

[10 Commandments E2]

[Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins, Tim Mackie, Oliver, Susan, Jody]

[Musical Intro (0:00—0:05)]

Jon: What is the first command of God in the Bible? Well, it's on page one. After God creates life and orders the cosmos, he creates humans, and he points them to be his image, and he instructs them this way: "Be fruitful, multiply, subdue the Earth, and rule it." In other words, carry forward God's authority and rule, over what he began.

Tim: The first directives God gives to the humans, are, essentially, "imitate the divine life." So the first time God tells anybody what to do, it's a blessing.

Jon: While the first command in the Bible is called "a blessing," the second command in the Bible is straight up called "a command," and it has two parts. The first part of the command reminds us of the blessing: "Eat of every tree in the garden."

Tim: The good that you see out there...is real. And when you find the good, enjoy it. And when I'm enjoying the good, what I am enjoying is God.

Jon: The second part of the command is about how there's one tree that will look good, but will actually lead to death. So don't eat from that tree.

Tim: There are apparently some things that look good, but that won't *be* good for me, at least, not now.

Jon: And these two parts of the command work together.

Tim: God's command is twofold. One: have life, enjoy good. The second part of the command is "don't die."

Jon: Now, all the trees in the garden look good for eating, but not every tree is wise to eat from.

Tim: You can appreciate goodness, but *not* have to take it into yourself, and make yourself become one with it. You can just see, and be like, "that's good." And isn't that what God's asking them to do, with this one, particular tree?

Jon: So how can we learn to discern between what *looks* good, and what is *truly* good?

Tim: How can you know? How can you know? The only thing in this story is Yahweh's command.

Jon: Today, we trace the theme of the commands of God in the Bible, as we prepare to meditate on the Ten Commandments. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (2:15—2:21)]

Jon: Hello, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon.

Jon: We are talking “ten words.” The Ten Commandments, introduced to us in the story of Exodus, as the “ten words.”

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Some of the most famous things that God says in the whole Bible, famous, meaning, lots of people probably know about them. Whether all those people have pondered their full significance, and all of the cosmic meaning buried within them, well, that's—

Jon: That's the journey we are on.

Tim: That's the journey you and I are on.

Jon: And we'll get to the bottom of everything.

[Laughter]

Tim: So in our last conversation, we just kind of introduced “the ten,” roughly where they appear, in the biblical story. They are introduced in the second book of the Christian Bible, and the second book of the Jewish Bible: the Book of Exodus—and actually, halfway through it. So you're almost seventy chapters in to the biblical story before “the ten” are introduced. And so, typically, when you and I are doing a theme study, we try to look for themes that are introduced, right in the first pages that are continued throughout the Hebrew Bible, culminate in Jesus, and are, somehow, there's some kind of culmination near the end of the Bible. So the Ten Commandments, as such, don't quite

fit that bill. It's a little unique, because they're not introduced until way, way into the story.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: However—

Jon: *However...*

[Laughter]

Jon: All right. Tell me about Genesis one.

[Laughter]

Tim: *How did you know?*

Jon: Oh.

Tim: *How did you know?* So the significance of God telling a human what to do—

[Laughter]

Tim: —that doesn't happen for the first time at Mount Sinai.

Jon: Yes.

Tim: That actually happens in the first pages of the first scroll of the Bible.

Jon: That's Genesis two, though, however, right?

Tim: Right. Genesis two.

Jon: That's where God tells a human what to do.

Tim: That's right. But it's God speaking, happens in Genesis one.

Jon: I think I know this Bible trivia. In Genesis one, ten times, God speaks.

Tim: Oh, God speaks ten times in Genesis one.

Jon: So it's got to be connected to the ten words.

Tim: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's great. The first place that we actually do start is with the ten words spoken in the seven-day creation narrative, where God tells creation what to do.

Jon: And the first one is, "let there be light," right?

Tim: "Let there be light." What God does is speak to God's own self, about God's own light—right—emanating, generating out, into the universe. Something goes out from God, into the nothingness. It is God's own light. So that's God speaking to the darkness; day one. Day two is God speaking about the chaos waters, that they separate. God introduces an orderly line and division, in between the waters. Then God calls, thirdly, the dry land, up out of the waters, and then calls plants, summons the plants, to come up out of it.

Jon: These are all the words.

Tim: These are words one through four—or, yeah, one through five.

Jon: There's seven days, but there's ten words.

Tim: There's ten words. Yeah, so you go through; the tenth thing that God says—

Jon: Ooh.

Tim: —is to the humans. In Genesis one, and it goes like this, "And God said, 'Let us make human in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule.'" Then you get the little poem, in verse 27. "*Elohim* created human in his image. In the image of *Elohim*, he created him, male and female. He created them." That's a rad little three-part meditation puzzle. Then you get a repetition of God speaking. So actually, here's the tenth—

Jon: Oh wait, that was the ninth before?

Tim: Yeah. That was nine, and, yeah—so the ninth and the tenth are a little "frame," a symmetrical frame—

Jon: Around the image of God poem?

Tim: —around the image of God poem.

Jon: Whoa, okay.

Tim: But this tenth one has a little twist: “And God *blessed* them, and God said to them...” So the tenth thing God says is—

Jon: Is also a blessing.

Tim: —is a blessing. They're called “blessings,” not commands, but they're stated as instruction, or like, “do this.”

Jon: Yeah. “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the land, subdue it, rule.” You can think of those as instructions, or commands.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. It's five—

Jon: But they're framed as “blessings.”

Tim: Five verbs: “be fruitful; do multiply; do fill the land; subdue it; and rule it.” Yeah. But they are called blessings, words of blessing. So blessing, right, is about God donating his own, infinite, auto-generating abundance, to another creature, so that it now gets to generate, and experience that abundance, and security, and order, and harmony. And what else is being fruitful, and multiplying, and creating order, subduing?

Jon: Hmm, it's about abundance.

Tim: It's about abundance and order.

Jon: And order.

Tim: Yeah. That's the blessing. So the first “directives” God gives to the humans are, essentially, “imitate the divine life.” Out of God's infinite abundance, a whole universe of different things comes into being—all these different expressions of God's creative abundance. And then, he makes a creature that's an image, that's like that “likeness of God” is focused in on one creature, and that image is also called to—

Jon: To do the same thing.

Tim: —bring order and experience....

Jon: Yeah. That's cool.

Tim: Yeah, so the first time God tells anybody what to do, it's a blessing. Isn't that interesting? Just "enjoy being, and be like me," which means to be fruitful and multiply, and spread order.

Jon: Yeah. When instructions are a blessing, that's interesting.

Tim: The tenth word, which these ten words in Genesis do—well, actually, you would invert it, and you would say: the ten words of Exodus are an "echoing back" to God's ten, order-bringing, blessing-generating words. Something like that.

Jon: So you could think of the Ten Commandments as "stodgy rules"—

Tim: Mmm, right.

Jon: —but you could think of them as an opportunity for blessing—

Tim: Yeah, yes.

Jon: —and being the image of God.

Tim: And then the fifth command, the fifth of the ten, actually has the blessing in it: "Honor your father and mother, so that you can have long days in the land."

Jon: That's the blessing.

Tim: That's the blessing, yeah. So creating an ecosystem of multi-generational honor, will result in an experience of blessing: "long days in the land." Yeah. That's the first time God tells a human what to do. The second time God tells a human what to do, it's going to feel similar, but also, the narrative context is a little different. So here, is the context of "God has brought a garden into being in the middle of a desert."

Jon: Is this Genesis two?

Tim: Yup.

[Musical Break (09:22—09:51)]

Tim: The Eden story begins, Genesis two, verse four. What we're told is there's no plants, there's no water, there's no human, it's just dust; just dust and dirt. So spring pops up out of the ground: plants come up out of the ground; Yahweh plants a garden; Yahweh forms the human, then breathes into the human the breath of life, puts the human in the garden. And then, we're told, "Man, this garden has sweet trees. Every tree is beautiful to look at and good for eating." And there's the tree of life, in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowing good and bad. So lots of beautiful trees. They are given to eat and enjoy, sustain your life. There's a tree that will *really* sustain your life, and then, you know, the tree of knowing good and bad—which is introduced, and you're like, "What—what's the significance?"

Jon: Yeah. "That one must be...must be tasty."

Tim: Yeah, and the last one is the one that should cause the most questions in the minds of the reader. You get a little aside about the river that flows out of Eden.

Jon: The one river that is four.

Tim: One river, becomes four. Then verse 15, we pick up, "Yahweh God took the human, and rested him in the garden of Eden to work it and to *keep* it."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: These are important little words, because the word "work," *'avad*, is also the word used, "to serve," or "to give one's labor and allegiance." Like, "all of my productivity that I can generate is *for* another." That's this word.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then "to keep" means, "I've been entrusted with something, and now it's my responsibility to guard it; to keep it." And both of these words are going to be relevant in the Ten Commandments—both of these words are used.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: "Do not have any other gods before me. Do not *'avad* them."

Jon: Oh, and that's the "work"—oh, yeah—

Tim: —serve; “do not serve them.”

Jon: “Do not serve them.”

Tim: Don't direct all the energy of your life and what you produce, in allegiance, to an “other” deity; *'avad*. And then, in the fourth command, “keep the Sabbath,” it's *shamar*. This word used here, “keep the Sabbath.”

Jon: “Keep it.” Keep the garden, keep the Sabbath.

Tim: Yeah. So notice, this is the narrator—this is not God speaking—just the narrator says, “Yahweh put the human in the garden, to work and to keep it. *Then*, Yahweh Elohim *commanded* the human.”

Jon: Okay, here's the command.

Tim: This is the word, “command.” It's not—

Jon: It's not *davar*?

Tim: —it's not the word “speak,” and it got translated as “command.” It actually is the Hebrew verb, “command,” which is *tsavah*. And then from that, you get the Hebrew noun, *mitsvah*. *Mitsvah*. And then the plural of that is *mitsvot*, “commands.” So *tsavah mitsvah*: “instruction,” is one way—but I actually think *that* English word better captures the Hebrew word, Torah, “instruction.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So “command” is a pretty good one. It's a directive: “I'm telling you what to do.”

Jon: Command.

Tim: *Tsavah*.

Jon: *Tsavah*.

Tim: I mean, can we think of some other...? “Direct?”

Jon: So “instruction...”

Tim: “Instruct” has a pedagogy program, like a school—

Jon: A training—

Tim: —training in mind. And that's not *tsavah*.

Jon: *Tsavah* is just basically...

Tim: “Do this.”

Jon: “Follow these...”

Tim: “Do this. Do what I say.”

[Laughter]

Tim: “I need you to do what I say.”

Jon: Okay. “Command.” Yeah.

Tim: Now, this is the narrator telling us, “Yahweh Elohim commanded the human, saying...” And now, we're going to—maybe, let's try and define what *tsavah* means, by what it is that God says.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Let's think of it that way. And here's the *mitsvah*: “From every tree of the garden, you will eat, eat.” This *mitsvah* has three parts.

Jon: Okay. That's part one.

Tim: That's part one. So the first part is from—

Jon: “Eat of every tree.”

Tim: Yeah. And you're like, “Wow, that sounds like the Genesis one blessing,” which was “be fruitful and multiply.”

Jon: Which just means, “I'm going to eat a lot of food.”

Tim: Yeah. So here, it's just, “enjoy all the trees.”

Jon: “Eat up.”

Tim: “Eat up.” So the first part of the *mitsvah* is to enjoy God's good world, and what it provides for you.

Jon: “Party on.”

Tim: “Party on.” So there's this wide-open field of human experience now, that I've just been commanded, right, to enjoy. That just raises a million issues. Like, how...right? And so, the second part of the *mitsvah* comes along, and it qualifies, specifies—and it's the first prohibition in the Bible; the first “do not.” *Thou shalt not*. “But from the tree of knowing good and bad, thou shalt not eat from it.” Which is just, “You will not eat from it.”

Jon: Yeah, okay. So we were introduced to that tree earlier—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: —we didn't know why. Here, it's like, “Oh, okay; that's the *one* tree not to eat of.” We still don't know why—

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: —in the story. “Eat of every tree. There's this one—it's the tree of knowing good and bad—not that one.”

Tim: That's right.

Jon: “Just not that one.”

Tim: Right. Now, “knowing good and bad.” So, just a quick reminder. This is a phrase used throughout the Hebrew Bible to “discern between good and bad,” or “know” between good and bad, it's a mark of human moral maturity. Children that are really young, or a human that's super old, like, right about near death, are the two seasons of human life where someone doesn't really, probably, have a very reliable knowledge of good and bad.

Jon: I didn't know about the old one.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: So with children, you just—you're naive. You don't know.

Tim: You don't know.

Jon: You haven't learned.

Tim: Yeah. There's a guy that comes to David—when David is coming back to Jerusalem, after he was run out by his son who staged a coup—and this guy says to David, like, “I'm not going to come with you. You don't need—I can't add any value to you. Let my son come with you, but I'm too old; I don't know good from bad, anymore.”

Jon: You lose it.

Tim: Point is, “my mind isn't—”

Jon: Your mind's going.

Tim: “My mind's going.”

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: Yeah. Super interesting. So go back to these trees. This is important.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This is, as always, what's happening in this moment is foundational for understanding all of God's commands to follow. In a way, you could say, all the commands, the ten, and the hundreds, all are unfolding—

Jon: It all starts here.

Tim: —the core idea of what's happening, in this moment.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What I was just told was that every single tree in this garden is desirable—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —to see. “Desire,” that’s the word used in the tenth command: “Don’t covet.” It’s the same word.

Jon: Don’t desire.

Tim: *Hamad*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So every tree, and actually, this is key. Genesis two, verse nine—this has been a very productive meditation for me, in the last year: “Yahweh caused to sprout, from out of the ground, every tree”—and it’s given two descriptions—“desirable for seeing and good for eating.” So those are set in parallel with each other.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So “desirable...to see; good...to eat.” Let’s meditate on these things.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So “desirable” matches “good,” and “seeing” matches “eating.”

Jon: Huh.

Tim: Think of it like two parallel lines in Hebrew poetry.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “Oh Lord, the trees that you have planted, they are desirable to see. Yes, they are good for eating.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: If that was set up in a line of biblical poetry, you would say, “Mm, somebody wants me to think of—”

Jon: These two things connected.

Tim: “—of these two connected.” So what's the relationship of desiring—something that is desirable, and something that is good?

Jon: Yeah. When you desire something, it's because you want it, and you want it, because it's good. At least you think it's good.

Tim: Yeah, so what any creature wants is its own good. And that might seem so intuitive, but it actually, it's worth saying out loud. Like, what is it that motivates any living creature to do—?

Jon: This is why the golden rule works.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: “Do to others as you would do to yourself. I want good.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “So do good to others.”

Tim: That's right. Now, you can, you know, introduce the twist, to say, well, man, what I *think* is good—

Jon: —yeah, always actually good—

Tim: —isn't always actually good.

Jon: Yeah. So, I want good, but do I actually see what is good?

Tim: Totally. But that doesn't call into question the basic truth about human experience.

Jon: Yeah. I desire good.

Tim: Whether or not it is good for me, the reason I do *anything* is because I *think* that it is the good. I might be mistaken, but the reason I'm doing it is still because I think it's good.

Jon: Hmm. So that is interesting that, for how diverse people are, and how many different ways there are to try to exist in the world, every single person is actually after the good.

Tim: The good. And it might be how, in the course of a human life, that my sense of what is good has become so misshapen, right? So damaged, so corrupted, that what I actually think is good for me, are actions that hurt me—or hurt other people.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But even then, underneath all the wreckage, is still a desire to do what is good. It's just the good has become so mutated that it's hard to see what good one is pursuing, if they do something that, right, on the outside, looks really bad. So notice that “desire” and “good” are connected there, in the parallelism: “*Desirable* to see, *good* for eating.”

Jon: What I desire is the good.

Tim: I desire the good; wanting the thing that I believe will bring me good. That's the basic relationship. So now, let's move to the “seeing and eating.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Because those are—“desire” and “good,” you said, are pretty intuitive; how those relate—“seeing” and “eating.” So “seeing” is a part of “noticing, perceiving” something is good, but not taking it. You can see and appreciate goodness, but not—

Jon:—but you haven't consumed it.

Tim: Yeah, so the difference between *seeing* and *eating* is really interesting. Because you can appreciate goodness, but *not* have to “take it into yourself,” and make yourself become one with it. You can just see, and be like, “that's good.” And isn't that what God's asking them to do with this one, particular tree? Because when the woman sees the forbidden tree, what we're told is, “It was desirable to look at.”

Jon: Yeah. Because *all* the trees are desirable to look at.

Tim: Because *all* the trees are desirable. This is so profound, man. This is like, the longer I sit...with this simple little verse—Genesis two, verse nine—it's like the whole universe opens up. And remember, in the seven days, God did “x,” he saw that it was good. Genesis one: creation is good.

Jon: When God has his way, he creates the good.

Tim: Yeah. The creation is good. And *good* is something that humans perceive, first with their eyes, and then their eyes—

Jon: Which creates desire.

Tim: —which generates desire. Which then leads to an impulse to take and want to “become one with it.”

Jon: “To eat,” yes.

Tim: Yeah. So by saying that *every* tree is going to look good, but now we know there's *one* tree that looks good and will excite your desire, but it is *not good* for you.

Jon: It's a sneaky tree.

Tim: And there's *nothing* visible that will lead me to know the difference.

Jon: So how can you know?

Tim: *How can you know?* How can you know? The only thing in this story is Yahweh's command.

Jon: Yeah. The word.

Tim: And the word says, “Eat of every tree in the garden—ooh! Ooh! This one! Do not eat from it.” Now, let me finish the command.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This is the third part, “because in the day you eat from it, you will die-die.” The verb's repeated twice in Hebrew.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So first command: “enjoy every tree.” Why? Every tree is so beautiful to see. And once that desire is excited within you, it'll impel you to move towards the good.

Jon: So follow your desire.

Tim: Yes—

Jon: And consume the good.

Tim: —follow your desire. The good that you see out there is real.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And when you find the good, enjoy it. And when I'm enjoying the good, what I am enjoying is God. Because the seven-day narrative taught me that God is the knower and provider and definer of all good. So any physical object within creation, here, with the trees, is actually a sign or a symbol, pointing to the ultimate source of all good. So in a way, eating and enjoying the tree is a way to enjoy God. That's what these two narratives, next to each other, are teaching me—

Jon: Really?

Tim: —because God's the provider of what's good. Good comes from God.

Jon: But you're enjoying the good goodness God's providing.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: How are you taking the next step, saying, “And so I'm actually enjoying God”?

Tim: Ah. Because anything that is good is a gift of God, because God is the provider of what is good. Good doesn't just happen. Good is the product of a mind, with the power

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Jon: Good would not exist without God.

Tim: —that's right—to generate a world, within some objects are fine and other objects are good. But actually Genesis one, the seven-day narrative, taught me that all of it's good.

Jon: It's all good.

Tim: It's all good. But there are *apparently* also some things that *look* good, but that won't *be* good for me, at least, not now. And the only thing that will tell me is not looking at it, it's—

Jon: Listening to God's command.

Tim: God's command. That's right. So God's command is twofold. One: “live; have life, enjoy good.” The second part of the command is: “don't die.”

[Laughter]

Tim: Truly. I mean, right? The assumption is, “in the day that you eat of it, you'll die.” Then, kind of, the assumption is: “I don't think you want to die. I think you want to live. So live, and do not die.”

Jon: Okay. So “follow your desire and eat.”

Tim: Yes.

Jon: “It's all good.”

Tim: Yep.

Jon: Mm, “although you are going to run into situations where it's going to look good—”

Tim: Yes.

Jon: “—but it's not.”

Tim: It's not.

Jon: “In that situation, listen to my voice. And when you do that, you're not going to die.”

Tim: Yeah. “You'll avoid death, and you will experience life.”

Jon: Which is back to then, well, what's the purpose of this: it's for life.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

Jon: Okay. So that's the three parts of God's command.

Tim: Yeah. Three parts. And there's really just, there's a positive element.

Jon: "Eat and live."

Tim: "Eat, and have life."

Jon: "Listen to my voice, and don't die."

Tim: "Don't eat what will lead to death. Do what leads to life. Don't do what leads to death."

Jon: When you say it that way, it's kind of like, really, really simple.

Tim: It is, really...

Jon: But when you meditate about this image of the trees and the garden and being in this orchard, and all this beautiful fruit, but there's a poisoned tree, and you don't know the difference, it's just like; it excites the imagination.

Tim: It's hard to think of a story with better images.

Jon: "I have an impulse to take, but I can take the wrong thing that will destroy me." It's kind of comical to think of us as creatures that just want to like, take good, and consume it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You know, take and eat and consume and become one with good.

Tim: We want the good.

Jon: "Good—I want that. I want to be one with that." It's this very simple...

Tim: And it's not just that we want good in the abstract. What we want is the goodness that the concrete thing in front of me will provide—I want to live. I want to taste good things in my mouth. It's pleasure. Pleasure. I desire pleasure and life.

Jon: Yeah. Abundant life.

Tim: Abundant life. Yeah. Because you can just stay alive—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —and eat, like, bread and...stale bread...and that's "living."

Jon: Right.

Tim: But man, if you could *live*—and taste apples and oranges and tiramisu and soft brownies with vanilla ice cream. Right?

Jon: Key lime pie.

Tim: Key lime pie. Now, we're talking the good life, right? But then that introduces the problem, which is, not everything that humans see and desire is actually good for them. So the story introduces these, kind of, two principles: God wants humans to live; to be partners with them. Listen to what God says, do what leads to life.

Jon: And you can think of it in terms of, "You can eat something that's actually poisonous." But the real complexity of human life, where things get weird, is how we relate to each other, right?

Tim: And how we relate to creation, which is a part of how we relate to each other.

Jon: Right. So as we're "taking and consuming the good," I mean, there is the trap of grabbing something and consuming it, and realizing, "actually that wasn't good for me"

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Tim: Right.

Jon: —and that happens. And that can be complicated. But where it gets *really* complicated is, as we're all taking and consuming and looking for the good as a community—

Tim: Right.

Jon: —how to do that in a communal way, where we are honoring each other and loving each other.

Tim: Yes. And in those complex environments, it will often be the case that we don't actually know what is truly good for ourselves. And our desires, or what we "see," is not reliable. Like, it's either selfish, self-oriented, in some way; that it's about having pleasure and goodness—

Jon: At the expense of others.

Tim: —at the expense of another. Or it could just be lack of knowledge; ignorance about the cause-effect sequence, that me, doing this thing that I think is good, will set into motion something that actually is bad for my neighbor, ten years from now. So this story is simultaneously saying, God has packed creation with goodness, to be enjoyed, that leads to life. But I actually need to become, also, suspicious of my eyes. And I need to be somewhat suspicious of my desires—not because desire is bad, but my desire for the good could lead me towards something that looks good, but is not. And how am I supposed to know what's the way forward? And in the Eden story, it's a very simple moment in the story where God is the one who says, "Listen, I will teach you. I will teach you—"

Jon: "I will tell you."

Tim: —"how to know good from bad. Not from this tree. My command will be how you know good from bad." That's fundamental.

[Musical Break (28:59—29:33)]

Tim: So Genesis three begins by saying, "there's a snake in the garden, and it's crafty." It's shrewd. Sees an opportunity. So no backstory about the snake, other than it's a creature that God made. We know that. And I don't know, maybe I'll hyperlink to our podcast series on "spiritual beings," in the God series.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Okay. So the snake starts talking to the woman, and says, "Did God really say, 'Don't eat from any of the trees of the garden?'" Which of course—

Jon: Is kind of a trick question.

Tim: —is not what God said. In fact, it's the opposite of what God said.

Jon: He said, “eat-eat.”

Tim: It's what God said, with the introduction of the word “not.”

[Laughter]

Tim: Remember?

Jon: That's a way to screw things up...throw a “not” in there.

Tim: Yeah, God said, “Do eat from all the trees of the garden.” And what he says is—the snake says, “Did God say, ‘*Don't* eat; do not eat from any trees of the garden?” So the woman—that's the easy one, right—so she says, like, “No, that's not what God said.”

Jon: Fact-checks the snake, right, real quick?

Tim: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: But what the woman notices is, “Well, God did say, ‘From all the trees of the garden, eat.’ Well, but there's one...”

Jon: The one.

Tim: So suddenly, the snake draws attention to the one.

Jon: “Let's talk about that one.”

Tim: The one object of desire that God said, “It looks good, but it will kill you” and, right, he's drawing attention to that. And the woman says, “Well, God says, we'll die if we eat it. So it looks good, but it's not.” And then the snake says to the woman, “You're not going to die. God knows, that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened”—an image of knowledge and illumination; it's a metaphor—“and that you will be like Elohim, knowers of good and bad.”

Jon: Now we can't really trust the snake, here at this point, that what he's saying is reality.

Tim: No, that's the whole point, is that he, he's a deceiver. Mhm. So the snake both tells the truth, and he lies. And that's always the hardest kind of lie, right—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —the lies that are full of half-truths. So he does say, “You will not die,” and that is not true.

Jon: They're going to die if they eat the fruit.

Tim: Yep. Totally. They're going to cut themselves off from—

Jon: That's a lie.

Tim: —God's life. So that's a lie. Then he also says, “There's just other effect that you'll have, that you really will—by declaring through your choice to do what God said is ‘not good’—you will become a knower of good and bad.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The tree—

Jon: And that's true. And you desire that. He's speaking to her desire. “You want to know good from bad. You can actually just have it. And the day you eat from this, you're going to have it.”

Tim: That's right. “You will, in that moment, become a knower of good and bad.”

Jon: And that's a sneaky half-truth too, because it's true.

Tim: Yeah. Totally.

Jon: But it's a “distorted knowing” of good from bad.

Tim: That's right. Because God just invited you to trust him; to trust his command.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay. So this phrase, “You will be like Elohim, knowers of good and bad,” just always throws me for a loop.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Because they *are* like Elohim; they're images of God.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: And they are meant to know good from bad.

Tim: Well, they are meant to rule and steward creation as God's partners, which will involve making calls about good and bad. They don't *yet* make calls between good and bad, like Elohim does. But that's the riddle of the command. Because the command seems as if God is saying, “I don't want you to have the knowledge of good and bad.”

Jon: Right, “Don't eat it.”

Tim: But the command itself is the first lesson about knowing good from bad. Namely, that you will know good from bad, not by following your desire or your eyes, or what you perceive as good; the most reliable source would be from the divine command. And if you begin to let that teach you, now we're going to actually begin to learn true good from bad. At least, I think that's the logic of the story. So verse six, “And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating.”

Jon: Because all the trees were that.

Tim: Mhm. Okay, “And that it was an object of longing for the eyes, and the tree was desirable for making wise.”

Jon: Okay. So three ways of kind of saying the same thing.

Tim: Remember, it was just two ways before. “Desirable to see”—

Jon: “Good for eating.”

Tim: —“good to eat.” That was the word *khamad* or *nekhmad*. And that is used, here, in Genesis 3:6, for the third description, for “desirable to make one wise,” that's that word *khamad*. The second thing “for the eyes,” it's a new word.

Jon: Oh, it was “desirable for the eyes.” And here, it's “object of longing.”

Tim: An object—a *ta'avah*.

Jon: A *ta'avah*.

Tim: *Ta'avah*. So *ta'avah* and *nekhmad* are the two, key, Hebrew words for “desire.”

Jon: And they're synonyms?

Tim: They're synonyms, but *ta'avah* speaks more like our English word “craving, longing.” It speaks to a physical experience of desire, in a way—it's a little more visceral.

Jon: More primal.

Tim: *Khamad* is certainly connected to our bodies, but it is speaking more, I think, to the, a little more, to the mental—

Jon: Like, our mental imagination, a bit.

Tim: —Yeah, imagination. So *khamad*, desire, is about your imagination. *Ta'avah* is about the “physical impulse.” Like, when you see the food, you're really hungry; there's an appetite—

Jon: When you smell the food cooking—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: —and you salivate.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: That's a *ta'avah*.

Tim: Yeah. That's right, so that smell; obviously “the eyes” are an “activator” of physical longing—for food and for sex and for pleasure or for comfort, right—you see a mansion that's not yours? So that physical, the thing that happens in your stomach, right, when you want something? So, that's. Here, okay. So first, notice, notice the order, when—

back here, when the trees were introduced—it was, “every tree was desirable to see, and good to eat.” So it’s *seeing*, then *eating*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Because you can see something, and then just be like, “That looks good, but I don’t need it. I’m good.” And it can be good. It can be good, and I can be good, without eating it. Notice how “eating” is second. Now, in this scene, what she first perceives, and sees, is that “it’s good for eating.” The order has been swapped.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the first thing she sees is about what it is “in relation to *me*.”

Jon: Okay. “The good needs to come into me.”

Tim: Right. I think that’s significant. In other words, because you can see something that’s desirable, and just be like, “that is so rad that exists in the world.”

Jon: “And if I take it, I’ll screw it up.”

Tim: Yeah, “but I don’t *have* to eat it. It can just be.”

Jon: “It can just be.”

Tim: But it is noticing: you’ll see something that’s good; it’ll excite the desire; and then, you’ll want to consume it. And here, what she sees and notices first, is what that thing is in relation to my—“I’m going to eat that thing. That thing is for *me* to eat.” She doesn’t notice that it’s *beautiful* and *good*, but that I don’t have to have it. The first thing she sees is what it is in relationship to me: “I can eat that, and this will be good for me to eat that. *And* when I see it—”

Jon: “I crave it.”

Tim: “I crave it. I need it.”

Jon: Hmm. So, okay, that’s interesting. So you’re saying when “seeing” is first, you can see and desire it, but it can stay neutral. And then, when “eating” is first, the “seeing” becomes this impulsive kind of “craving.”

Tim: Craving. That's right.

Jon: Where you aren't letting it be neutral. You're just like—

Tim: Yeah. Maybe it's the difference between...I'm hungry, and I'm riding my bike home—this is, actually, a real experience I sometimes have—riding home, if I've worked all day here in the studio, and if I ride my bike up Ankeny street, I'm going by all of the restaurants—some of the best restaurants in Portland are a block parallel to my bike ride home, right—and I'm just like, “Oh my gosh, that smells so good.” And I'm hungry. Like, I want to go home, and we're going to start dinner. So it's kind of like that. But so it's that difference of, “I smell that it is good. It excites my desire.” But I can say, “That can be good for all the people in there, right now. But I've got a good thing that I'm going home for. That's what's good for me, right now.” But here, it's inverted. And it's just the moment you smell it, you're just like—

Jon: “I need tacos.”

Tim: “That's mine. That needs to be mine.”

Jon: “Tacos in my belly.”

Tim: “That is mine.” It's that difference. See, there's some distance, like, I can distance myself, to say, “That is good, but I don't need that right now.” And the swapping of the order, I think, here in Genesis 3:6 is telling us that—

Jon: —that can get inverted, which screws you up.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, you can begin through habit—I think, mental habit—begin to relate to any object, and the moment you see it, you're just like, “Need that. Need that. That's mine.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It can begin, I think, to develop a distorted way of relating to things that are good.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Your first impulse is to just take.

Jon: Isn't that what a Cookie Monster is?

[Laughter]

Tim: Really?

Jon: I don't know. I just keep thinking of the Cookie Monster, for some reason.

[Laughter]

Tim: "Cookie is for me. C is for cookie."

[Laughter]

Tim and Jon: "And cookie is for me..."

Jon: [eating sounds]

Tim: Cookie's not for anybody else.

Jon: ...Just mounds of cookies.

Tim: Cookie's not just for the shelf to be tasty and good, without *me* having to eat it.  
"Cookie is for me."

[Laughter]

Tim: That's Genesis 3:6, right here.

Jon: Okay.

Tim [chanting]: "The woman saw the cookie, and the cookie is for me." Yeah. That's it.

Jon: All right.

Tim: So of course "she took from its fruit, and she ate. And then of course, she gave to her husband, who was right there the whole time." We find out now, for the first—

Jon: We're talking about the third part, though, "it was desirable for making wise."

Tim: Oh, oh, oh, thank you. Thank you...Thank you.

Jon: Because the impulse of being wise is—is a good thing.

Tim: Yes, yes. This is *maskil*, or *haskil*. This is positive, everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. It's the way to find success through your decision-making process; to find the way forward, that leads to goodness.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But what's interesting is, what you were told the tree is connected to knowing good and bad. And knowing good and bad is crucial for making wise decisions that lead to a good outcome. So in this sense, she's not wrong.

Jon: She should have gone the opposite direction: “Okay, I want to be wise. I desire to be wise. That object looks like it's good. But do I need to eat it? Actually, no. God said, ‘Don't eat it.’”

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. So what defines wisdom? Is wisdom defined by following God's command, and assuming God is wiser than I am? Where this tree represents a decision, and the moment I take it, I'm striking out on my own, and declaring, “That's how; that's wisdom. Wisdom is following my desire. And if I follow my desires, if I, be true to my most authentic, right, desire then that is wisdom.” That's so tricky, because in some cases, that's true.

Jon: That is the baseline God gives, “Eat-eat.”

Tim: But in some cases, it's not true.

Jon: But then how do you know when it's not true?

Tim: And the only thing is the command. So is it God's command that gives wisdom, or is it following my desire?

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So this sets up the fundamental dilemma, I think, of the human story. And to me, this has been so important over the years, because this isn't a moment of, like... depraved rebellion.

Jon: Hmm. They didn't kill anyone.

Tim: It's not a—it is a fail. The word “sin” means “moral failure.” So it is a failure to not do what God said, or to do what God said not to do. So it is—the word “sin” is accurate description. It's not used in the story, but it is an accurate description.

Jon: Yeah. But it's not, like, “armed rebellion.”

Tim: It's not—yeah...

Jon: They're not like, “You know what? We're fed up with you, God.”

Tim: They're culpable, because they heard what God said. So they're accountable to that. But it's not like they have a broad life experience to draw on, and they are, willfully—they're stupid; they're foolish. This is an act of folly. Like, they don't even know what death is, experientially. So they're depicted—and again, not knowing good and bad is the state of—

Jon: They're also naive.

Tim: —children. They're naive. They're easily deceived. So it's with Cain—in the next story—that we're going to start getting into, “God just told me this is bad. What is bad is taking the life of another. I'm mad. I'm going to kill my brother.” Then we start getting more, into a little more culpable and—but this is, I think depicted, the fundamental human condition is that we don't know. We are ignorant. We don't know what's good for ourselves. And our desires, sometimes—

Jon: But we need to know.

Tim: —point us to what is good, but not always. But we *need* to know this, if we're going to ever get ahead. And this is the moment in the story that's saying, like, humans from, right, as far back as we can possibly tell, are pretty much trapped in folly and ignorance, and being misdirected by their good desires. Good desires can lead to bad ends. And it's a problem that every human, and every generation of humans, seems to grapple with.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: What's the way out? What's the solution, even if humans don't seem to listen to it? It is God's command. God's command leads to life, even when it doesn't seem like it. This is fundamental stuff.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Okay. Where we're going to go from here, is then trace—just overview, real quick—a couple key moments where God also tells some people what to do. He tells Noah, or Noah's sons, one specific thing about murder. And then he tells Abraham to do all kinds of things. And that is going to introduce all these twists, because Abraham sometimes “doesn't do,” sometimes “does,” and sometimes “half does”—and what happens in all those combinations. And then we'll get to Mount Sinai, where God tells a whole bunch of things to do and not do, to the Israelites. And this is our journey of tracing the theme of God's command, in the story of the Bible.

[Musical Break (44:31—44:34)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we'll continue to study the theme of the commands of God. We're going to look at the story of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. We'll see that, in each of their stories, listening to the voice of God will bring them to the end of themselves.

Tim: It looks like a kind of surrender, or death, but God's command tends to lead people in that direction, and then surprises them with life.

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Jody: Hi, my name is Jody and I've been working at Bible Project for five years. I'm a part of the Patron Care team, and what our team gets to do is thank and serve those who have decided to join our patron community, whether that's through a financial gift, our prayer newsletter, our weekly volunteers, or even those that pop in the studio to visit here in Portland. I get to hear from people from all over the world, from different walks of life, who are studying and experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. And I learn something every day as I come into work. There is a whole team of us that make the podcast happen every week. For a full list of everyone involved in this episode, check out the show credits wherever you stream the podcast and on our app. Thanks again for listening and being a part of this with us.

[Musical Finale (46:56—47:17)]