

H2R Wisdom E6 Final

Solomon the Cynic & The Job You Never Knew

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Tim: Hey, this is Tim at The Bible Project. Today on the podcast, we are going to finish our series on How to Read the Wisdom Literature in the Bible. If you've been tracking with our conversation so far, you'll know that we've been covering these books in the Bible that are associated with Solomon. We began his story, actually, way before him back in the Garden of Eden with the failed human quest for wisdom that resulted in humanity's exile. Solomon comes as a new Adam figure who gets things right, who trust God to give him wisdom, at least for a little while, until you replay the failure of Adam and Eve. So this is the context for the wisdom books, the books of Solomon in the Bible.

In the previous episodes, we've looked at Proverbs and the Song of Songs, and today we're going look at two books connected to the wisdom literature, the book of Ecclesiastes, and the book of Job. Ecclesiastes is kind of like the cold wet blanket thrown on you in the Hebrew Bible. You read it, and it's either depressing, or I like to think of it as just a heavy dose of realism. This book is unique and different in that Solomon isn't actually named, but the figure that we meet speaking in the book is a Solomon-like person. Jon and I explore what that means and the fascinating implications.

This Solomon figure has eaten some humble pie in his life. In Solomon's story, it's because he didn't truly live by God's wisdom, he failed royally (pun intended), and he didn't rule wisely as God called him to. So it's as if in Ecclesiastes we hear the voice of this failed elder Solomon looking back over his life of hardship, and he's trying to warn the next generation of the things that he has learned the hard way so that perhaps you don't have to.

After that, Jon and I are going to talk about the book of Job yet again. I learned a whole bunch of new stuff recently about the book of Job, and so we're going to process that in this conversation. The character of Job is presented as someone who was upright, he fears God, he does the right thing. He's the ideal wisdom figure that Solomon and Adam and Eve and Abraham, all of these people in the Hebrew Bible. He is what none of them were, a truly righteous wise person who fears God, and yet he suffers unfairly. God even said so. So what is up with that?

The Book of Job is actually staring that paradox or contradiction of faith right in the face. The last chapter of the book has a number of puzzles that unlocked for me recently in reading some work of some other scholars. And so I'm excited to share that with you because the role of Job in the Hebrew Bible just leaped off the page in how it connects to the New Testament and the story of Jesus in some really profound and exciting ways. All that and more in this conversation on Ecclesiastes and Job. Thanks for joining us, you guys. Here we go.

Jon: We are in a series about the Wisdom Literature and we are going to talk about the book of Ecclesiastes.

Tim: Yes, we are.

Jon: The last episode was Song of Songs, before that it was Proverbs. We're taking all of these books that are thematically related in the idea of the pursuit of wisdom.

Tim: Humanity's pursuit of wisdom. Or wisdom's pursuit of humanity.

Jon: Yeah. Which is a fundamental idea in the story of the Bible, which we see in Genesis - the garden narratives.

Tim: If humans are going to be the images of God ruling in the world, they will need wisdom.

Jon: We will need wisdom.

Tim: The question is, whose wisdom and how do you get it and define it? That's what the Eden story lays it out.

Jon: It's easy for me to miss that in the Eden story because the knowledge of good and evil as a phrase, or good and bad as we talked about, tov and ra', it doesn't necessarily smack of pursuing wisdom.

Tim: Well, it is the word "knowledge" which is a wisdom type of word.

Jon: Yeah, it's related.

Tim: And remember when Eve sees the tree, she does say it is desirable for gaining wisdom.

Jon: That's right. I love how at the end of the last episode you quoted from...

Tim: Ellen Davis.

Jon: Yeah. She made the observation that I heard you make before or you might have gotten it from her, of imagining that those walks with God in the breezy part of the day. Or a moment for God to relationally impart His wisdom. "Here's how you're going to rule with me." And it was a very connected, relational, intimate way of living with the divine. So with all that in mind, coming back, because we've talked about Ecclesiastes before - I think there are two or three episodes deep in the archives - but we're going to come back fresh eyes.

Tim: Yeah. The three books of Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs are all hyperlinked through Solomon into the Solomon story in the book of 1 Kings, which is an elaborate replaying of the Garden of Eden story. And so his search for wisdom, his finding, what you think is he finds divine wisdom and creates a little Eden.

Jon: Yeah, he does.

Tim: He also starts slowly doing things by his own wisdom, and then it all falls apart. So these three books of Solomon are linked into Solomon story, but they are making it universal as the humanity story like it is in the garden. Proverbs, we saw that, did Song of Songs. Ecclesiastes comes in as the...it's just as unique and different from

the other two Solomon books as the Song of Songs is unique. Because here we meet a sad Solomon.

Jon: Yeah, a cynical...

Tim: A cynical chasing Solomon who has eaten some humble pie. But again, this fits in. It fits in. Just like Song of Songs is like a what if, Solomon hadn't stumbled and fallen and...

Jon: What if Adam and Eve.

Tim: What if Adam and Eve hadn't done what they did? This becomes an Ecclesiastes...not a hypothetical scenario. This actually is more realistic. Imagine Solomon at the end of his life looking back, and what would he say? However, the plot thickens immediately as you open the first line, as you look at the first line of the book.

I have two different translations represented here in the notes. "The words of the preacher, son of David king in Jerusalem." That's the New American Standard, English Standard, King James. But the NIV and the NRSV read "the words of the teacher son of David. So preacher or teacher? We went with teacher in our video. I feel fine about that for the purpose of the video. But if you want to have the next level conversation, it gets a lot more interesting. Because the Hebrew word being translated here is not the word "teacher" or "preacher."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The Hebrew word is "qoheleth."

Jon: Qoheleth.

Tim: Qoheleth. It's a verbal noun from the verb "qahal," which means "to assemble or to convene" a group of people. Interestingly, Solomon, in the prominent moment in his story was someone who qahaled people. He was a qahaler. A convener or gatherer. And it's when he dedicated the temple in 1 Kings 8:1. "Solomon qahaled all the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and brought up the Ark of the Covenant from the city of David. All the men of Israel assembled themselves." So Solomon was a convener, but he wasn't the only convener. This is fascinating.

The people who convene all of Israel it's a pretty shortlist. I've put it right there in front of you. So people who do this verb to the to the Israelites: Moses is the first one, David, Solomon, Rehoboam who is Solomon son, and then three other kings from the line of David, Sons of David: Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. So convening all Israel is a royal task.

Jon: Israel's kings.

Tim: Yeah. So here is the million-dollar question. Why does the book of Ecclesiastes open up saying, "the words of the convener - the words of one who convenes"? Why doesn't it say, Solomon?

Jon: Like the Song of Songs says, "To Solomon."

Tim: Song of Songs in relation to Solomon. The book of Proverbs opens, "The Proverbs of Solomon." Why doesn't this open "the words of Solomon" if he's the only one that we're supposed to connect this book too. Why is he called the convener?

Jon: So evidently, we're supposed to connect this book in a more general sense to just kings in the line of David?

Tim: Correct. I think so. In other words, what we're hearing is the voice of the line of David, primarily through the Solomon persona. But as we're going to see, we're going to hear echoes of multiple kings from the line of David in the words of the teacher. Solomon isn't the only king from the line of David who's being hyperlinked to here. But he is the first son of David, and he was the first to build the greatest Eden that Israel ever saw in Jerusalem.

Jon: And the most famous.

Tim: So I'm going to call it a Solomon-like persona.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: But think of it like, you know, those photo mosaics. It'll be like a famous person, but then it's made up of hundreds of pictures of maybe other famous people. I don't know. Something like that. So this would be...

Jon: A picture of Solomon. And it's a bunch of...

Tim: It's all the kings from the line of David that you read about in 1 and 2 Kings. So a very helpful book. Again, a scholar Jennie Barbour, she wrote a book called "The Story of Israel in the Book of Qoheleth" that is all about this.

Jon: The Book of Qoheleth. Is that what she's calling this book?

Tim: That's right. In scholarship, it's often just called Qoheleth, not Ecclesiastes. Because they just refer to it by the Hebrew name.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Ecclesiastes, I'm pretty sure it's the title that was given to the book in later Christian tradition based on the Septuagint translation of the word "Qoheleth" as Ecclesiastes, namely the church gatherer.

Jon: Right, okay.

Tim: The word "church" means "the ones called together" or "the ones called out." So just on this point, Jennie Barbour says, "The name Qoheleth means the one who convenes the assembly. This is a label with royal associations. After Moses, only kings summon all Israelite assemblies."

Jon: And Moses was even called a king.

Tim: And Moses is called king once. "And those associations taken more kings than just Solomon." I like this. "Qoheleth's name cast him as a royal archetype, not in every man so much as in every king."

Jon: In every king.

Tim: He's all the Davidic kings in one persona.

Jon: Which everyone is called to be a king.

Tim: Totally. The role of kings over creation is given to male and female on page 1. The other thing, just an interesting note is, any of the kings from the line of David could be called the Son of David. In other words, the phrase "Son of David"...

Jon: Yeah, it doesn't mean your biological son.

Tim: That's right. Hezekiah who has many generations down could be called the Son of David. In Ecclesiastes 2:9, the speaker says, "I increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem."

Jon: Right. And if it was just Solomon...

Tim: I mean, his dad founded Jerusalem. There hasn't been any other king except his dad.

Jon: That's a sly way to be like, "I'm better than my dad."

Tim: But when you hear Hezekiah in here or Asa or Jehoshaphat or Rehoboam, then that comment begins to make more sense. Essentially, what I think we're meant to see here is a jaded king at the end of Israel story bringing a bit of realism to the pursuit of wisdom. And remember the phrase "under the sun," "life here under the sun," I think is this book's way of talking about life outside the garden. Life exiled from Eden.

So pursue wisdom, but just know I thought side here the garden is a vapor. And even your best efforts will usually result in mixed results.

Jon: Right. We could practice garden life, but we're still outside the garden.

Tim: We are still outside the garden.

Jon: Things aren't going to go as planned.

Tim: Correct. Time will catch up with you. Remember the three...

Jon: Yeah, the march of time, the randomness of life.

Tim: Randomness of life and death. And death itself.

Jon: Yeah, and the grave.

Tim: ...throw this wet blanket over all of our efforts to fear God and live by His wisdom. Which doesn't mean don't fear God and live by his wisdom. It just means don't expect your whole life to be like Eden if you do that.

So think, for example, one of the big themes of the book is labor and toil and how you work so hard. All this vocabulary of labor and toil comes right from Genesis 3 where God says, "Cursed is the ground, in painful toil, you'll eat of it all the days of your life. You're going to be planting fields but it's going to grow thorns and thistles." You're like, "I didn't want that. I didn't want weeds. I'm looking for vegetables here."

Jon: Work is going to be work.

Tim: Totally, yeah. And then it's going to be work - again, back to Genesis 3 - until you return to the ground. Because from it you're taken, you are dust and to dust you go back. That little line right there is just...

Jon: It's like the seedbed for ...

Tim: Yeah, half the book is all this vocabulary.

Jon: Let me tell you about this cruel reality outside of the Eden garden.

Tim: Totally. I'm going to let you read one.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Think of that line that we just read in Genesis 3, and then think of this paragraph from chapter 2.

Jon: "Therefore, I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. When there's a man who labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with him. This too is vanity."

Tim: It's hevel. Vapor.

Jon: Hevel.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This is hevel.

Tim: A great ra'.

Jon: Whoa, a great ra'. A great bad thing. A very bad thing. "For what does a man get in all his labor and in all his striving which he labors under the sun because all his days, his task is painful and grievous. Even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is hevel." Vapor.

Tim: This is exactly meditating on life exiled from the garden. Totally. It's exactly what it is. When he talks about death, he'll talk about returning to the dust. In chapter 3 there's

this whole thing about, you know what, the animals return to the dust and so do you. So don't think too highly of yourself.

Jon: Yeah. I like to not think about that.

Tim: Men, I had this weird experience where Jessica and I took the boys to a water park. It was a cold Portland day on Saturday. We went to the water park for two hours and just like had fun.

Jon: On a cold day?

Tim: Cold day outside. Oh, an indoor waterpark. East Portland Community Center, they have a big, lazy river, a whirlpool, and a big slide. So anyway, August, for the first time was tall enough, my younger son was tall enough to go on the slide but he had go on my lap. Can't go by himself. He's too short go by himself but tall enough to go with me. So recently, feels good putting his head under the water. It was like a kid in the candy store.

Jon: "Let's do it again. Let's keep going."

Tim: We did it 20 times. I mean, it's like just an hour going up and down the stairs. I was exhausted. But dude, having him sit in my lap...and we're pretending we're a race car. It was like a parenting highlight moment. It was so fun. And to do it 20 times, and to see it be just as exciting 20 times over, it was really one of the sweet moments of life. I'll remember that for the rest of my life. This is joy and excitement and we had so much fun together.

And because we were repeating it over and over, and so there was a line sometimes, I'm so screwed up. I started to have these meta reflections on like, "You know I'm going to die one day." I couldn't believe it. I was like, "No, just enjoy the moment." And I found as we kept going round and round, I started feeling like, this is like life just round and round and round...

Jon: The repetition of life.

Tim: ...and then pretty soon this little guy is going to be grown-up, and I'm going to be an old man and I'm going to die and I'm going to lose all this, and I won't have these moments anymore. That's what I was thinking.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: I couldn't be present.

Jon: You got it deep.

Tim: Yeah, that's how my mind works. That's Ecclesiastes. It's like, even with the beauty of the garden and trusting the resurrection, and new creation, there's a grievous sadness to the world as we experience under the sun. And it's sobering, and you can't avoid it. We spent a lot of our mental energy pushing those thoughts to the margin so that we can function...

Jon: Totally. Protecting ourselves from those things.

Tim: ...and the book of Ecclesiastes just says, "No, stare reality in the face. We're outside the garden and you're going to die."

Jon: We kind of talked about this as that kind of the cantankerous teacher who he wants to get eyes out of you and he wants you to stare at something uncomfortable.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. I remember in our previous conversation from a couple of years ago, he's like that friend that you only want to be around in small amount.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You enjoy talking to him, but he's kind of dark and you don't want to hang out with him too long.

Jon: But he gives you a really good perspective.

Tim: But he reminds me of important things that you don't want to forget. My point here for this video is, notice again, a book of Solomon, and here we are back meditating on Genesis 1-3. Just like in Proverbs just like in Song of Songs so too here.

Here's something interesting. Ecclesiastes in the early part begins with our Solomon figure telling us about how he was king greater than all the kings before him in Jerusalem. He talks about how he made a little Eden in the city. This was Jenny Barbour who pointed this out in her book. So many people just assume Oh, that's recalling the story we read in 1 Kings of him building the temple in Jerusalem and everyone under their own fig tree and gold and all this. And that's true that is calling back to that. That itself is a hyperlink to Eden.

So get ready for how the line of kings works. Every king after Solomon becomes just another little repetition of Solomon for good or bad. That list in Ecclesiastes 2:4-10, he says, "I made my works great. I built houses for myself. I planted vineyards for myself. I made gardens and parks. I planted fruit trees." You can see Genesis 3 leaping off the page here. "I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees, male and female slaves, home-born slaves, flocks, herds more abundant than all before me in Jerusalem. I collected silver and gold and the treasure of kings. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men, many concubines."

So you can hear the Solomon story from there, but most of this vocabulary is actually hyperlinked to the story of Hezekiah. That list actually more precisely maps on to the building accomplishments of Hezekiah as described in 2 Chronicles. Jenny Barbour points this out. So this is part of her larger argument to say the Solomon-like voice is actually drawing upon the narratives about all of the sons of David, not just Solomon. Because the Hezekiah story is very similar. He has a great start, builds Eden, rescues the city from Assyria. And then the last story about him is how he blows it with these emissaries from Babylon and sinks the ship.

Again, a quote from Jenny Barbour about this. She says, "In all of these ways, the building projects, the riches, the treasuries, the pools, and the singers, the royal

boast in Ecclesiastes 2 displays a king's achievements in terms that show how an author of the Second Temple period is reading and interpreting the stories of Israel's kings. In other words, what she's saying, this is her view on the authorship of the book. You can disagree with her. That's fine. But it's an interesting perspective.

Any view of the authorship of the book has to account for why Solomon isn't named and why the persona and the voice is hyperlinking to stories of all of the kings, not just Solomon. So her way of saying is, this is a really late biblical author who's created a voice and persona speaking as if it's the whole line of David, the sad line of David sitting in exile.

She goes on. She says, "The writer has pulled together texts and motifs from Israel's history to show that the paradigm King Solomon set the mould that was continually replicated through the rest of Israel's monarchy, right down to the exile." She shows how in Jewish interpretive tradition, ancient Jewish leaders saw these connections, and so they portrayed Solomon as actually foreseeing the whole history of his line crashing, and burning in exile as the context for the book of Ecclesiastes.

Jon: Not a fun vision.

Tim: No. This is in the Aramaic translations of the book called The Targums to Ecclesiastes. It portrays him sitting on his throne having a vision of the whole history leading to the exile. And then he writes this book.

Jon: There's like an edition in that version of the book?

Tim: Yeah. It's an imaginative interpretation in early Jewish tradition. But again, it tells us how people read the book.

Jon: Oh, it's a separate book? Got it. Targum to Ecclesiastes.

Tim: The Targum is Aramaic translation of Ecclesiastes.

Jon: Oh, it is a translation.

Tim: The translation, well, it is very, very interpretive translation.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: And it includes at the beginning of it, Solomon having a vision of the whole kingdom crashing and burning and then writing the book of Ecclesiastes.

Jon: Right.

Tim: And it kind of makes sense.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Totally. Anyhow, we could fill this out a whole lot more, but that's the basic insight. I think that Jenny Barbour isn't just making this up. I think she's paying attention to

how the book fits in alongside Proverbs and Song of Songs hyperlinked to the Solomon story. But the Solomon story is just a gateway into Adam and Eve story, and now, here to the story of the monarchy of David, and how all of that is just itself reiterating and riffing off of the Adam and Eve story. Failed rulers, pursued their own wisdom trying to build their own Eden. But outside the garden, even our best Edens will always be compromised and vapor and hevel and won't give us what we're really looking for.

[00:24:33]

- Jon: It's cool how nuanced and complex the wisdom literature is as it relates to the pursuit of wisdom. Because in Ecclesiastes, it's never like, "Don't pursue wisdom." It's fear the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.
- Tim: The final words of the book are still fear the Lord and keep His commandments.
- Jon: Yeah. It's just this big asterisk of like, as you do remember we're not in the garden. And you might accomplish some really great things that end up falling apart, or you're just going to die one day.
- Tim: Yeah, you'll have to pass it on.
- Jon: You're going to pass it on. Just keep that in mind that on this side of new creation, have a little balance in your expectations. And it seems like that same kind of balance is there in Song of Songs a little bit in this whole like pursue. And then you get there, but then all sudden, it starts over and you're pursuing it again. "Okay, I found it." And then, "No, it's over."
- Tim: "It found me."
- Jon: It found me." It's kind of the cyclical approach of this kind of realism to your pursuit of wisdom will be this lifelong ongoing pursuit that will be satisfied in some ways, but then in another way will never be completely satisfied.
- Tim: Ecclesiastes is a remarkable book. All of these books are remarkable. They're just remarkable texts. But it's such a realistic, honest portrayal all of our lived experience. This is leaping forward then into New Testament theology. But the Apostle Paul and Peter, John, they have no hesitation to say like, "If anyone is in the Messiah, new creation..."
- Jon: It's happening.
- Tim: It's happening. The new humanity has been created in the cross and resurrection. "We've been given new birth through the hope of the resurrection," Peter says. It's very much inviting the future has arrived now in the present. The same Paul that says that can also say, "But remember, your sinful nature, the flesh is still at war, and..."
- Jon: "And I have not yet attained the resurrection."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. I haven't yet attained the resurrection. But he can experience his power even in the midst of his suffering. The New Testament offers that same balanced nuance between the now and the not yet. And Ecclesiastes is mostly focusing on the now. Very little emphasis on the now. But that's what other books of the Hebrew Bible are for is to do more of that stuff.

Jon: The curmudgeon of the Hebrew Scripture.

Tim: Yeah, totally. So again, we could spend a lot more time talking about Ecclesiastes. What I'm interested in this video is, again, the frame, the narrative context in which we come to read the wisdom books so that we make sure we're reading them along the lines that the authors want us to - the authors of the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Now, how does that narrative frame of the pursuit of wisdom affect the way you think about Ecclesiastes? It's different than the way we approached it in the previous video.

Tim: Oh, yeah. Well, if you think the other video we were approaching the main themes of the convener, the teacher, and then we were kind of just universalizing them. And I think that's right. Like the story of Solomon and the kings of from the line of David aren't just there for historical interest.

Jon: And we were juxtaposing it against the themes of Proverbs.

Tim: That's right. I feel wonderful about our wisdom trilogy. But it had a different aim, which was to make the messages of those books almost connect immediately to the listener or the viewer. Here in the series on How to Read the Bible, it's about setting these but in their kind of first layer of meaning, which is the narrative framework of the Hebrew Bible. But the narrative framework of the Hebrew Bible is all rooted in the Adam and Eve story, which is about all humanity.

Jon: So let me ask in a different way. What kind of insights do you get about the quest for wisdom reading Ecclesiastes?

Tim: I think we just talked about it.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What we're drawing attention to is why is this book connected to the sons of David, and why is it spoken from the voice of this king who built all this amazing stuff but is now reflecting on it in light of the exile. So it's more than that. It's the next level of understanding these books as why the Solomon layer of the identity of the speaker, I guess. That's really it. The themes of the book are the same.

Jon: As we pursue wisdom, fear of the Lord, be kind of honest and ready for the random chaotic outside of Eden nature of reality is still the setting,

Tim: Correct. The fact that things won't work out, that I might experience suffering or pain unjustly, or for no reason that I can discern, doesn't mean that everything I believe is a sham or that God hates me, or is punishing me. We're just outside the garden. It's

living in the fog - the image of the vapor. It's hazy. And we have to do our best to live by wisdom and the fear of the Lord, but also have tempered expectations.

If you have tempered expectations, you're just surprised at every good thing that happens. It just becomes a gift. That's why I actually don't mind having such a, you know, the moment on the water slide. I think some people would be bummed if that's how their mind worked, like always thinking about your coming death. But for me, it sobers me and then it makes the water slide moment so sweet just like a precious gift. And every one of those I get just becomes this surprise.

Jon: Just in talks about that kind of idea in terms of a metaphor of draw a string curtains like in hotel room, where it's just curtains that when you open up one side, it opens up to the other side at the same time. Like you can't open just one side. And so that as the metaphor for how we experience emotions and passions, it's like we just want the like happy water slide moments with our kids, and we just want that high, and we want that other side of the curtain to stay close. But opening one side of the curtain allows the other side of the curtain open too.

Tim: That's right. That's sweet moment with my son on the water slide is a companion to many difficult moments of tantrums and messes and broken furniture, broken windows. And that all. Yeah, it's both sides of the curtain. I like that.

[00:32:02]

Jon: Great. That's Ecclesiastes. That leaves Job?

Tim: Leaves Job, which is the only book connected to the wisdom literature that isn't explicitly connected to Solomon.

Jon: But it is explicitly connected to the pursuit of wisdom.

Tim: And the fear of the Lord.

Jon: And the fear of the Lord.

Tim: So Proverbs, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord. Wisdom and the fear of the Lord are main themes of Job. Actually, as we're going to see, Solomon's in the mix. There's Solomon [hyperlink](#), but not just Solomon. So the book of Job is connected into the wisdom literature, but actually, it's connected into the entire Hebrew Bible.

I'm going to force us to have a short, concise conversation about how the book of Job fits into this narrative context for the wisdom books. But I'm just like, when I opened Job and I start working on it, and following the [hyperlinks](#), I just jaw on the floor. Whoever wrote this had the rest of the Hebrew Bible in front of him or had the rest of the Hebrew Bible...

Jon: In his mind.

Tim: Yeah. I mean, just literally every other line is a virtual quotation or [hyperlink](#) to almost every book in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: It's crazy to think of somebody's mind.

Jon: So this was clearly written later?

Tim: Yeah. But it's set. It's narratively set in ancient period. And I think I'm beginning to understand why which I guess we can talk about. So what I want to pay attention to is the narrative opening and the narrative conclusion in the middle of all the dialogues and the poetry the Job and his friends, which is amazing. I just want to pay attention because it's the beginning and ending...knows that Proverbs was like this. The beginning and ending linked us to Solomon. Song songs, the beginning, and ending. Ecclesiastes, beginning and ending that we didn't get as deep, but same with Job.

Opening line of the book of Job. "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless, upright, fearing God, turning away from ra'.

Jon: Yeah, there it is. He's the man of wisdom.

Tim: Totally. "Blameless and upright..."

Jon: That's a high claim.

Tim: It is. It is. Noah was the first blameless one, Abraham was the second.

Jon: So this doesn't mean he didn't do anything wrong.

Tim: Oh, well, just pause.

Jon: Pause.

Tim: Hold on. "Fearing God, turning away from ra'." That phrase "fearing God turning away from ra'" just appears in like one other book of the Hebrew Bible. It's the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is spoken from Solomon to the line of David, my son. In Job, we find Noah, Abraham, and the idealized, obedient wise line of David all embodied in one character. And he's not even Israelite. So good.

Jon: You're saying these things, blameless and upright, is linking it to Moses and Noah?

Tim: Oh, I know. When we open the story, "there was a man blameless and upright, so and so," oh, okay. There are only a few stories that begin that way. Noah, and then Abraham. Abraham is a more compromised character, actually.

Jon: So this is a Noah type Abraham-like character who also is a character, who is embracing fully realizing the Proverb ideal.

Tim: The Proverbs embracing wisdom ideal. Yeah. But where does he live? In the land of Uz.

Jon: The land of Uz.

Tim: Uz only appears a few times in the Hebrew Bible, and it's all connected to Abraham's family. We're in the family. When we say something's happening in the land of Uz for an Israelite, we're like, "Oh."

Jon: We're like a family tree.

Tim: They're are akin. Uz first appears in Genesis 10, where a figure named Uz is a son...remember Noah has three sons, Japheth, Ham Shem.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Shem has many descendants. Among them are Uz and also Eber - and Eber is the Hebrew word for Hebrew. Eevriy - who becomes a great grandfather of Abraham. Already on page 10 of Genesis, Uz and the line of Abraham are kinsmen in the line of Shem.

Jon: Got it. Job's not Israelite, he's connected.

Tim: Yeah, he's a Shemite.

Jon: Shemite. okay.

Tim: I go further down, and in Genesis 36, I discover that Uz is a great-grandson of Esau. Jacob and Esau. This is a different Uz.

Jon: Oh, a different Uz.

Tim: Well, but it's the same name.

Jon: Right.

Tim: There's another Uz. The two Uz's are ones in the line of Shem. Then this one is a great-grandson of Esau who's Abraham's grandson. Then in the book of Lamentation, there's other time Uz appears. And Uz is identified with the land of Edom, which is where Esau went and settled.

The whole point is, I meet a figure who's like Noah, and Abraham, an ideal wise person, and he's in the land of Uz. I'm imagining the most righteous human, but who's in the parallel line of Abraham living out there in the desert. That's the idea.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: We go on. He had seven sons, three daughters, and all these possessions: 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 Ox, and 500 donkeys.

Jon: He's loaded.

Tim: He was loaded. He was more great than all the sons of the east.

Jon: So he's the dude.

Tim: The sons of the East, these are all the eastern tribes from the line of Abraham. He sends his son, Midian. There are all these tribes that go from Abraham, his third wife, Keturah, and then they all go out and move in this area. They'll settle to the east.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it's a parallel line of Abraham out there. It's fascinating. That phrase "he was more great than all the sons of the east" is a copy and paste from the Solomon story.

Jon: That Solomon was more great than all the sons of the east?

Tim: I've got the parallel.

Jon: Yeah, I remember that. Oh, where are you at? Page?

Tim: This is page 31. When we're talking about Solomon's wisdom, it was more great than the wisdom of all the sons of the east. And that's also where we learned about his proverbs and his songs on this kind of thing. So Solomon was more great than all the sons of the east. Job was more great than all the sons of the east.

Jon: Kind of like a Solomon kind of guy.

Tim: Totally. Here's where I think this lands us. Job is like an Israelite wisdom experiment. We are imagining the most righteous, God-fearing, wise person.

Jon: Likened to all of our heroes of the faith.

Tim: Just like we have all of our versions of that in the Israelite tradition, our parallel family over there, our brothers over there, they had one too.

Jon: This is like the multiverse Spider-Man thing.

Tim: Whoa, whoa. Here, let's play that out. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Yeah. It's similar but different.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So welcome to the spider-verse.

Jon: Welcome to the spider. It's not a title.

Tim: There's a movie where parallel universes all have their own spider hero figure. And then in this movie, they all come together from parallel universes. And they are similar, they have spidey powers, but they're different. One is Gwen, spider woman, there's Peter Parker, spider pig.

Jon: What a great movie.

Tim: That was an awesome movie. Welcome to the wisdom verse.

Jon: What we expect as the Israelite, Solomon, Moses-like rad dude, we've been tracing that idea theme ad nauseum through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This one's saying like, "Hey, let's do that. But let's put them in..."

Tim: The parallel family of their need.

Jon: Their parallel family and their differently land. And then let's go with that.

Tim: That's right. As you go through the roster of characters that Job is parallel to, all of them were righteous for some portion of their story, Noah, Abraham, David Solomon, but all of them also had moments of failure that resulted in their suffering and misery and so on. Except one. Well, actually, that's not true. There was one who had a period of blameless perfection. And that's the archetype of all of them, namely, Adam in the garden. He blew it too and all this misery, but he alone of all those characters had the clean slate...

Jon: He did have a clean slate.

Tim: ...until he was tested by the tester, the serpent. As we're going to see, Job is also likened to Adam.

Jon: Because he starts with a clean slate. So actually, I think that Job is introduced to us, we're imagining a sinless person.

Jon: I mean, that's how he...

Tim: What does that first sentence mean?

Jon: That's how it sounds. But you said that blameless was also referred to Abraham.

Tim: That's right. Oh, it refers to Noah.

Jon: To Noah?

Tim: That's why God's bears him as the remnant. Then actually, Abraham, God commands him to become blameless because he hasn't been. So, a sinless Job presents problems for certain theological systems about human depravity, but that's not the point here, it's a thought of wisdom

Jon: It's a wisdom verse.

Tim: It's the wisdom verse.

Jon: This is an adam from another dimension.

Tim: Totally. It's perfect. There's a scholar Samuel Meyer who did a whole essay on this about how Job is presented particularly as another Adam figure. This is on page 32. So Job is blameless and upright, he turns away from ra', Adam was placed in the

garden with a clean slate, and he sinned by taking up the tree of knowing good and ra' (bad).

Job's children would have these parties and get together and feast. And when the feast is over, he would consecrate his children by making offerings for them. But he would consecrate them - set them apart. And lo and behold, in the Eden narrative, God is consecrating the seventh day. So Job consecrate the homes of his seven sons, God consecrate the seventh day. Just echoes.

Jon: So he's doing a God-like activity.

Tim: Yeah, totally. When Job says, "Naked, I came from the womb of my mother, naked I will return there," Adam and Eve were naked. And then once they realize it, by taking from the fruit, from dust you were taken, to dust you will return. In other words, the nakedness and then from dusk back to dust, to dust I return, Job is echoing those lines from the Eden story when he says, "Naked I came from the womb of my mother, naked..."

In the garden story of Eden, God provides Eve, and Adam says, "This is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh." But then the one that God provides, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh becomes the deceived deceiver in the story. In the same way in the Job story, the Satan asked to strike his bone and his flesh and surely he will curse you to your face. And then Job doesn't curse God, but his wife comes and says, "Curse God and die." And he says, "You're speaking like a temptress. Like a foolish woman." So the whole point is...

Jon: All these corresponding Eden stuff.

Tim: All these correspondences. That's right. So Sam Meyer says, "The correspondence between the behavior of Job's wife and Adam's wife, it's at Eve's instigation that Adam disobeyed God, the serpent stands in the relationship to Eve that the Satan does two Job's wife." So we're watching another version of the temptation of Adam happen. But Job passes the test.

Jon: Yeah, he does.

Tim: He doesn't curse God, he doesn't give in to the pain of suffering, he doesn't give in to the temptation of his wife. He passes the test.

Jon: Yeah. And then he asks for answers.

Tim: So let's just say the narrative of Genesis 1 and 2 it's another "What if" from our brother from another mother.

Jon: Job is a What if Adam had passed the test.

Tim: Let's imagine a human, remember the word "human" is the word "adam", let's imagine a human, an adam named Job who passed the test.

Jon: Interesting. Well, okay. I never thought about that.

Tim: But then all of a sudden, that gets you asking, "Well, but why did God allow him to be tested?" I mean, the guy passed the test, but now God's the one that comes off looking kind of like...

Jon: Well, Job's always struck me that way, most people. Like why does God allow Job to get hammered on?

Tim: This hit me like a ton of bricks. I was either riding my bike to work or walking to work. The observation that strikes every reader, it's not fair. It's not fair what happened to Job.

Jon: Job's not treated fairly. God is cruel.

Tim: Oh, well, first of all, let's start with "it's not fair." One implication that one could draw is God's cruel.

Jon: God must be cruel.

Tim: And Job goes there multiple time. The friends say, "It's impossible that God would be unfair therefore your suffering must be a result of your sin." But you the reader know that that's not true. That's the puzzle of the book. But the thing that strikes the reader is it's not fair. If Job is meant to represent every human, then that's right. But Job is being presented here...

Jon: Special kind of human.

Tim: ...as a very special human. A human who passed the test. But yet he suffers. He's the righteous sufferer. The righteous sufferer. Okay, dude, check out, at the end of the book, Job 42, Job confesses. And it was like, "I'm sorry, God, you're right. You're wiser and greater. I shouldn't have accused you." Then the narrative picks up in Job 42:7. It says, " It came about after the Yahweh had spoken these words to Job, Yahweh said to Eliphaz the Temanite..."

Jon: That's one of the friends?

Tim: That's one of the friends. "...my anger is kindled against you and your two friends. You haven't spoken about me what is right like my servant Job has." Now all of a sudden Job is God's servant.

Jon: I mean, he's always been God's servant.

Tim: But he's called it.

Jon: Also he's called...

Tim: He's called "my servant Job." It's a pretty short list of people called "my servant." Moses, David, and the prophets, and then that figure in Isaiah.

Jon: The Messianic figure?

Tim: Yeah. So God's angry at the nations, these representations of the Eastern nations because they have not spoken about God what is right. But who has spoken rightly about God? My servant Job. So God says to Eliphaz, "Go take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And when you do that, my servant Job will pray for you. And I will lift up his face." It's a Hebrew idiom for "accept his petition." "I will lift up his face so that I don't commit an outrage with you." God's about to go off the handle with the nations. "But good thing my servant Job is there."

Jon: To intercede.

Tim: "Go to him, offer sacrifice and he will intercede for you. Vs. 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the Lord told them; and the Lord lifted up the face of Job." Get this. Dude, Job 42:10 is the key to the book. "And Yahweh restored the fortunes of Job while he was praying on behalf of his companions. And Yahweh added..."

Jon: While?

Tim: While.

Jon: NIV says after.

Tim: Yeah, that's not what it says.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: While he was praying. "And Yahweh added to everything that belonged to Job twofold." Okay, dude, my righteous servant Job has unfairly suffered, not for his own sins, but for some unknown purpose. The opening of the book doesn't tell you. You never known why.

Jon: What does the end of the book really tell you?

Tim: The end of the books doesn't tell you why, but it does tell you the outcome of the suffering of God's righteous servant. God's righteous servant suffers for a reason known only to God. But in his suffering... in other words, Job is praying for the nations, that God would forgive the nations.

Jon: And then God does.

Tim: He's still suffering while he's praying. And it's while he's praying and interceding for the nations that God restores his fortunes. In other words, it's as if Job suffering unfairly uniquely qualifies him to become the righteous servant intercessor who now has a place to stand. It's because of his unfair suffering that that gives him the place to stand before God and to say, "Forgive these people."

Jon: Wow.

Tim: It as if he's earned the right to get a voice with God. His suffering qualifies him to become an intercession for the nations. And he's called "my servant Job."

[00:50:45]

Tim: So just that right there. There's something going on here. And remember, he's a new Adam, he's a Noah, he's all these other characters mapped onto them. Here are some comments from David Clines, who's written I think the longest commentary on Job in history. It's almost 1,300 pages.

Jon: Oh, my gosh.

Tim: Three volumes. He says this. "We must remember that Job hasn't yet been restored when the friends bring their request to him for prayer." It's very clear in Hebrew while he was praying that's when Yahweh restored him. He is presumably still on the ash-heap."

Jon: Yeah, he's still suffering.

Tim: "Job has no inkling that Yahweh intends to reverse his fortunes. All he knows...

Jon: ...is now he's praying on behalf of others.

Tim: This is very perceptive of Clines. He says, "All he knows is that he's still suffering at Yahweh's hand, and if it is difficult for the friends to acknowledge the divine judgment against them, it must be no less difficult for Job to accept this second-hand instruction to offer prayer for people that he's totally disenchanted with." Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In other words, God doesn't say to Job, "Job, pray for them." Job is just talking to the friend Eliphaz.

Jon: And the friend is like, "You're supposed to pray for me."

Tim: Imagine this. Job's on the ash-heap suffering, nothing changed...

Jon: And these are the guys who have been like giving him a hard time for 50 chapters.

Tim: Oh, they are insulting each other and calling each other windbags. And they show up, and Eliphaz says, "I know that I just insulted you many times over, but your God's angry at me and just going to kill me. And he told me to offer these sacrifices and you're supposed to pray for me so that He'll spare my life." That's the thing.

Jon: You'd be like, "Yeah, just go."

Tim: Clines goes on. "Job certainly owes them nothing. Is this yet another 'test' that Job must undergo before he is restored? The wording of Job 42:10 makes it seem as if Job's restoration is dependent on his prayer on their behalf, as if this is his last trial. The last trial of all will be to take his stand on the side of his 'torturer- comforters.'" In other words, in chapter 2, they came to comfort him.

Jon: But they really tortured him.

Tim: And then he says multiple times, "Lousy comforters is what you are." This is fascinating. "It is true that this prayer of Job is the first selfless act that he's performed since his misfortunes overtook him. Not that we begrudge him the self-centeredness that's dominated his speech throughout the book. Perhaps his renewed orientation to the needs of others is the first sign that he's abandoned his inward-looking mourning, and is ready to accept consolation. In any case, the very act of offering his prayer on the friends' behalf is when his own restoration is said to take effect. The Hebrew says, 'Yahweh restored the fortunes of Job while he was praying for his friends,' not as most Christians have it, when or after he prayed for his friends." Dude, mind-blowing. At least for me.

So we're introduced to a righteous sinless sufferer who suffers for no reason except known to God alone. And he's angry about it. And he goes to God with it. And at the end, he never finds out, but what he does discover is that his suffering has positioned him uniquely to now intercede on behalf of the nations. And the nations received God's mercy because of the intercession of the righteous sufferer who is "my servant." Dude, what's happening? And all of a sudden, again, I was riding my bike, I was like, "It's not fair. It's not fair."

Jon: It's not fair.

Tim: That's the whole point is that Job suffering isn't fair. That's actually the point.

Jon: The point is it's not fair.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: There's something about someone needing to suffer unjustly and it's an actual kind of necessary...

Tim: What the narrative of the book is simply saying is a righteous sufferer is uniquely privileged by God. God takes these kinds of people into His counsel and will accept just... Remember Moses and the golden calf? Moses has not blown it yet with the Israelite, and God says, "Leave me alone that I may destroy these people and that my anger may burn against them."

Jon: Oh, and he intercedes. Yeah.

Tim: And Moses doesn't leave God alone. He steps into the Divine Council.

Jon: So he's that role of the righteous intercessor.

Tim: The role of the righteous intercessor. And it's a role that is going to be played by the prophets. Jeremiah will be another suffering prophetic intercessor. And then that figure in the book of Isaiah is my servant who will suffer on behalf of the sins of his own people. In other words, the Hebrew Bible has another photo mosaic of the righteous, prophetic suffering intercessor. It's the kind of figure that we need if God's mercy can be released to the nations instead of another flood of judgment. That's the profile of Isaiah 53. Job fits it perfectly. It's an outline of Job.

Jon: It's like Job's biggest contribution to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tim: Yeah, he's one of them. That just hit me like a ton of bricks. Then all of a sudden, the fact that it's not fair makes sense because that's the point. All of a sudden, so much of the atonement theology of the New Testament for me pops into focus of Jesus going to Jerusalem to suffer as the Passover lamb, as the suffering servant, as Israel's King, as the prophetic intercessor. He's putting himself in the path of the...

Jon: The template has been set. God is going to use a righteous suffering intercessor to bring blessing to the nations.

Tim: Yeah, Jesus' anguish in the garden becomes a moment... That's Job. He's like Job wrestling with God.

Jon: Why?

Tim: Why? If there's any other way... It's as if when Jesus kneels in the garden, he's kneeling beside Job, and beside all the suffering righteous figures of the Book of Psalms too, all that. These are all overlapped on each other.

Jon: Right. Is that a theme video, the suffering servant?

Tim: Whether it's the intercessor or my servant, just called my servant...I don't know. There's something going on here. The book of Job actually is not just belonging to the wisdom storyline. It's actually...

Jon: It's prophetic.

Tim: It's prophetic. It's about what the whole Hebrew Bible is about. We need a new Adam. Who won't blow it.

Jon: But not only he won't blow it, but there will be something about him that allows him to correct it for everyone else.

Tim: That's right. To step into the place of the intercessor to release God's mercy to the nations instead of justice. That's right.

Jon: Yeah. It's interesting how in Job there's still this mystery, though of like the why. Why the suffering? Why not just let Job intercede without suffering? And why let him suffer? Why?

Tim: I know.

Jon: And that's the thing where it's like Job still has this unique "you can't know, and you won't know. Be okay with that."

Tim: That's right. And the why does God allow the Satan to do what he does in the story of Job is the same question as why did God let that snake crawl up to the tree. It's the same thing.

Jon: And why did God let Himself, the son.

Tim: The way the story of Jesus fits into this is that the why question of Job and of Eden isn't answered. But God's response to it isn't to answer it, it's to enter into the story Himself and become the suffering servant. God becomes the suffering servant, to bear the pain of His creation's failure.

Jon: It's like all the Hebrew Scriptures is looking for this person. "I need this person. We know we need this person." Job is a reflection on that. All these psalms are reflection on that. And then the New Testament gospel claims are God Himself is going to be that person.

Tim: Correct. Actually, I think the book of Isaiah is even pushing you there, that that servant is Emmanuel, is God within us. Isaiah 7. Mind-bending, dude.

Jon: Wow, very cool.

[01:00:25]

Tim: Let's recap. The Garden of Eden is about the pursuit of wisdom failed, resulting in exile and death and the division of man and woman. The story of Solomon takes that template and just fills it out. Now they are new Adam in a new garden opportunity. He pursues wisdom it seems but then doesn't. And then it's with the ladies that it all falls apart. Then these four wisdom books are all connected into that pursuit of wisdom or failed pursuit of wisdom. Proverbs is about pursue Lady Wisdom, embrace her love her.

Jon: It's mostly for just like there's two paths.

Tim: Two paths.

Jon: You can pursue the wisdom, you can pursue another lady and pursue wisdom and it's going to go well.

Tim: That's right. Ecclesiastes comes along and we get the Solomon voice of saying, "Neither me nor any of my descendants ever did it. We ended up in exile.

Jon: "We did the best we could. But we did a lot of great stuff." I guess they didn't do the best they could.

Tim: "But we didn't succeed and life here outside the garden is hard and do your best to follow God, but..." Song of Songs is an imaginative what if. What if Adam and Eve or Solomon and Lady Wisdom had come together? Imagine what it could be like. We're pushing constantly waiting, forward, forward.

And then Job comes along and imagines an Adam who was not deceived. But he's the Adam who's living outside of Eden. Job is outside the Garden of Eden so he's living post humanity's failure. And so what a new Adam will have to do is suffer precisely so that he can intercede on behalf of the nations to release God's blessing to the nations.

Jon: Which is not just a call for one guy.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: It becomes the way.

Tim: Yes. It's the Messianic vocation, which it falls upon one person, the servant, but who also has a whole family that he creates in the book of Isaiah, who are called the servants who imitate the suffering intercession of the servant. And then that's welcome to the New Testament. It's like that's what's it's about.

Jon: The why we suffer then becomes for others in a way. It's an opportunity to serve others.

Tim: That's right. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: How are we going to summarize this in one video?

Jon: I think we can do it.

Tim: Oh, good job. Good.

Jon: I didn't say I've done it.

Tim: Everybody, that is it for our Wisdom Series conversation on the podcast. Thank you guys for listening to the series and your interest in it. The next episode on the podcast is going to be what we usually do, a Q&R episode. So if this Wisdom Series has raised questions for you, feel free to send us those questions. We would love to hear from you. Here's how you can do it. You can email a question to us at info@jointhebibleproject.com. If you could make an audio recording, give us your name, where you're from, that would be awesome. And if you can, please try to keep the question to about 20 or 30 seconds.

All these conversations that Jon and I had on the wisdom books of the Bible were in preparation for a video that we made through The Bible Project. And it's now out. It's a video called How to Read the Books of Solomon. You can check it out on our website, thebibleproject.com, or go to youtube.com/thebibleproject. Today's show was produced by the amazing Dan Gummel. The music was by the band Tents. The Bible Project is a crowdfunded nonprofit animation studio in Portland, Oregon. We're able to make all of these videos and other resources, this podcast, because of the generous support of so many, many people, and you are some of them. Thank you so much for listening and for being part of this with us.

Lauren: Hi, this is Lauren. I'm from New York City. My favorite thing about The Bible Project is that it's an extremely generous way to spread the news of Jesus and teach the Bible in our culture. We believe that the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We're a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, podcasts and more resources at thebibleproject.com