either side. So the New International Version actually kind of just dodges and just translates, "I was constantly at his side filled with delight day after day." The English Standard Version, New American Standard, and RSV say, "I was beside him like a master workman daily his delight."

So how they translate here, you walk away going, "Oh, Yahweh used wisdom like a tool." So it's Yahweh's wisdom. It's a literary poetic depiction of God building the world by wisdom. Once again, it's a literary depiction where the wisdom is Yahweh's attribute but it's distinct.

Classic King James goes for the interpretation of the word that it's a nurse laying a child, that I was beside him as one brought up by him. In which case it's Yahweh has fostered wisdom-

Jon: Why wouldn't King James just say, "I was beside him like a child"?

Tim: Because that interpretation of a man, the Hebrew word is one entrusted or raised by. There you go. That's actually a long rabbit trail that we could go down. All that to say is wisdom is it fits the same bill that all these other divine attributes have been and it maps on Yahweh's spirit and Yahweh's word.

Jon: What's the significance that this is a woman. Before everything's been very masculine.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The Hebrew word for "wisdom", chokmah...Actually, most languages have what's called the grammatical gender and it doesn't map on to any clear connections between masculine nouns or more masculine things. It doesn't work like that.

Jon: Has its own logic.

Tim: Yeah. Has its own system. Different languages of different systems, what they assigned masculine or feminine. So it seems like one part of how this poetic personification gets spun out is because the nouns itself is feminine.

[00:53:15]

Tim: So here's something cool. If you look at the gospel of John, the opening sentence of the gospel of John, this is all connected in your mind - you'll see the opening sentences of John are drawing words and ideas from the shelves we've been looking at. Specifically, the word, the spirit, and wisdom. So in the beginning—

Jon: Very clear.

Tim: Yeah, very clear he's replaying Genesis 1 before your eyes. And what he says is, "In the beginning was the word."

Jon: And we talked about the word being there already in Genesis 1 when God spoke, and then we saw that the word of God is itself somehow distinct from God but also God.

Tim: It can appear to people, it has hands, it can appear as a human figure touching Jeremiah's mouth.

Jon: So these are the breadcrumbs as a good Bible reader you've been meditating on and John has meditated on, and now as he's coming to pin about Jesus, he's pulling it all together.

Tim: Yeah. So he's going to draw and call Jesus before becoming human the word. Now when he says, "In the beginning was this personified divine attribute of God," He's also pulling on Proverbs 8, that wisdom was in the beginning with God. We just read that in Proverbs 8. So, in the beginning, was the Word. And then he has this line that once again it seems like bad math. "The Word was with God and the Word was God.

Jon: Which is coming out saying what we've been kind of dancing around which is this attribute seems distinct but it's the same. It's God.

Tim: It's the basic shelf created by in the Hebrew Bible God's identity is complex. And there are entities which appear that are Yahweh and at the same time are distinct from Yahweh. How else are you going to say it? And so, this is how John puts it in this clear of language as he can. This word that we met in the human figure of Jesus, Jesus was the Word that you read about in the Hebrew Bible, and he was with God - distinct - and was God. He is Yahweh embodied.

He goes on. He was in the beginning with God. Just like wisdom, he was back then. So just like through wisdom, and through the Word, all things came into being through Him.

Jon: Sorry, you're bringing wisdom in the mix because we know from Proverbs 8 that wisdom was also there in the beginning?

Tim: Yeah. Proverbs 8 is itself rereading Genesis 1 and placing wisdom in—

Jon: And here's another reread of Genesis 1.

Tim: In Genesis 1, in the beginning, God - by what means? By His Spirit and by His Word. Proverbs come back and reread Genesis 1.

Jon: It says, "Hey, God's wisdom was in Proverbs. Wisdom. Lady Wisdom.

Tim: It was the slot of the Spirit and Word.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: And now John's doing it and he's putting Jesus as the Word, and as the wisdom slot in the beginning. So, therefore, if he's the wisdom and the Word, all things came into being through him. Apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into

being. In him was life and that life was the light of men and the light shines in the darkness." This is all the first sentences of Genesis.

Jon: Yeah, light, darkness.

Tim: Life and all that. Then if you go down to verse 14, we'll really draw it together. So the Word became human and flesh. So that Word became human, and you're like, "Oh yeah, the word stretched out its hand to Jeremiah."

Jon: The Word had a physical appearance before.

Tim: Yeah, the Word has appeared as a human before in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: But this time, it's not just appearing as human, it's actually flesh.

Tim: Correct. It's not just appearing as a human, it is a human. Here's the second thing the Word did. The Word set up a temple, tabernacle among us, and we saw his glory.

Jon: His Kavod.

Tim: His Kavod. So what he's saying is, Jesus was a human that was distinct from Yahweh but is Yahweh, and he is the physical embodiment of God's word, His purpose, he's the physical embodiment of God's Kavod, and God's glory. Also—

Jon: Which lived in the temple and also appeared as a human.

Tim: An exalted enthroned human as the king of the universe. Then he says, "We saw his glory, glory as the unique begotten one - the only begotten one from the Father full of grace and truth." So the only begotten, what he's now doing is he's pulling on teachings of Jesus. Jesus's fundamental way of referring to the one who sent him and the one that he presented as Father. And then he called himself the unique Son who is distinct from the Father and one from the Father.

Jon: Begotten means? What is that word? It's a weird word.

Tim: Hey everybody, this is Tim from the future who's rudely interrupting Tim and Jon from the past. However, Jon just asked a really important question about the meaning of this phrase only "begotten Son" to describe Jesus, and Tim of the past answer was a little bit rambling and not very succinct and thoughtful, at least as Tim of the future would prefer. So I'm going to replace the old answer with Tim of the future answer, which is right now.

So the question Jon asked is, what is this phrase, the only begotten Son. It appears just a few times in the New Testament. One is right here in the Gospel of John chapter 1. It also appears in the most famous Bible verse in the New Testament, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son" and a few other times in the New Testament.

So here's the thing is, if that's the version of John 3:16, that you know the phrase "only begotten Son," you actually know from that fact that it's an older Bible

translation. The King James, the New American Standard, the Revised Standard all have the phrase "the only Begotten one." However, if you look at almost all of the modern translations from the past 50 years or so, you will notice that they don't use the phrase "begotten" at all. Like the NIV or the ESV, all read "the one and only Son."

So there's been a debate, probably actually a few generations old now and mostly settled, that this phrase, the Greek word is Monogenes that's used to describe Jesus. An older generation of Greek scholars thought that this word meant "the only born." That the phrase "gene" in the Greek word "Monogenes", they thought that the genes part of that word refers to the Greek word "gennao" which means to be born.

However, there's been a whole new reason set of research studies done that the root word of that is not only, born, but rather only of a kind. So that's why all of the most up to date Greek dictionaries I'm just looking here at the like standard Greek dictionary that biblical scholars use by Fredrick Danker and Walter Bauer, and the entry, the first set of meanings is the only one of its kind, or the one and only.

So what this word means, what John is doing as he introduces to Jesus, he's going to call Jesus the Son of God. However, as you've learned from the series, there are other beings, spiritual beings that can also be called the sons of God. There talked about all over the Hebrew Scriptures.

However, John wants to preserve this phrase that Jesus used up himself, the Son, and the idea that all over Jesus' teachings that God was his father. But John uses this word, "the one and only Son," "the monogene son" to distinguish Jesus from any other being that could be called the Son of God. Why does he want to distinguish it? Because as you going to go on to claim that Jesus is the one and only Son because he is both distinct from the God of Israel and he is like God of Israel at the same time.

And so I know the math doesn't work on that one, it's like one plus one is one, but that's the claim that John is going to try and make. It's actually kind of important, I think that we shift our language away from "only begotten" primarily because to say that Jesus is the only born son, misunderstandings of that word have led to a number of offshoots from Orthodox Christian tradition that claim that Jesus is the first and supreme created being from God is not identical for sharing in the identity of the God of Israel himself.

So that's not what this word means, rather, is saying that Jesus is the one and only unique son of all the other spiritual beings because he actually shares in God's identity and is one with God. And then the rest of the gospel of John is going to spell out what exactly that means.

Anyway, that's Tim of the futures clarification of Tim of the past. John is now going to summarize and wrap up this whole conversation.

Jon: Yeah, let me just walk through this again. So, in the beginning, was the Word. We know in the beginning God created. We also know God created with His Ruakh and with His words. We know that the word in Hebrew Bible, the word of Yahweh

becomes a character in and of itself. We know that also from Proverbs 8 that in the beginning, wisdom was there creating.

So there's all this rich literature to pull from the Old Testament that when we get to John 1, and him saying, "In the beginning was the Word," all of these things are coming to mind. And then he says, "The Word was with God, so distinct, but the Word was God, so also Yahweh himself. Through the Word everything was made, life, light shines." You know, that's a creation.

And he's saying all this to introduce Jesus. So he's making this claim that is who Jesus was. Jesus wasn't just merely a human. He was the Word who became human, became flesh, and tabernacled. And we saw his glory, which is another attribute of God. Cool.

Tim: So here's one concluding thought and this will launch us into the New Testament and what the apostles are saying about Jesus. It's a very common misperception that the concept of the Trinity and the idea of God as Father, Son, and Spirit is a Christian innovation, that it's foreign to the Bible, totally other. The word doesn't appear in the Bible - Trinity.

Jon: Right, the word "Trinity" doesn't appear.

Tim: Yeah. Therefore, it's hundreds of years later that Christians are imposing a foreign set of categories and language on to Jesus and on to the Hebrew Bible. So in biblical scholarship, that idea has been thoroughly unraveled and disproven. That has not happened on the popular level, however. And so, what you get is Christians who were just like, "Well, the Trinity, I guess, oh, I don't know. I don't know how that comes out of the Bible but, okay, sure." Or you get people for whom it becomes a real stumbling block for them.

And so, essentially what we're saying is that these are all Jewish ideas that emerged from the Hebrew Bible. And when you go back to the literature of this period, you see Jewish scholars, they're all tracking with all this stuff. These aren't foreign. And talking about God in these complex ways was not viewed as compromising their belief in one God. You see all these complex things happening in the same books as statements as there's no God beside me or there's only one God.

So for ancient Israelites and Jews, this all is a part of their understanding of a complex God. And what Jesus and the New Testament authors are going to do is then say, "Yes, and that complex God has met us in the person of Jesus, who is the surprising but also completely connected fulfillment of all these ways of talking about God."

Thank you, guys, for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. If you have a question after listening to these episodes of the God series - and I can't imagine anybody listening to it and not having a zillion questions - send us one of them at info@jointhebibleproject.com. We're going to be hosting more Q and R episodes throughout the series as we go on. If you can send us an audio recording of your questions, keep it to around 20 seconds and also introduce yourself and where you're from. We'd love to hear from you.

The Bible Project is a nonprofit animation studio in Portland, Oregon. We make videos and other resources available for free to help everybody from all walks of life understand the story that the Bible is trying to tell us and to know how it leads to Jesus. We're able to do this because of the support of generous people like you all. Thanks for being a part of this with us.

Jasmine: Hi, my name is Jasmine and I'm from Portland, Oregon. I use The Bible Project...Well, what I use is the big gray book that simplifies things, but tells you exactly what the Bible is saying in each chapter. The Read Scripture book. And I think it's absolutely amazing. What I really enjoy about the read scripture book is because, for those that may have a hard time like understanding Bible and scripture, I think it really helps people to really like connect all the pieces together.

So I use the Read Scripture book and then I go to actual like scripture in the Bible to connect pieces because sometimes it can be a little bit confusing for me. I love the visual that they have in the Read Scripture book as well. It's made reading the Bible really fun for me and come to life. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We are a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, more at thebibleproject.com