

H2R P20: Metaphor E2

The Mountain Garden & the Human Ideal

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- Jon: One of the main ways that we understand the world, if not the main way that we understand the world is through metaphor by describing one thing as another thing, mapping on the features and identity of something that we know to help us better understand something that we don't yet fully comprehend.
- Tim: Metaphors create an expanding web of associations and comparisons. Characteristic of metaphor is a fullness of significance that is not evident. In other words, a surplus of meaning that extends beyond the words in dictionary definitions.
- Jon: Every culture has shared metaphors that become a common set of explanations that we draw from again and again to make sense of the world and to produce new thoughts. In the last episode, we referred to this as the encyclopedia of production, like a database of images that we draw from to try and understand the world together.
- Every culture has this, but not every culture uses the same set of metaphors. In fact, the Bible has a few foundational metaphors that will seem strange to us, and so we've got to become familiar with them. But where do we start?
- Tim: Almost all the poetry in the Bible is stocked with image encyclopedia that was given to them by the Torah, first five books of the Bible, specifically, the book of Genesis.
- Jon: Now, in this episode, you're going to hear Tim say that he has four foundational metaphors that he wants us to walk through. In the end, we only get to talk through two of them. In this episode, we're going to tackle the first one. A biblical metaphor to help us understand the human ideal. What does it look like to live in a state of peace? What does true freedom look like? What is the human ideal? Well, the Bible gives us the metaphor.
- Tim: An ideal state of humanity is in covenant relationship with God, imaging God through creative work. It's a garden. And that is what is created on pages 1 and 2 in the Bible, and that gives the storehouse of imagery, then, for the biblical poets to talk about eternal life.
- Jon: This is the Bible project podcast. I'm John Collins. Today, the human ideal, cosmic mountains, fortresses, and temples. Here we go.
- Tim: We're carrying on a conversation about how to read biblical poetry specifically about symbols, imagery, and metaphor in biblical poetry.
- Jon: And we spent a lot of time talking about how a metaphor is very basic to the way we just understand the world.

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Tim: That's right. It's not just a fancy way of talking. It's actually poetic. Figures of speech are our ways of giving expression to our metaphorical understanding of the world of time as a possession, or life as a journey, people as plants, up is good down is bad.

Jon: That's a very basic one.

Tim: Those are really basic. "Death as a departure." Which is actually a way of thinking about life as the journey's end of sailing off into the sunset, kind of thing.

Jon: Great.

Tim: Important part of this is how what we're doing, what our brains are doing, or what a poet's doing is taking associations, feelings that we have with one domain, say, like, our money and our possessions, and then mapping it onto the target domain. Like 'my time' in a given day. So it's a basic conceptual metaphor to conceive of as a possession.

Jon: These are so rooted in the way we think it's hard to sometimes remember that they actually are metaphors.

Tim: That's right. "Argument as war" is a great one. You win an argument. You win, or you lose. As opposed to I had the more convincing or the more compelling, it's I beat and defeated the other person. Even though I hopefully never touched them.

This is actually a quote about this idea from one of my favorite introductions to biblical metaphor by guy named William Brown, called "Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor." So good. It's really good. Basically, he breaks the book down into all the basic concept metaphor that work in the Book of Psalms, and then he groups some in different chapters.

Jon: So he creates encyclopedia?

Tim: Yeah, he's trying to recreate the visual encyclopedia of the Book of Psalms. This is such a good book.

Jon: Encyclopedia production of Psalms?

Tim: Yeah. He says, "Metaphors create an expanding web of associations and comparisons. Characteristic of metaphor is a fullness of significance that is not evident in other words. A surplus of meaning that extends beyond words of dictionary definitions. A metaphor, in essence, works by violating language. It's a transgressor that builds bridges across chasms of meaning that we have separated in our minds."

Jon: He's talking very paradoxically here. That's weird.

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Tim: Totally. Well, he's using a lot of images. This is from the introduction to the book. But when you're talking about God as a rock, or God is a fortress, that would be an example.

Jon: What does he mean, though it's a transgressor?

Tim: In other words, if you look up the meaning of the word 'God' in a dictionary, you won't find the entry under stone fortresses.

Jon: Yeah, right.

Tim: That's the idea is stone fortresses and transcendent eternal beings are totally different domains. But what the poet does is break the rules of language and say, "God is our fortress."

Jon: I get it now. What's the word for like when you're kind of an instigator - you like to kind of curse?

Tim: Provocateur?

Jon: Yeah, provocateur? Which is more like that than transgressor or a violator. It's more like, "Let me mess with you."

Tim: Sure. yes, that's right. I get it. I guess he's thinking more that if you think of how a dictionary defines what things mean, the poet is wanting to...he says, "Create an expanding web of connections and comparisons between things that aren't connected in your dictionary." That's the encyclopedia, and that's what metaphors are doing. There you go.

The question is, every culture does this in its own way - develops core basic metaphors that have lots of roles and slots that can spin out lots of different figures of speech. And when we read a poem, like we read Psalm 46, at the beginning of last conversation, you might kind of get some of them on a universal level. There's a lot of images like that in the Bible: Light, dark, water, sun, thirst, hunger, life is a journey.

But then there's going to be all kinds of imagery that has really specific connections and associations that if you didn't grow up in that culture, you're just not going to get. Here's what I think this video can do is begin to provide or help people know how to begin to build their biblical encyclopedia of imagery.

Something that I have discovered over the last few years is that really what it takes is a lot of meditation on the first about 50 pages of the Bible. If you really have the first 50 pages, and by that I mean Genesis chapters 1 through 50, but if you get Genesis in your bones, the rest of the imagery of the Bible—

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Jon: Let the way that Genesis talks about things become a way that you start to think about things.

Tim: Correct. Almost all the poetry of the Bible is stocked with the image encyclopedia that was given to them by the Torah, first five books of the Bible, specifically the book of Genesis. This has been such a helpful and productive principle for me, that it's the main way that I introduce students to Biblical poetry and imagery now.

Kind of like we did "Life is a journey." So "life is a journey," and so you can use a figure of speech about hurdles and obstacles. But that assumes that life is a journey, that goes all the way back. Or you can talk about death as departure is the end of the journey. That's a totally different figure of speech. You know, I faced many hurdles last year versus my grandpa passed on. But those are both actually assuming the same underlying metaphor of life as a journey. And the Bible works the same way.

So all this stuff about water in the Bible, drowning in the waters, the waters overcoming you, waves overcoming you, waters, pounding the mountains, still waters, stormy waters, it all goes back to page one. It all goes back to Page 1 of the Bible, and the way water works on Page 1. It's very similar.

What I am hoping the video can do, actually, is just develop some core themes from Page 1 and 2 of the Bible and then show how those metaphors develop and grow.

Jon: Do you have a list?

Tim: I've got four here that I think...I don't know if we'll do all four in the video. They're organic, and they connect together. One is, God is dryland. God is the dryland, mountain, rock. The second is, the waters are danger, evil, and chaos. The third one is human's relationship to animals. Humans at peace with the animals or humans at war with the animals is a fundamental biblical image.

Jon: So image, not metaphor?

Tim: Well, how humans relate to animals, whether hostile or at peace, is a core set of images. Humans at peace with animals, humans at war with animals or in danger from animals, those are two core underlying images that have a lot of resonance and meanings throughout the Bible.

The last one is the Garden of Eden River and the Tree of Life. If you put those together, what you have is the picture from Genesis 1 of the dryland emerging out of the waters, you have the chaotic waters that are kept at bay, and on the dry land, you have Eden. The Eden temple where God and humans and God and humans and animals are at

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peace together, where the River of Life gives eternal life to those who dwell on the dry land garden. That's all pages 1 and 2.

And almost all the water, garden, tree, animal, rock imagery in the whole Bible are...

Jon: Are drawn from that poem.

Tim: ...traced back to riffing off of themes from pages 1 and 2. It's so helpful. It's just like all of a sudden, these images just pop now when you come across them.

Jon: Those become four anchor ones.

Tim: Yeah, it's sort of like these are four basic conceptual metaphors or images in the biblical imagination and biblical poets. Well, express those and all kinds of-

Jon: These are the schemes?

Tim: Yes, totally. Each one of those has a scheme that biblical poets then develop in and riff off.

Let's talk about this first one, that God is somehow deeply connected to the dry land rock in the midst of the water.

Jon: I guess what I understand about this is that God provided land for humans and it came out of the waters.

Tim: Yeah, that's correct. Let's just start there. On Page 1, you have "The land was wild and waste." This is Genesis 1:2. "The land was wild and waste and dark was over the surface of the deep waters." Right there, even we've talked about this before, you have two images laid on top of each other that seem to contradict. One's a wilderness wasteland, the other one's an ocean, an undulating stormy ocean.

Jon: Or is it both? Is it that there's land, that's why the noise and there's an ocean that's...?

Tim: Oh, if you're actually trying to understand what this is referring to physically, that's totally not the point here. The point is, there's no order yet. The world is in its unaltered state. So creation is going to be about the bringing about of order for humans particularly. We've talked about this.

For the first creative act of God is to separate the waters above from the waters below, so it's as if the horizon line is created imaginatively. Then you get the dome, the sky dome with water above it, and then separated from the waters that are the deep abyss.

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Jon: Because in the ancient imagination, there is a big reservoir of water above the abyss...

Tim: Above the sky dome.

Jon: ...and sometimes it trickles down?

Tim: Yeah. The windows of the heavens open. God controls windows, that kind of thing.

Jon: So if they're up there, then at some point it must have gotten up there?

Tim: Yeah. If it rains, there's water up there.

Jon: So maybe everything was just one big pool of water but then somehow it was separated. God separated it.

Tim: Correct. Separation of the waters, that's day two. Then the next day is, "Let the waters under the sky dome, let them be gathered and let dry ground appear." Think of a volcanic island emerging out of the sea.

Jon: Out of the chaos, yeah.

Tim: Not that they knew about volcanic islands. It's a conception of a dry space emerging out of the waters. Which is pretty good conception of if you look around and you are near an ocean, you're like, "Oh, yeah, we're on dry land and there is where it ends."

Jon: Yeah, that's what it feels. So if you're in a sandy puddle and you scoop up a bunch of dirt in the middle and crop it up, you'll have a little island in the midst of the chaos.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Genesis 1 is saying, "The dry land which we inhabit is a divinely provided safe place. From those waters of wild and waste, I don't belong out there. I can maybe get boat and sail out there, but I can't.

Jon: But most people who do, die.

Tim: That's right, yeah. It's not my space. My space is here on the dry ground. So right there. And who's the one doing all this, providing the dry ground? It's God who is doing all this. That's Page 1. It's giving you a fundamental image. The ground is this refuge from the waters.

Jon: I'm with you so far, but the title of this is God is the dry ground.

Tim: Yeah. We'll get there. Just one step at a time. Page 2, Genesis 2. "God planted a garden in the East. On the dryland there now. Then in the east of the dry land, God planted a garden in Eden, and Eden's the Hebrew word that means delight. And there he put the

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human that he'd formed. All these trees in the garden, so beautiful. The Tree of Life is there, the tree of knowing what is good and what is not good.

Jon: There's two mystical trees.

Tim: And very important, a river. A river was there watering the garden flowing out of Eden. Then after it leaves Eden - it's one river in Eden - after it leaves Eden, it separates into four rivers. We're going to pick up the river in the next metaphor.

Jon: And the tree.

Tim: Yeah, and the tree and so on. Right now we're just talking about the dryland. The idea is this big mound of dirt has emerged out of the waters as a safe refuge. Now, on the dry land...

Jon: In the east.

Tim: ...in the east, there's a certain realm called delight, Eden, and beauty, and a river. So there's some source, headwaters there and it's these waters provided that bring life and beauty to the garden. That's the image here, and it's divinely provided. God planted the garden, He's providing for the beauty in the there. Now, God provides the dry land, He provides the garden on this mound here. Eden.

As you read on through the Bible, there's the storyline of the Bible progresses, Israel's Temple in Jerusalem is a symbolic recreation of Eden, which makes you realize and go back that the Garden of Eden is being described as the temple. For example, - this is where we get into poetry - in Exodus Chapter 15, this is the song of the sea that the Israelites sing after being delivered through the waters.

After recounting what just happened, Moses looks forward to where God's leading them and he says, "In your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed. In strength you guide them to your holy dwelling. You bring them in and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance— the place, O Lord, you've made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, your hands have established." Here the conception is, the Israelites just came out of the dangerous waters.

Jon: Which we'll talk about.

Tim: Which we'll talk about. But they're being led through the waters to this cosmic mountain where God dwells on top. And what's on top? Well, it's the mountain of your inheritance, your dwelling, your sanctuary. And you bring them in and you plant them

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there. It's the garden. Planting as if they're seed that you plant there on the sacred mountaintop. This is all Genesis 1 and 2 imagery.

So the conception of Eden and the dry land is that it's this cosmic mound that emerged out of the waters and Eden's like the divine temple where heaven on earth are together. This is a good example where this is a poet riffing off of Genesis one and two style imagery of Eden as the cosmic mountain garden where God and His people will live together in peace, and harmony, and so on.

I mean, Exodus 15, you're reading, and then we're talking about planting people? It's the actual word plant. You plant people on the mountain of your inheritance where your dwelling is? All these images only make sense in light of some more basic conceptual metaphor.

Jon: Well, doesn't it make sense just in terms of that the Jerusalem is on a hill?

Tim: Correct. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So at a very literal sense, it seems like, "Oh, the mountain of your inheritance, yeah, Jerusalem. Dwelling in your sanctuary, yeah, the temple?"

Tim: That's right. "And you will plant people there." So people become these garden plants. You're right, the metaphor is plant. Why is God planting people? What is that talking about?

Jon: It's making it permanent and part of the ecosystem there.

Tim: Right. People are plants.

Jon: People are plants. "She blossomed."

Tim: Yeah, totally. Think back to Genesis 2. God planted a garden and there He put the human - he formed.

Jon: It's almost like He planted them there.

Tim: Totally. He's planting the trees and He's placing the humans. Here he's planting the humans and planting the Israelites after they come out of the waters.

Jon: What I see here so far as the metaphor is that dry land or elevated land more specific is a place where God can create refuge and delight.

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- Tim: Yes, yes. The basic ideal of humans living at peace and in safety at one with the presence of God is of a cosmic mountain temple garden.
- Jon: Why do you keep saying cosmic?
- Tim: Cosmic, because we're talking about their concept—
- Jon: Of the cosmos?
- Tim: Correct, of the cosmos - How the world is ordered. For them, order, language about safety and divine presence and order—
- Jon: If you were to think of all the land on earth connected in one island and there was one mountain on top of that island, that's your cosmic perspective and that's your cosmic mountain.
- Tim: Correct.
- Jon: And if there was headwaters that came from the mountain, that is the river that then turns into four rivers that waters the whole island, all four corners of the island. And obviously, you walk around, you're like, "Oh, it's not one big island. It's separated by different types of seas and peninsulas and different things." But that's the kind of yes mythic image or the symbolic, metaphorical—
- Tim: The metaphor. Yeah, that's right. It's metaphor. Conceiving of the world as Island.
- Jon: Yeah, clearly it is.
- Tim: Totally.
- Jon: We all live on an island.
- Tim: And in a way—
- Jon: Have you seen the Fuller Projection? This guy named Buckminster, he made what's called the fuller projection of map. It's a way to show the—
- Tim: The normal world maps are distorted?
- Jon: Yeah. If you take the globe and you unfold it, you have to decide how are you going to unfold it so that it's flat. And the way we typically do it makes it...It really ends up showing how disconnected everything is. But what he does is he takes this platonic shape called a hex-something, and he breaks up...You can see the shape here. So you could fold that into a globe.

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Tim: Wow.

Jon: And when you unfold it, it looks like it's one island.

Tim: It looks aside from Australia down there?

Jon: Australia is kind of—

Tim: Australia's the loner.

Jon: Then also Antarctica.

Tim: Antarctica, oh, yeah. Got it.

Jon: But then everything else is strong together.

Tim: Totally. It really just looks like one big island. The South America, North Asia...

Jon: If you're listening, just look up Fuller Projection and you can see the earth is one big island.

Tim: Wow. Then places Africa in the normal type of position that Europe is.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: In a normal conception, it's just upside down.

Jon: Yeah, South Africa's in the very top left corner of the map.

Tim: It's like it's in the northwest of this map.

Jon: Right. It's where Alaska would be. South Africa is where Alaska would be.

Tim: Wow, it's fascinating. There you go.

Jon: There it is, the Island Earth.

Tim: I think this is important. In other words, the imagery of the map, the cosmic map given to us, say, just even the first page of the Bible, so much debate and energy get spent on trying to recreate that map in terms of our conception of planet Earth. Now, with satellite technology is—

[crosstalk 00:25:09].

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- Tim: So I just wanted to say, "Wait, put the brakes on. Are we fundamentally misappropriating what this imagery is trying to communicate?"
- Jon: No one back then had satellite images.
- Tim: Because if you look at how biblical authors use this dry land, mountain, temple, Eden imagery, they use it as a source of imagery for what the images mean. So for them, the Eden as the garden temple on top of the dry land refuge is for them a fundamental image of heaven and earth together of God and humanity, of humans in their ideal vocation, and calling, image of God type of stuff.
- That's how biblical authors keep referring back to these images. They're not trying to build a precise map of the world. They're building a symbolic or metaphorical map of the world.
- Jon: Well, and the map that you have affects the way you think about the world.
- Tim: That's right. What framework could they have had other than the one they had from just by observation, looking around?
- Jon: If you go back to this Fuller thing, if you just looked at a typical map that you're used to—
- Tim: I see. He's saying, "If I was raised looking at a fuller map instead of this kind of map, I would actually think of the world as an island."
- Jon: You kind of would. That's why Buckminster did it that way is because he wanted people to see how connected everything was, really. Because when you look at a typical map, it's just you see these big ocean separating landmasses. And so we all feel very disconnected. You look at his...and all sudden, you realize, like, "Oh, we're all strung together as one landmass almost." So it helps you start to think more globally, actually, and less separated. That's powerful. It changes the way you think.
- Tim: Yes, it does.
- Jon: I guess what I hear you saying is, biblical authors are saying, obviously, they didn't have satellites, they didn't have photographers - Is that the right word? - who went around making maps of the known world. But they had a sense of their territory obviously, and what they knew was that you go out in the ocean, you die. Most likely. You stay on dry ground, you survive. The higher up you are the safer you are generally. With all that kind of basics, understanding is going, "Oh, okay."

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So my understanding of the world is that God has created this in such a way that where He wants us to be is at peace with things. To be at peace is going to be high up and planted there.

Tim: Planted on the dry land that was meant to become the garden.

Jon: Yeah, garden or around where we are actually changing nature to become ordered in a way that's good for humans.

Tim: And it's one humanity. God doesn't make Israelites on Page 1 of the Bible. He makes human. This is going to be a family of God video. It's a unified conception of dryland, it's also a unified conception of humanity as one extended family.

Jon: That's cool. This still doesn't help me understand how you say God is a mountain fortress.

Tim: We'll get there.

Tim: Here's another example from the book of Joel that just shows here's an Israelite poet, who for him the connection between the dry land, mountain, Jerusalem, temples, Zion and Eden. Look at how it leaks out of his consciousness. This is Joel Chapter 2. He says, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, that's another name for Jerusalem, sound the alarm on my holy hill - because the temples on the hill. Let all who live in the land tremble. A large and mighty army comes before them, the land is like the Garden of Eden."

He's thinking of Israel under the reign of David or Solomon. And for periods under their rule, it was like the ideal. Everyone under their vine and fig tree like the Garden of Eden. He compares Jerusalem under the rule of a few righteous kinds to Eden. But once exile happens, Babylon comes through, it's like a desert waste.

He's using these images of Genesis 1 and 2 to describe an army coming and defeating us and taking us into exile. But he wants to talk about it in terms of its cosmic significance. He's filling those historical events with cosmic meaning. He's placing them in a larger drama of God and creation. And so all of a sudden, the sacking of Jerusalem becomes like the garden coming over ground becoming a desert wasteland. That's the idea. So once again, the garden on the protected mountain is the fundamental default metaphor of humans—

Jon: Thriving and shalom.

Tim: Yeah, the whole image of the ideal. There you go. Last step. Here's another poet, biblical part, taken another direction. This is Psalm 48. "This is a song. A poem by the Sons of

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Korah." Psalm 48. "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise in the city of our God, his holy mountain. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the far reaches of the North, is Mount Zion, the City of God, the Great King. God is in her citadels; he is known to be her tall fortress. Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider her ramparts." You're getting a tour of Jerusalem.

The poem started "Great is the Lord, and great is the city that is the host of His temple. It's high and exalted. The whole earth finds joy in the temple in Jerusalem like the far reaches of the North," which is a way of talking about...that's what the Canaanites called Mount Hermon to the north, which is where they believed all the gods of their Pantheon dwelt.

So he's explicitly saying Mount Zion which is Yahweh's temple is the reality to what the Canaanites they've got their real far reaches of the North.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. Because there's one island.

Tim: That's right. Totally. There could be only one—

Jon: And they are on the mountain.

Tim: If there's only one true creator God, there's only one highest peak with the one true God. And it's not Baal's mountain up north. That's the idea. Now, take a tour around Jerusalem. Look at the walls, look at the ramparts so that you can tell them to the next generation. "For this is God, our God, forever and ever. He will guide us unto death." Into the poem arms.

Jon: You said that verse 14 is hard to translate.

Tim: Well, you've been looking at the city the entire poem, right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It was just so clear. The last line of the poem is, "This is God, Our God forever and ever; He will lead us all unto death." So the whole poem you've had your mind, this is about the holy mountains. All the images coming together. And to be in the holy mountain, well, sheesh, that's where you're reconnected with the giver of life there because that's where God is.

The last line of the poem just says this, this whole thing that the poem has been about, is our God and He will guide us unto death. Apparently, the city is a citadel and a protector. All this stuff about the walls and the rampart is defense.

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So the last line of the poem is like this kicker at the end where you're like, "Oh, I thought I was getting a tour of ancient Jerusalem, but actually, I think I'm getting a tour of the new Jerusalem. And if I'm there, apparently, I can be brought through death and out the other side if I'm living here."

Jon: That's what he means by "He'll guide us unto death"?

Tim: He saying, "The city is God." That's what the last line of the poem says. "This is God." So if I'm taking refuge in God, which is the protective city, who's the enemy? What am I being protected from?

Jon: Yeah, it's other nations.

Tim: It's not other nations. That last line of the poem equates God with the fortress Garden of Eden on the mountaintop. To be in fortress is to be defended from death, apparently. So that last line of the poem of Psalm 48 is all a sudden bringing this physical image of Mount Zion Jerusalem into the larger biblical drama of Eden. Eden is the place of...

Jon: I got that.

Tim: ...the river of life and the tree of life, and if humans are there, they live. But the moment humans leave or exiled or banished from the garden, there in the realm of death, because they're cut off from the source of life. You can see this poem is expressing when this poet looks at the temple in Jerusalem, it fills his mind with a storyline about the meaning of life, and about the source of life, and what death is.

That's a good example. We just went on a long train of different texts from all over the Old Testament. But there's really just one basic storyline and one set of images that are being developed here.

Jon: So "God is the city" it's a metaphor?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Because God is in a city?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: But you can take that schema of the cosmic mountain and then you can say, "Okay, what are the elements that make the schema work"? The heights, the protection, the life that comes out of it, all these things, now attribute those to the character of God.

Tim: Correct.

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- Jon: Then you get this metaphor. Now, a couple questions. One is, is that really a predominant metaphor throughout Scripture? You gave me one example, does it come up a lot? Then I guess the second question is, it's just one of many metaphors of what God is like, right?
- Tim: Correct. Yeah, that's right.
- Jon: The second question. You made a list of four that come out of what?
- Tim: Genesis 1 and 2.
- Jon: Genesis 1 and 2. In my mind, I was thinking, "Oh, so these four are really important for the whole narrative scripture." So am I supposed to be thinking throughout Scripture God like a cosmic mountain? Is that supposed to be a guiding metaphor or is it just one of many?
- Tim: It's one of many, but as you read through, you come across it so many times. It's clearly a dominant. You can see why it was introduced to you on page one; the dryland, garden, mountain thing. Gosh, if we just did a word study on rock, fortress, refuge just in the book of Psalms alone, you're going to get dozens of hits. These are just a sampling, but Gosh, I don't even want to wait. Here, let's do it real time.
- Jon: Do it.
- Tim: I have 78 hits of rock, fortress, refuge in the Book of Psalms.
- Jon: Out of like 150 Psalms?
- Tim: Yeah. And over half of the Psalms...and for some of them, "The Lord is my rock, my deliverer. He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him," every one of these is from different Psalms. "O Lord, my rock, and my Redeemer, in the secret place He'll Hide me in His tent, lifting me up on the rock." That's Psalm 27. So the tent is the tabernacle...
- Jon: And it's up on a rock.
- Tim: ...which is on a high rock. The tabernacle was carried around the wilderness. That's a good one. "To you, O Lord, I call my rock. Don't be death." So the rock listen. The divine rock does. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Eating, you eat the Lord? You taste the Lord's goodness? "How blessed are those who take refuge in Him." So garden, Eden, and then cosmic mountain, refuge. So we're combining garden mountain imagery from Genesis 1 and 2 here.

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Psalm 40. "He brought me up out of the pit." We'll get to the waters after this. "He set my feet on the High Rock." So being brought up out of the mud and the waters and being set on top of the mountain, you could say, "Oh, but that's universal." Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Up is good and down is bad." But you are reading the Hebrew Scriptures that started with Page 1.

Jon: For them, they're pulling from that image. There's that quote you read, I think at the end of the last conversation of surplus of meaning that comes out an image which it seems like, yeah, up is good, down is bad, but now it's connecting you to a story.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So now, it's not just a safe rock, is connecting you to this idea of the divine, sacred territory that God designed for humans to flourish, and be protected, and thrive.

Tim: Yeah, "the High Rock refuge safe from the waters" has a very specific meaning in this story.

Jon: This is an example of that being a very...that's a core metaphor to anyone in ancient Israel, it's just—

Tim: Well, to the biblical authors.

Jon: To the biblical authors?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I guess there's basic metaphors that I just grow up with because they're just in culture. At least in some segment of—

Tim: However, big the circle of Moses and the prophets and biblical authors were, you get the picture throughout the story that it's not the majority.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Remember the Hebrew Bible's minority report.

Jon: But they still would have had sacred mountains.

Tim: But they're drawing on common ideas. That's right.

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Jon: Because nowadays, besides Mount Olympus and stuff, I don't go around thinking in terms of cosmic mountain.

Tim: Totally.

Jon: It doesn't shape the way I explain things or imagine things.

Tim: Cosmic mountain was a common cross-cultural way of thinking about the divine relationship to our world. The connection is at mountaintop.

Jon: And their specific cosmic mountain was one where humans flourished with God. It gets so layered though because then it becomes the city of Jerusalem...

Tim: Eden is Jerusalem.

Jon: ...and then it also becomes just a way to talk about God.

Tim: Correct. But I think that—

Jon: I don't know, my brain hurts.

Tim: But think of it as, God plants the garden, what is it that really gives the life to the humans in the Garden of Eden? It's not magic trees or magic rivers. It's the ideas that God is the divine provider of life and sustenance. That's why to be exiled from the garden is death. You're cut off from the source of life.

So God and the garden on top of the mountain all become an associated set of ideas. And so I can take refuge in the temple, I can take refuge in Jerusalem, I can take refuge in God. God Himself can be my refuge. "I can dwell in the shadow of your wings." In terms of thinking of the cherubim, the wings of the cherubim that overshadow the Ark of the Covenant, only the high priest goes in there once a year.

You know, I mean? Like, take shelter under the wings. But you have all these biblical pilots talking about how they take shelter in God's wings. What is that supposed to mean? It means being connected to the ideal, and the temple, and Eden and Jerusalem, and so on.

These are just all connected ideas, and they're going to be connected even more of these metaphors. But that's, I don't know...How are you doing?

Jon: I'm just trying to trying to make sure I understand the significance of this. I mean, in one sense, we can just say, "Hey, here's a metaphor you probably don't even really think

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about, but it's so basic to the biblical imagination." That is a simple takeaway. Now, when I run into it, I can see it. That's great.

But now I kind of want to understand really what it's getting at. Is it just getting at security? Is it getting at the sense of...?

Tim: The ideal.

Jon: The ideal?

Tim: The ideal.

Jon: It's getting at the ideal?

Tim: What's the ideal state of human existence in God's world? Safe.

Jon: So is the metaphor, really, the ideal is a mountain fortress? Is that the basic underlying metaphor?

Tim: Oh, I see.

Jon: And God is just one kind of offshoot of that? If that's the case, God is ideal and so God also is the mount fortress.

Tim: The ideal state is the mountain, garden, fortress.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. That helps me because I never think that. For me, my ideal state is sleeping in and then being able to read a book in my bed or something.

Tim: Yeah, totally. That's right.

Jon: Or I don't know, my ideal place would be, you know...It's so funny some people's ideal place is actually on a cliff overlooking the chaotic waters. Like building their house on bluff. That's the ideal place, and that would not be the ideal place for it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. You're right. Page one is asking us to imagine the ideal state of humanity is in covenant relationship with God, imaging God through creative work and responsibility on—

Jon: On cosmic garden mountain.

Tim: On a mountain where it's stable, and I can see everything. It's a fortress. I'm safe from threat of harm. It's a garden. It's a beautiful abundance.

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Jon: Abundance.

Tim: Yeah, that's the idea.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Ideal state is the mountain garden and fortress. And that is what is created on pages 1 and 2 of the Bible, and that gives the storehouse of imagery then for the biblical poets to talk about eternal life, to talk about the blessing of God through Abraham to all of the nations, to talk about the New Jerusalem, to talk about what God can be to me in the midst of the chaos in my life. That's the core image.

Jon: Nice.

Tim: Payoff.

Jon: The payoff. Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. This episode was edited and produced by Dan Gummel. There is one more episode on biblical metaphors. Obviously, we could have many more episodes but we're just going to do one more to talk about one final foundational biblical metaphor that begins in Genesis and continues on. We've already alluded to it. It is about the chaotic waters and danger. It's going to be great.

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