[Advent E1 Transcript]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon.

Jon: Today we're going to do something new.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: We're going to spend four weeks in the words related to the Advent season.

Tim: Exactly. The four words are "hope," "peace," "joy," and "love."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And those are the four Sundays of Advent. And the whole theme is about waiting, developing the virtue of patience and waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise in sending the Messiah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And for us, it's just a chance to dive into four really profound, meaningful biblical—uh, I guess I won't say words, because many of these words actually have multiple Hebrew or Greek words underneath them.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So they're kind of like idea—topic studies.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And we're gonna first look at hope.

Tim: Cool. Okay, it's been a while since I've begun with a Bible trivia question, Jon.

Jon: Ooh.

Tim: If I were to ask you, "Who's the first person in the story of the Bible who has to wait?" Like, they're waiting for something, and that's, like, a focus of the story, is they're waiting.

Jon: First character waiting—

Tim: Waiting.

Jon: For something.

Tim: For God to do something or just waiting. Mhm.

Jon: Okay, well let's start with Adam then.

Tim: Okay, right. Yeah.

Jon: Is he waiting for anything? God wants to give him a helper.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: He's gotta go into a little sleep.

Tim: He needs that delivering ally. Yeah, but he's not sitting around waiting.

Jon: No, it—well, he's anesthetized.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So that time went fast.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Cain and Abel—there's no waiting. Uh, all right. So then we get to Noah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: He's got to build the ark. He's got to wait for the rain. That's right. So there is some, like, the rain's not here. We got the boat. So it's Noah.

Tim: That's right. Uh, it is Noah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Ding, ding, ding, ding [Jon laughs], ding, ding, ding, ding. And you're right in that God says, "In forty days, I'm gonna bring rain on the land." But that forty days isn't really drawn out in the narrative. It's just sort of, like, then he builds the boat and then—then the rain starts.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But the opposite moment, where the period of waiting for the waters to recede—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: To go away.

Jon: That's also a forty, right?

Tim: Mhm. Yes. And it's marked by a series of moments in the story where Noah sent out a dove to see whether the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. And the dove couldn't find a resting place for her foot. So she returned to him in the ark, though the waters were still all over. He stretched out his hand, brought her back into the ark, and he waited for seven days.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And then he sent out the dove again, and it came back with the little olive leaf—tree leaf—in the mouth. And then he waited for seven more days. He sent out the dove, and it just never came back. And then he gets off the boat. Noah is the first person to wait.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the word here is *yakhal*. You gotta clear your throat in the middle. *Yakhal*. This is one of the main Hebrew words that gets translated as "hope."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But the first time it appears, it very clearly—

Jon: Just means "wait."

Tim: Yes. Yeah. It would be weird to say, "And he hoped for another seven days and then sent out the dove."

Jon: That does sound weird.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "He hoped for seven days." Yeah.

Tim: So I'm just gonna say *yakhal*. So let's look at some more examples here.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So there's a story in 1 Samuel where King Saul is supposed to *yakhal* for the prophet Samuel for seven days, and then Samuel's gonna show up and offer a sacrifice and a whole bunch of stuff's supposed to happen. And then during those seven days, the Philistines surround him, and he's freaking out. And he doesn't *yakhal*. He, like, moves too quickly before Samuel shows up. So it's another example just of *yakhal*—

Jon: Means wait.

Tim: Yeah. And it's also seven days, which is interesting. Okay. But then here are other examples of *yakhal* or the nouns that come from it. So *tokhelet* is a noun that derives from *yakhal*.

Jon: I don’t see that at all, how they are similar.

Tim: Oh.

Jon: *Yakhal* and *tokhelet*?

Tim: Yeah. Well the *ya* of *yakhal* gets morphed into “o” when you put that “t” on the front.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then you can see the *kh* of *yakhal* and *tokhelet*. You see the *kh*, and then the *t* on the end is a little suffix on the end.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, it’s in there. *Yakhal* is in *tokhelet*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It’s just a little historical linguistics. Anyway, so there’s a noun, and the verb and the noun are used in ways where “waiting” would be a weird translation. Maybe.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So here’s a rad little riddle of a proverb. Proverbs chapter 13. “*Tokhelet* that is deferred makes the heart sick. But a desire that is fulfilled, mmm, that’s a tree of life.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Such a cool little riddle hyperlink back to the garden of Eden story.

Jon: Mmm, with the tree of life.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Desire fulfilled is a tree of life. The point of the tree of life is, as you’ve said many times, to participate in God’s life—

Tim: God’s own life.

Jon: That never ends.

Tim: Yeah. So the tree of life is like the representation of God meeting us with his own personal life, presence, power. It’s like the ultimate fulfillment of every human aspiration and desire.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That’s the second half.

Jon: That’s the second half. So the first half is—

Tim: The opposite of that.

Jon: The opposite.

Tim: So you get *tokhelet* matches “desire.” You get “deferred,” meaning “constantly delayed,” is the opposite of fulfilled.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then a sick heart is the opposite of the tree of life. Isn’t that an interesting contrast?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In biblical thought, heart is the center of thinking and desiring and purpose.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So you constantly want something, are planning to get it, strategizing, desiring it. And when the thing that is your *tokhelet* is constantly delayed, it just makes humans fall apart, man.

Jon: Yeah. Makes you feel sick.

Tim: Mhm. *Tokhelet* is like a driver. It’s a motivator.

Jon: Hmm. I see. So here it’s not strictly the act of waiting.

Tim: No, it’s—it’s more, isn’t it?

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Mhm. It’s the thing that you’re waiting for.

Jon: It’s what you’re waiting for.

Tim: When you’re waiting for a thing and it is constantly, forever put off, it just makes the heart sick.

Jon: So it seems like this word *yakhal* is like a type of waiting attached to a hope.

Tim: Attached to a—yeah—particular object.

Jon: Like an expectation.

Tim: Yes, yes, exactly. Isn’t that interesting? So it can refer to enduring the passage of time, but also included in the meaning of the word is the thing that you are waiting for. And we would call that, like, your hope, your object of hope.

Jon: I see. Okay.

Tim: Okay. Let's go to Psalm 33.

Jon: All right.

Tim: There's three appearances of this idea here, starting in verse 16. "A king is not saved by the greatness of an army. A warrior is not delivered by the greatness of strength. A horse is a false hope for victory, nor can it save by the greatness of its power."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Typically, we think the bigger army and the bigger tank, that is, the war horse, gives you victory. And that might be true in a relative sense, but it's not always true. And you can't count on it all of the time.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So verse 18, "Look, the eye of Yahweh is on those who fear him, on those who *yakhal* for his loyal love to deliver their soul from death, to keep them alive in a famine."

Jon: Okay, so what really does save? Ultimately, what has the power to save and deliver and bring hope? It's Yahweh, his loyal love, and his ability to deliver from death.

Tim: From death and famine, which is, interesting examples.

Jon: Oh yeah.

Tim: Both really important in Genesis as images of the fragile nature of life that we didn't create for ourselves and we don't really sustain for ourselves.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: Lack of life breath and lack of food, like, we could be there in a heartbeat. So truly what's most powerful is waiting for Yahweh to fulfill his promises out of loyal love.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Verse 20, "Our soul waits for Yahweh." And this is a different Hebrew word. It's the Hebrew word *khikah*, which does seem to refer particularly to the passage of time, sitting through a passage of time.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: A more neutral word for "wait."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So "Our soul waits for Yahweh. He is our"—ooh—"our *ezer*." This is what God provides for Adam in the woman.

Jon: The delivering ally.

Tim: “Yahweh is for us as we wait for him. He is our help and our shield. In him our heart rejoices. In his holy name we trust. Let your loyal love,” notice the repetition, “be on us, O Yahweh, even as we *yakhal* in you.” So we have, “Our soul waits for Yahweh,” but these two uses of *yakhal*, I mean, we are waiting, ’cause you’re waiting for Yahweh to do something, rescue you. But there’s more here. We’re waiting for Yahweh’s loyal love. “We’re waiting on you, Yahweh.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You could also translate it, “on those who hope for his loyal love.” And it’s hard to tell the difference. So maybe it’s just—the invitation for us is to see that in certain acts of waiting where I am really emotionally invested in the outcome, we use the word hope, *yakhal*.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So this is one major word for hope, but it’s not the only one.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this was—that was part one.

Jon: Part one.

Tim: Yeah. This next one’s super interesting.

[Musical Break (10:49—11:14)]

Tim: The next word that’s used a lot in biblical Hebrew is *qavah*. *Qavah*. So here’s a poem that uses it multiple times. It’ll tell the story. So he says, “Let me”—that is, Isaiah the prophet—“sing a song for my beloved”—that’s God—“about his vineyard.” And as we’re going to find out, the vineyard is the people. So “My beloved had a vineyard on a nice fertile hill. He dug it, cleared it of all the stones, planted it with choice vines. He even built a watchtower right in the middle. He, like, got a pickaxe and hewed out, like, a wine vat in it, you know, to stomp on the grapes. And then he *qavah*-s for the garden to yield grapes. But it yielded stinky, wild grapes.”

Jon: Stinky wild grapes?

Tim: Yeah, *beushim* is the—

[Laughter]

Tim: So, it’s so rad. So he put in all this effort.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then he *qavah*-s.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And what he *qavah*-s is for—

Jon: The harvest.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, like what he expects is gonna happen. And then it, you know, it yields unusable grapes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Prophet steps in. “Okay, inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, why don’t you judge between me and my vineyard?” So now the beloved is talking. The beloved just started talking. “What more could I have done for my vineyard that I didn’t do? Why, when I *qavah*-ed for it to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless ones?” So God basically says, “I’m gonna destroy the vineyard.” Like, just full on gonna remove the hedge, break down its wall. Animals are gonna trample it. And thorns and briars are gonna come up. And no more rain on that vineyard. “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. The men of Judah are the plant that he’s supposed to delight in.” So he *qavah*-ed for *mishpat*.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But what he got was *mispakh*.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: “Bloodshed.” It’s a little wordplay in Hebrew. He *qavah*-ed for *tsedaqah*, but what really comes up out of Jerusalem is *tseaqah*.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: The innocent crying and distressed because of their oppression.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Okay, so here’s what’s so interesting. This is one of those moments where you just look things up in the Hebrew lexicon and you’re just like, “Whoa, serious? That’s, like, so cool.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I’m looking at the *Koehler-Baumgartner Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, and here we are. This is *qavah*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it's a denominative verb. What this means is it's a verb that's derived from a noun. So a noun is, like, the base meaning—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then a verb developed out of it. But the noun's the primary meaning.

Jon: All right.

Tim: So here's what a *qav* is. But this is now looking at the noun. In Isaiah 44, this is describing a guy making an idol statue. And it says, "Let's say you have a woodworker. How's he gonna start the process of making an idol?"

Jon: Making an idol?

Tim: "Well, the first thing he's gonna do is stretch out a *qav* and then make an outline of it with a marker."

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: "He's stretching out a *qav*. Then he'll get the knife and, uh, he'll make an outline of it with another tool and make into the image of a human." He—so a *qav* is something you stretch out.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And then you use it as this kind of measure to cut or shape something.

Jon: Okay. So it's like a ruler?

Tim: Ezekiel 47:3. "There was this man who went out to the east with a *qav* in his hand. And he measured a thousand cubits."

Jon: Yeah. It's an ancient ruler.

Tim: Well, this ancient ruler, but it was a cord. Like, have you ever gone and seen those super-long-distance measuring, like, on a soccer field?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it's like a hundred yards or—

Jon: Right.

Tim: And it's all in a roll? That's a *qav*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it's like a cord, a measuring cord. That's what a *qav* is. So in the Hebrew lexicon, it says "denominative," that is, a verb derived from a noun, from *qav*, "with the

basic meaning of ‘to be taut.’”

Jon: Oh, okay. It’s fully extended.

Tim: Yeah. So the case that they’re making is that *qavah* refers to the moment when a cord is being pulled tight.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then there’s some—

Jon: Tension.

Tim: Yeah, the tension is our English word. And tension refers to when all of the energy of motion—it can’t move.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But there’s energy. And so all that energy gets focused in on, like, one spot on the cord. And then, usually at the weakest spot, it breaks.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But it’s referring to the energy focused on that spot in the moment of the tension.

Jon: That’s what the verb refers to?

Tim: That’s what they’re saying the verb—

Jon: So wait, the noun is the cord itself.

Tim: The noun’s the cord itself.

Jon: But then the verb is when it’s completely extended.

Tim: You’re pulling the cord tight. Yeah. It’s a figure of speech. So it doesn’t make literal sense.

Jon: Okay, the point of the cord is to pull it tight.

Tim: Yeah, ’cause if it’s all loose, then you don’t get the correct measure.

Jon: I see.

Tim: If you wanna measure it correctly, you gotta pull it tight.

Jon: That’s the purpose of the *qav*, is to be *qav*-ed.

Tim: Mhm. That’s right.

Jon: I see. And so then what does it mean for myself to be *qav*-ed?

Tim: To *qavah*.

Jon: To *qavah*.

Tim: *Qavah*. So I—

Jon: I'm stretched tight.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, I pull tight the cord.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And that's this word—

Jon: And that's an idea of anticipating.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. So you *qavah*, you cord.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yahweh corded for good grapes. I mean, when I learned that, I thought that's the coolest way to imagine expectation or hope.

Jon: Yeah, it is.

Tim: It's a state of tension.

Jon: To anticipate is to be a cord pulled tight.

Tim: Mhm. Yes. Isn't that rad?

Jon: It is rad.

Tim: Okay, so here, let's just look at examples now. So Psalm 25, "To you, Yahweh, I lift up my soul. My God, I trust you. Don't let me be put to shame. Don't let my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who *qavah* for you should be put to shame. Those who betray without cause, they should be put to shame. Make me know your ways, Yahweh. Teach me your paths. Cause me to walk in your truth. Teach me. You are the God of my salvation. I *qavah* you, or for—for you."

Jon: Hmm. I'm stretched tight for you.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: I mean, so what's interesting is when I hear the word "tension," we have this English word to describe that tightness of all the energy focused in, but not yet to the breaking point.

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's not a sustainable or desirable place to find yourself in.

Jon: Right.

Tim: It's not pleasant, but it's generative. It's creative. It, it's um—

Jon: It's not pleasant, but it does have energy.

Tim: Yeah. Yes.

Jon: And you could use that energy for a good purpose.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Embedded in this metaphor is the idea of, in order to live into your purpose, you need to be stretched.

Tim: Yeah. There was an early church bishop and a scholar in the fourth century. He lived in the region of Cappadocia. His name was Gregory of Nyssa. I just discovered his writings a couple years ago. I can't get enough of this guy. He talks about the experience of new creation as being this paradox where it's both the fulfillment of every hope that I've ever had of being in a resurrection body in the direct presence of God or with all, like, the redeemed creation. And you're like, "Wow, that's a pretty sweet setup. Surely that would fulfill all of my hopes."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But for God to be God, God is always above and beyond what any creature could ever fully comprehend. Like, the very essence of who God is as someone to know—like, we'll never know the full depth and beauty and complexity of God's being. Yet every step forward that we take to grow in our knowledge and union with God will simultaneously satisfy us but then make us realize there's another horizon in knowing God beyond it. And he thinks of the new creation as just an infinite—

Jon: No way.

Tim: An infinity.

Jon: This is a brand new thought for me.

Tim: Yeah, he calls it—

Jon: Wait. What?

Tim: The *epektasis*, the internal stretching out of the human soul.

Jon: So this idea of actually being fulfilled—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's like a past tense. I've been fulfilled.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: You're saying, like, every moment where you're like, "I've been that," you just realize, "Oh, there's—"

Tim: There's more.

Jon: There's more.

Tim: There's more. So he, he's not saying—it's a paradox, because it's both being—every desire fulfilled in the new creation, but simultaneously realizing my appetite for desire fulfilled is infinite and can only be matched by an infinite God, which means it's just an eternity of growing into our desires and meeting them, only to see that there's, like, the next horizon.

Jon: Huh. So it's like an infinite stretching.

Tim: Yeah. And he calls it the *epektasis*. Anyway, this was his kind of unique take.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: But I think it's a really beautiful way to think about that our capacity for union with God is infinite in a way that corresponds to the infinite fountain of God's life to meet our needs and desires and keep drawing us into himself.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that's, uh, one way to think about hope. It's a generative, creative tension that keeps us exploring and desiring.

Jon: And finding the thing that we want, and then realizing it goes much deeper than we thought. And there's more.

Tim: Yeah. To be a creature is to *qavah*, to exist in a state of tension, of desiring.

Jon: Because I've thought about this a lot. Like, when you get to eternal life, are we gonna be bored?

Tim: Right! Yeah, yeah.

Jon: Because we've attained it all.

Tim: Yeah. This is Gregory of Nyssa's way—he was bothered by that question too.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: And so the more he thought about the biblical imagery of God's infinity, God's eternity, God as the source of infinite goodness and beauty, that to be a creature will always be to desire more.

Jon: So this virtue of hope is not just something that we have to put up with until one day things are all fulfilled.

Tim: Yeah, it's like it's a—what do you say? A feature, not a bug.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: Because that tension that desire creates in us, that hope drives us onward, looking for more. And then when you find the one who is infinite more-ness, then, dude, you've got a sweet existence. Because God's just like, "Hey," like, "come over here."

Jon: "I got more."

Tim: "I got this thing for you." C.S. Lewis ends the final book of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, with that image of the new creation as them running with Aslan over the next hill, and then over the next hill, and it's just further up and further in. And then he says, "You know, really, the story just finally reached its beginning. The whole story, you might think it's ending, but actually it's just an infinitely new story." And he says, "in which each chapter is better than the last."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: I wonder if there's something about *qavah*, especially *qavah*, the state of tension, that's just built into our nature as creatures. It's a beautiful idea.

Jon: Mmm, it is.

Tim: Yeah.

[Musical Break (23:13—23:41)]

Tim: I think this plays into a conversation you and I've had many times over the years about this difference that I like to make between optimism and hope.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: And I—we're kind of in the same ballpark here, where you can have a hope built up because you look at a set of circumstances and you're like, "Yeah, I think we're trending in a certain direction here, and it's the one that I like. So I'm hoping for that outcome."

Jon: Okay. You would call that optimism?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In my mind, optimism is about looking at the current trajectory—

Jon: Ah, yes.

Tim: Of events and seeing, like, I think—

Jon: All the data's pointing—

Tim: It's pointing that way.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Versus hope, which I think is something the biblical authors want us to sustain regardless of the circumstances, or actually in the face of, like, the opposite circumstances.

Jon: The giant army.

Tim: Yeah, with Goliath standing in front of you.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And in that case, you're not hoping in the circumstances to go a certain direction. What you're actually hoping for is—is God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: This is why these words, *yakhal* and *qavah*, especially when you go to the Psalms, they most consistently just have God as their object. As the thing for which you are longing or waiting, that you *qavah* and that you *yakhal* for. And, back to Psalm 33, you have a big army and you have, like, the biggest ancient horse tanks of anybody. Don't hope in that. It's a false—ooh, false hope for victory. I forgot to look up—17—Oh! *Sheqer*.

Jon: Oh, it's a *sheqer*.

Tim: It's false. *Sheqer* means—

Jon: It's an illusion.

Tim: A false representation of something. It's not really what it is.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: It's a trick.

Jon: So then that then raises the question, if there's something good about anticipating a thing you desire—

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Then is the wisdom in, “Let’s learn to anticipate the right thing and actually enjoy that”?

Tim: Yeah. It’s teaching us to separate our real hopes from any of the objects or experiences that we tend to put our hope in to fulfill our desires. And like this Proverb, 13:12, it’s telling us that the only thing that can really fulfill our ultimate desires is this gift of participating in the very life presence of God. Which, whatever that means, that’s the goal of getting back into Eden is just unity, union with God. I mean, we just have all these biblical images to talk about it. Yeah.

Jon: So Advent’s about being in that season of feeling stretched. But let’s find meaning in that and let’s enjoy—

Tim: Sitting in the tension.

Jon: There’s a purpose for that.

Tim: Yeah. So hope. We might think that we want a day when we don’t have to hope anymore.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But I wonder if there’s something about *qavah*, especially *qavah*, the state of tension, that’s just built into our nature as creatures.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” There’s much to meditate on there.