



Spirit of God (Reboot) E1: The Spirit, Breath, and Wind Behind Everything

Official Transcript

Speakers:

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[The Frequency of Ruakh and Pneuma in the Bible (0:00-13:32)]

[BibleProject theme]

Jon: Welcome to BibleProject podcast. Today, we begin a brand-new, expanded series on the Spirit of God. Back in 2017, we did a short three-episode series called the “Holy Spirit,” and it was during those few short hours that Tim introduced me to the ancient and biblical idea of God as *ruakh*, that is, God as spirit. And today, we come back to this portrait of God to explore it more deeply. You know, in the many years of BibleProject, we’ve yet to ever revisit an idea. But here we are, ready for more spirit.

Tim: [Audio clip from the episode below] If there’s one video and podcast topic we’d like to return to and fill out more, it’s been this.

Jon: The Spirit of God, *ruakh* Elohim. *Ruakh* is a Hebrew word that we have difficulty translating into any one English word, and so *ruakh* gets translated in our Bibles many different ways.

Tim: [Audio clip from the episode below] What the biblical authors could signal with one word, we have many words for in English. It's translated as "wind," "breath," "spirit," and then "mind."

Jon: *Ruakh* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek. It's a concept that takes a while for our modern minds to appreciate. But we can get there. Look out your window and see *ruakh* blowing through the trees. Close your eyes, take *ruakh* into your lungs. As you do this, you begin to realize that we live and breathe and exist within this invisible energy. And so it's no surprise that *ruakh* becomes one of the key ways the Bible talks about the nature of God.

Tim: [Audio clip from the episode below] The invisible personal energy of God that makes all things possible, that originated all things, and that sustains all things.

Jon: Saying God is *ruakh* invites us into this mystery about the nature of God, how we, as mortal, finite beings, can experience an infinite God.

Tim: [Audio clip from the episode below] *Ruakh* is the way the biblical authors are uniting the divine and the human, creator and creation. It's the meeting place of the two. It's a point at which God can influence humans by uniting with them in this invisible way. There's a mystery. And that's at the heart of what the Biblical authors are trying to say.

Jon: Today, Tim Makcie and I kick off this expanded series on the theme of the Spirit of God. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[BibleProject theme fades out]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello.

Tim: Hi.

Jon: Here we are.

Tim: Here we are.

Jon: What are we doing?

Tim: Mmm, we're doing a new, old thing. I guess you could call it a reboot conversation. What we want to do is re-explore the—theme?—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —of the Spirit of God throughout the storyline of the Bible. And we made a video called the Holy Spirit a long time ago.

Jon: Yeah. And we had a podcast conversation, maybe four or five episodes.

Tim: Yeah. Three.

Jon: Oh, really? Only three?

Tim: Oh, well, at least in my notes, it's in three blocks.

Jon: Okay. Wow. We were brief back then. [laughs]

Tim: So yeah, I think this was like year two or three of the project—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: —and it was so new, we didn't have, like, a pattern for how we made stuff. We made some things after talking for twenty hours—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —and we made some things after talking for three hours.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so we made a video called the “Holy Spirit.” We talked for three hours.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And basically, the goal of those conversations was to help do a reframe of just what the basic biblical vocabulary of Spirit means and refers to. And what was so interesting was we named it Holy Spirit, but then mainly the video wasn't about, like, the Trinity—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —it was about helping us recover what a Hebrew or Greek speaker would have heard when they heard—

Jon: The word spirit.

Tim: —the word spirit.

Jon: Yeah. And then what does it mean that God is spirit?

Tim: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. So we landed on the English word “energy.”

Jon: Yeah. [laughs] We translated the word “spirit” as “energy.”

Tim: Yeah. And we even qualified in the video that, you know, the energy that is of the personal presence of God. But I think it was easy to misunderstand.

Jon: Yeah, that sounds, uhm, like you're—

Tim: Like the Force—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —like from Star Wars—

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: —the Spirit of God is like the Force.

Jon: Depersonalizing God to some impersonal energy.

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

Jon: But the reason why we chose energy was because of that word *ruakh*—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Has three dimensions to it.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Which it can mean wind, it can mean breath, it can mean the animated force of a person.

Tim: And—totally. Yeah, I think, even, I want to vie now for four—

Jon: Ooh.

Tim: —a four-part meaning.

Jon: All right.

Tim: [laughs] Including mind, what we call mind.

Jon: Ooh, okay. Oh.

Tim: So we were talking recently, and we were like, "*If there's one video and podcast topic we'd like to return to and fill out more, it's been this.*" Eight years go by, and I just have read and thought and talked with so many more people and, in my own journey of following Jesus, have encountered the Spirit in new and surprising ways. And mostly, I just wanted to fill out a much more in-depth biblical theme study of the Spirit of God throughout Scripture and—the storyline, and also aspects about the Spirit that I think maybe I knew about but hadn't fully appreciated, or just hadn't taken the time to really sit in these manifold dimensions of Spirit in the Bible.

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: So this is going to be a much more in-depth series. And I'm just really excited about it.

Jon: Cool, me too. I'm really excited.

Tim: Yeah, let's jump in. So first, what I'd like to do is just kind of actually summarize the original series that we did, the basic ideas, but try and summarize them in one go—

Jon: Okay. Yeah.

Tim: —which is the many dimensions of meaning that are wrapped up with the biblical vocabulary of spirit, and just try and inhabit what—the mindset of the biblical authors when they use their words for spirit. And part of the problem is, we have this English word spirit, which is just one of the meanings.

Jon: Okay. [chuckles]

Tim: [laughs] So from this point on, I'm just going to use the original words, *ruakh*—Hebrew, *ruakh*—and then the Greek word, *pneuma*.

Jon: You put a P on there.

Tim: Yeah, you know—oh, okay, so quick note about—

[Jon and Tim pronouncing the word in different ways]

Jon: *p-neuma*.

Tim: Well, *p-neuma*?

Jon: *Pneuma*. [laughs]

Tim: Yeah, probably, actually, *pnevma*.

Jon: Whoa.

Tim: I know. There's a young New Testament scholar, Benjamin Kantor, who's just unleashing a tidal wave of historical research on the pronunciation of Koine Greek in the first century.

Jon: Okay. They hit that P?

Tim: Yeah, he's overturning all kinds of—

Jon: He found some audio recordings or something?

Tim: —misunderstandings and mispronunciations.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: No, it's super cool. what he actually looks for is places where Greek is—

Jon: Is transliterated somewhere else?

Tim: —appearing or is transliterated into Latin, Syriac, or other dialects, and what he's looking for is mistakes.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: And it's actually in the mistakes in these multilingual transcriptions of Greek that he's able to reconstruct how people were pronouncing Greek. And the one thing that is certain was that there was no silent P at the beginning of words. It was pronounced. Anyway, yes.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: *Pneuma*.

Jon: Now I got to get used to that.

Tim: I know. No more silent P, *pneuma*, it's *pneuma*.

Jon: I'm used to *pneuma*.

Tim: I know. Me too. But it's *pneuma*. And probably *pnevma*, but that may be too far of a leap—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —so we're just going to go *pneuma*.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Oh boy.

Tim: [laughs] I know.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: So all right, *ruakh*—

Jon: Do I have to say *pneuma*?

Tim: You can say whatever you want.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Okay—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: —I'll work it out.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: I'm trying to retrain myself.

Jon: All right.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So *pneuma*. So here we go. A quick recap of the many meanings of *ruakh* and *pneuma* in the Bible. So Hebrew Bible is three-quarters of the English Bible. The New Testament is one-quarter in terms of page length. With that in mind, consider these numbers, just some quick statistics on the usage of these words.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] The Hebrew word *ruakh*—which we're yet to discuss its meaning—appears 378 times in the Hebrew Bible. And if you just look in one English translation for a translation count, like—so I'm just going to take the New American Standard, which is not widely read and used much anymore these days—it is in certain Christian traditions, but. In the New American Standard, those 378 occurrences—it's translated as wind. In other words, it's used with the meaning of wind over 100 of those times, about 114 times.

Jon: Okay, almost a third of the time, it's translated wind?

Tim: Yep, that's right. About 119 of those times, it's used of the human spirit.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —or of the human mind, but it's a human *ruakh*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But then thirty times, it's specifically about breath, like what humans inhale and exhale.

Jon: Okay, that's considerably less.

Tim: Considerably less. And then, about seventy-four times, it's a reference to God's *ruakh*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So wind, breath, spirit, and then mind are kind of the four main uses.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What the biblical authors could signal with one word, we have many words for in English. So I want to take just some time—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —to just try and recover what it's like to think natively with this view of the world, that you have one word— [chuckles]

Jon: Yeah, right.

Tim: —to talk about what we carve out into separate things: a wind, breath, mind, and spirit.

Jon: And when you say spirit, then you mean either God's Spirit or human spirit?

Tim: That's right. And "spirit" as an idea of personal presence.

Jon: Personal presence.

Tim: The personal, animated presence. So we'll talk about these things in a moment.

Jon: We'll talk about it, yeah.

Tim: This is just a breakdown with numbers.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: There's also a Hebrew synonym. The second-place award—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —for a synonym to *ruakh* is the Hebrew word *neslama*. And it only appears two dozen times, twenty-four times. So *ruakh* is a thing. It's the main word. Okay, so remember that's—the Hebrew Bible is three-quarters of the Christian Bible. It appears 378 times. The New Testament is *one quarter* of the whole Christian Bible in terms of page length, and the Greek word *pneuma* appears 379 times, basically the same number of times, but in—

Jon: Right. So four times per capita. [chuckles]

Tim: That's right. But even though it's, you know, like a third shorter kind of body of literature than the Hebrew Bible. So there's a lot of *pneuma* going on in the New Testament.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like a lot. So what is interesting—again, if you just do the same old experiment: Pick one translation. I'll pick the New American Standard. *Pneuma* gets translated as

spirit, referring to the invisible, personal presence, in some way, of either God or of a human, 373 times.

Jon: [jokingly] So all the times basically.

Tim: [laughs] Yeah, totally. There's only three times in the New Testament where it clearly and exclusively means breath. [Jon agreeing throughout] There's other places where there might be a double meaning intended, but three times where it exclusively means breath and only two times where it exclusively and only means wind. Now, there's other places, again, where it's packed with double meaning. But within the New Testament, invisible, personal presence is the predominant meaning of "spirit."

Jon: We've talked before that the New Testament letters and Gospels—they're written in Greek, but you're thinking in Hebrew?

Tim: Yeah, or they're thinking in terms of Hebrew Bible and Jewish thought.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So when they use the word *pneuma*, [laughs] they are using it to translate the Hebrew idea of *ruakh*?

Tim: Yeah, though, you know, the New Testament authors also didn't just grow up in Jewish culture. They grew up in a melting pot of first-century Greco-Roman culture.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] Yeah. Okay. So it wasn't: They were exclusively thinking in Hebrew words. They also had a meaning of this word that had a first-century Greek context.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, but it just so happens that there's a huge amount of overlap and commonality between the associations of *ruakh* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek.

Jon: So are we going to take this in two steps? We're going to, like, think of the word from a Hebrew imagination and then think of the word from a Koine Greek?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, as always, we're going to spend a lot of time in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then we'll step into the Gospels—

Jon: Okay.

[Music fades in]

Tim: —and then the rest of the New Testament in the kind of the latter third of this series.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. Thank you. That's a great clarification. From this moment on, we're just talking about *ruakh* for a while. *Ruakh*—the Hebrew word *ruakh* within the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: We're going to rock the *ruakh*.

Tim: We're rocking the *ruakh*.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: Yeah.

[Musical Break (13:00-13:32)]

[The Meaning of Ruakh (13:32-25:05)]

Tim: Here's a simple starting definition: *Ruakh* in the Hebrew Bible refers to the invisible personal energy that is the animating—

[Music fades out]

Tim: —sustaining presence that makes all things possible—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —that makes anything any-thing. So: the invisible, personal energy, that is, of God, that originated all things and that sustains all visible things. So it's invisible, but it

actually is the creator and sustainer of all visible and material things that we see happen in the world. That's the basic idea. Invisible—

Jon: Can't perceive it.

Tim: Yeah, okay. So let's start there.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So uhm, the coolest thing happened in the last week at the bus stop for my younger son, who I take to the bus stop a couple blocks away. So we walk there. And it's March real time we're having this conversation. The birdsong is just everywhere. Signs of fading winter.

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] And at the bus stop, in the bushes—I don't know how my younger son saw this—a week ago—there are hummingbirds all over our neighborhood. They're amazing creatures. They grace us with their presence—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —all the time, especially this time of year. And so he saw a hummingbird up, and then he saw it fly into the bushes, like, right ten feet from where we wait for the bus stop. And so he looked over in the bushes, and he just walked over, and he was like, "Dad, dad." And he was kind of stooping down, and there was a tiny little hummingbird that had made a nest. And it was perched, like, sitting in the nest. And so then we got close up, and it got freaked out. And so it went up into the tree. And I mean, if there is such a thing as a perfect circle—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —in nature, this hummingbird made it. The perfect little circle. And it's tiny. I mean, just, I don't even know what—

Jon: And it goes in it?

Tim: Yeah, it's like a donut but with a solid bottom.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And in it were two *tiny* eggs.

Jon: Oh my goodness.

Tim: I mean, quarter inch in size.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: I mean, they're just— [pause] and then so we backed off, and this hummingbird came back down and sat on its nest. And then we got to get so close to it as it got used to us. And so we've visited this hummingbird now every morning.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: [excited] And it was there this morning, again, before I came here.

Jon: Mmm, wow.

Tim: And so it's, like, rocking eight days of sitting on that nest.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: We're just like, "*How many days is it going to sit there? Does it eat during the day? Does it leave the eggs?*"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So it's become this very special little—

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —experience for my son and I. And for me— we've been talking about it, and the other night at dinner, he was—at the end of the week, we talk about gifts of God that God's given us during the week, and he brought up the hummingbird. And I was like, "Yes, buddy, that's right." Like, it feels sacred to encounter this creature. Because normally, they're high up in the trees. You don't see them. But it's a creature nursing, like, the next generation. And it's putting itself in danger of these giants—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —like—right?— [chuckles] coming around it. And anyway, I don't know why it was such a special encounter. So what's remarkable is that creature—you can see its tiny little chest. It has these orange speckles on its tiny chest. You could see the chest moving, and it's breathing.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And like, that's it, right there. So—

Jon: Wait, what's it?

Tim: The *ruakh*.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: So lock into watching a little creature inhale and exhale, and then just take a moment to stop and ponder the fact that I, as the observer, am inhaling and exhaling. And what we are both inhaling and exhaling is the same thing. And intuitively know that the thing we inhale and exhale is the thing keeping us alive. It's keeping me alive.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it's the same thing keeping that hummingbird alive. And so let's ponder a little more. Let's take a walk and think about that. What's so wild is: That same air—

Jon: Am I thinking about this like an ancient, or am I thinking about this like a modern?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. We're taking a walk now with, like, Jeremiah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Or with Moses. [laughs]

Jon: So I don't know about oxygen?

Tim: No, but you know that we're breathing in and out something that I cannot see.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: That's like any human. Take five minutes—

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —to think about your existence. [laughs] We're all taking in and breathing out something that isn't ours. It's outside us. We're taking it in. And every single living creature I ever encounter is taking in and out the same stuff.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So what do you want to call *that*?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then what do you want to call that in light of some other implications if you think about that long enough? So that thing that I'm breathing in and out, I first inhaled when I came out of my mom's womb. I don't remember it, but she told me about it.

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So not only do we share it right now, but we've been sharing it since we came into the world. And what's wild is that our moms could each tell a story about how they took their first inhalation of the same stuff. And that was before you and I ever existed. So we're talking about something that is keeping us all

alive, that has preceded all of us, that has to have preceded all of us all the way back. But then, the moment you and I die, it's going to still exist, right?

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah.

Tim: So what do you call *that*—the thing that precedes me, that has been sustaining my existence, that has to have preceded all living things going all the way back, and that will outlast us going on into the future?

Jon: Yeah, I mean, I have to do the mental exercise of getting out of my modern mind.

Tim: Sure. Sure.

Jon: Because I just immediately go to, "*Well, we're talking about oxygen, and all those things apply.*"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's all around us. We're all sharing it. And uh, I don't know how an oxygen molecule actually works, or an atom or whatever, but—

Tim: [laughs] Well, it's got some protons.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: It's got a neutron.

Jon: Per—yeah.

Tim: [laughs] All that stuff.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: [laughs] Yeah. Anyway.

Jon: From an ancient perspective—

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: Okay, I'm trying to get into that mindset. I'm walking around.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Air.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] I'm breathing in. [Jon breathes in] I know it's something. I feel it come into my lungs. I can feel it as it exhales. I could blow it into my hand, but I can't see it.

Tim: Yeah. You can't see it, but it's sustaining my existence.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] And it's sustaining my existence. And I see that it's also sustaining your existence. And I see that it's sustaining my cattle, and the wild creatures, and even the hummingbird in that nest.

Tim: That's right. That's right. And what is so interesting is that you and I come onto the scene, and we think of ourselves as real

Jon: "We think of ourselves as real"? [laughs]

Tim: We do.

Jon: [jokingly] Yeah, of course.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: [laughs] And in one sense, that's true. But also think: What is human existence, any creature's existence, except constant change and transition?

Jon: Oh. Yeah.

Tim: So we think of ourselves as real, but in fact, you and I, from moment to moment, are never even the same—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —because we're just constant change. And it's just happening in such slow motion from our point of view we don't feel like we're changing. We feel like there's a me—

Jon: Yeah. There's a sense of a constancy of myself.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —that's the same. And that's true. But the material makeup of my body right now, in my mid-40s, is hardly the same material makeup of the body that came out of my mother's womb. I'm, like, shedding myself all the time.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Dry skin and hair.

Jon: Yeah, every seven years—

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: —for a new body.

Tim: But the thing that we're inhaling and exhaling—

Jon: [With new clarity] Oh.

Tim: —and that everything else is inhaling and exhaling, that's just still there. It's still the same. It's enduring. It's long before us—

Jon: Okay, I see what you mean by “real.” So the material self feels very real, even though it’s actually changing.

Tim: Constant changing and coming out of nothing and going back into the dust.

Jon: [laughs] Yeah, some invisible reality that’s giving me life that’s more constant.

Tim: Yes. More constant. So—but that’s what I mean by real. If we want to compare “real” and “real”—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —in a way, whatever this invisible thing is that’s keeping us all alive is much more fundamental and real than you and I are.

Jon: It was here before me, it’ll be here after me.

Tim: Yeah. That’s right.

Jon: And it’s in and around everything.

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Yes. So here’s a meditation from Isaiah 40: “Humans are like grass. The wind blows, and they go away.” The *wind* blows, the *ruakh*. So the *ruakh* becomes an image for what is enduring, and permanent, and fundamental to all that is. *Ruakh* is a way that the biblical authors are trying to talk about what is primary and, like, ultimate cause.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: A fundamental reality without which nothing that exists can exist. And in our minds, it would be something like these forces. Isn’t that funny? We have to go to the word “force,” the gravitational force—

Jon: [With new clarity] Ohhh.

Tim: —the strong and weak nuclear force.

Jon: Something—yeah, that’s a great example. That’s—

Tim: Magnetic force.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] —the gravitational force is invisible, but it affects everything. And as soon as I start saying, “*Well, what is it as a thing?*” I can’t start talking about it as a chemical. I can’t start talking about it as a compound or any sort of material structure. That’s helpful.

Tim: Yeah. In our minds, I think gravity, or the strong or weak nuclear force, or magnetic —

Jon: That's how they thought of the air.

Tim: —force, is our equivalent of how the biblical authors conceived of *ruakh*.

Jon: [With new clarity] Ohhh. That's really helpful.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] Yeah. Because here's what's wild, is that I encounter that hummingbird, and I do some meditation, and I'm like, "*It's more real than anything, because it's keeping both of us alive, me and that hummingbird. And it's been here long before me. It'll be here long after me. And it's the stuff making the trees move and dance.*"

Jon: Yeah. It's more powerful than the trees.

Tim: Yeah. But it's—the same thing I'm inhaling is the same thing making those trees move. What ancient people had as a huge advantage over us is that they aren't as distracted and lulled into apathy—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —and mental laziness as you and I are. [laughs]

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: And so they just had a lot more time to sit and meditate on, like, the fundamentals of human existence.

Jon: Watch an animal breathe and think about it.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. Totally. So what they just intuitively put together is: The stuff moving the trees is the stuff that me and that hummingbird are inhaling and exhaling. It's keeping me alive. It's got to be fundamental to all life because it has to precede any living thing, because it's the thing that all living things depend on. [chuckles]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it's pretty cosmic. Whatever this thing is, it's cosmic. It's more permanent and real than anything I see.

[Music fades in]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And what do you want to call *that*?

Jon: What do you want to call that?

Tim: And *ruakh* is the biblical word for *that*. So let's dive into some examples.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: I think we'll be helped immensely.

[Musical break (24:36-25:05)]

[The Paradox of Wind and God's Spirit (25:05-40:39)]

Tim: So first, let's just look at some examples of what we would call wind.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And what we'll notice is that this wind is directly connected to God.

Jon: It's God's wind.

[Music fades out]

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] Yeah, it's God's wind. So wind, for us, is impersonal. It's just like an energy—impersonal energy, blowing around. Not for the biblical authors, which is why they use this word. So the first line of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the skies and the land. Now the land was wild and waste, and darkness was over the face of the deep waters, and the *ruakh* Elohim was fluttering over the surface of the waters." There's a lot of layers to this that I don't want to get into—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —but I just want to note that the *ruakh* Elohim is doing some kind of wind-like activity, hovering or fluttering. It's the word used to describe a bird's wings [laughs] flapping over the waters.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So in that sense, it's not just simply wind, but it has wind—

Jon: Wind-like qualities here.

Tim: Wind-like qualities, yes.

Jon: Yeah, you can imagine wind whipping over water.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, that's right. And you can see it.

Jon: Well, you see the effects.

Tim: You can see the effects. There you go.

Jon: Yeah, there you go.

Tim: You can see the effects of it. Okay. That's in the background of these other instances I want to look at.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So after the flood—the great flood story from Noah and the ark and the animals—the key turning point in the flood story, when it all changes, and the flood waters stop rising and they start receding and lowering, is in Genesis 8, verse 1, where God causes a *ruakh* to pass over the land and the water subsides.

Jon: Mmm. Mhm.

Tim: So it's very clearly, like, a wind—

Jon: He causes a wind.

Tim: —as it were, pushing the waters back.

Jon: And what's different is, in Genesis 1, it was the *ruakh* Elohim—

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

Jon: —and this is just a *ruakh*.

Tim: Yeah, here, it's God doing something to a *ruakh*. It's a little bit—it's a tweak on Genesis 1, which is God's *ruakh*. And this is now God making a *ruakh* [Tim makes a

whoosh noise] blow over. Which you could say—well, I guess if God can do that with a *ruakh*, you could say that's God's *ruakh*. But it is creating a bit of a distinction between.

Jon: It feels different from “*This is my personal presence you’re experiencing.*” Versus: “*I am animating something other than me.*”

Tim: Right. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yep. Yep. And that is the most common use of *ruakh* in our categories of wind, when it gets translated wind. So in the famous parting of the Sea of Reeds in the Exodus story, where the Israelites go through on dry land, Pharaoh and his army are destroyed in the waters, the waters are parted, because—Exodus 14, verse 21 — “Moses stretched out his hand. All that night, Yahweh drove the sea back with a strong eastern *ruakh*, a *ruakh* from the east, and turned it into dry land.” So actually, very similar—it's echoing the flood story.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] So this is a very common use of *ruakh*. It's associated with blowing the clouds in that bring rain. So there's many descriptions of storms in the Bible that use the word *ruakh* to talk about the force, the invisible force making those white puffy things—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —up in the air move and drop their rain. Wind.

Jon: Okay. So that is *ruakh*, but it's not God's *ruakh*. It's *ruakh* that God is using?

Tim: Mhm. But God's connected to it. It's under the direction of God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So in one sense, you could say it's God's *ruakh*. In another sense, you could say it's something distinct from God. And actually, that's so important. Okay, this is important.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: From one angle, it's God's *ruakh*, Genesis 1, verse 2. But then, from another angle, Genesis 8, verse 1, it's something distinct from God. It's God who is above and beyond all, but yet, it's God—when I want to talk about that above-and-beyond-all God interfacing—

Jon: Within—

Tim: —and within, in the terrarium—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —present in the terrarium—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —*ruakh* is one of the key words used to describe that personal presence. And so what's so tricky is then signaling that personal presence is what is behind uses of the word *ruakh* that we would call spirit. It gets translated spirit or Spirit of God. So like in Genesis one, verse two, "the Spirit of God [chuckles] fluttering over the waters," or the hundreds of uses of the word *ruakh* that is just the phrase "the Spirit of Yahweh" or "the Spirit of God." So when the prophets or when kings—I'm just literally sampled at random—here's a moment from the book of Judges, chapter 6, where there's a tribal chieftain named Gideon who does this great battle rescue of the Israelites from certain death. We're told that he was empowered by God's Spirit, but specifically, it's the phrase, "the *ruakh* of Yahweh clothed Gideon—enrobed Gideon."

Jon: Hmm. Okay, so—and this is the same word for wind?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So I have to make a decision here. Am I going to translate it wind or spirit?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But the ancient Hebrew thinker didn't have to make that decision.

Tim: Nuh-uh.

Jon: So they're just saying, "*The wind-spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon.*"

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] Yeah, clothed Gideon. And what's interesting, it's not saying—this is not a description of the day he was born and took his first breath. He's an adult. He's been breathing for a lot of years.

Jon: Something new?

Tim: Something remarkable happened to him that day. So remarkable, that this incredible, against-all-odds rescue of his people happened when there were violent, you know, armed soldiers attacking them. And the only way you could account for that preservation of life in the face of death is: Something happened to that guy. Like, he got the extra breath that day.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: He took some extra deep breaths, I don't know. He was super oxygenated.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: But it was the *ruakh* of God that gave him his first breath, but then gave him some special breaths that day. I'm using my English words to try and get at this.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: So there's the *ruakh* of God—when you want to tie it to the one who is above and beyond and creates and sustains all things, you can talk about it as the *ruakh* of God.

Jon: And when you do that, you're specifically talking about the activity of God, usually, right?

Tim: Yeah. But you're trying to tie it to the *person* of God.

Jon: But you're tying it to the person of God.

Tim: That's right. That it's not just a mindless force.

Jon: Right.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] You're tapping into the person, the someone, who's behind all things. But the *ruakh* is the way of talking about the one who is above and beyond and behind all things being personally involved in the nitty and gritty of all the change and events and the flux of human history and human life. The *ruakh* is the way the biblical authors are uniting the divine and the human, [chuckles] the divine creator and creation. It's the meeting place of the two—is the *ruakh*. It's a remarkable word. I think that's why, years ago, we actually were excited about the word energy. [laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: To find a word that does the same work.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] I—you know, years ago, when we had this conversation, I was trying to use the word spirit when I referred to wind. Not in conversation, because that's weird, I guess. But like to myself, in a poetic way. Like, "*Oh, the spirit moving through the trees.* Or "*I'm breathing in the spirit.*" But what's uncomfortable about it is then I start to conflate that with God's personal energy.

Tim: Right, right.

Jon: Which I'm like, "*Oh, but that's different.*" But I think that's actually—

Tim: Part of the point.

Jon: —part of the point, the discomfort I’m supposed to feel, the tension I’m feeling?

Tim: Sure. You know, when you just said that, the discomfort was saying, “*I’m breathing in God.*”

Jon: Yes.

Tim: Because—I think why that makes you uncomfortable is because when you breathe in God, all of a sudden, what that language can make you think is, “*I’ve contained God.*”

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: But I think part of what this concept is trying to invite us to see is it’s actually the opposite. It’s actually: “*I’m contained within God*”—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: —“*and everything that I am is sustained and is within and because of God’s ruakh.*” So anytime I’m inhaling *ruakh*, it is God in me, but all that is God in me as a part of an ecosystem in which I am in God.

Jon: [chuckles] Now, how clearly are they thinking in that category? Because, like, when we looked at Genesis 8, God caused *a ruakh*. It could have said, “And God’s *ruakh* parted the waters”—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that’s right.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] —and been more explicit. So there seems to be this understanding that while I am enveloped by God and I exist within God, it isn’t as simple as “I’m breathing in God.”

Tim: Oh, oh, yeah. This is so great, man. This is so great. This is such an ancient conversation—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —in Jewish and Christian tradition.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We’re trying to name one thing, but it’s so super real that we can only name it with two different names— [laughs]

Jon: Okay, what are you talking about? [laughs]

Tim: —that feel opposite to us.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What we're trying to say is a core claim of Jewish and Christian tradition: Something that exists cannot be the author of its own existence.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] Something whose existence depends on something else can't have brought about its own existence. And everything that you and I encounter visibly, with our five senses, is something whose existence is actually dependent on something before it. So it's real, but its real is a kind of dependent real. So there must be something—like, whatever it is that's highest up the chain of cause and effect has to be something that isn't dependent on any other thing for its existence. This is one of the classical kind of ways of thinking about God as the unmoved mover or the first primary cause. So by the word "God," we're designating the one who is—

Jon: "The one who is."

Tim: "The one who is." Yahweh, "the one who is."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So that's key. So anything that is then is because God is, which means that in a way, it's in God or its existence is dependent and sustained by God. Okay. So that could very quickly lead you, though, to think, like, "*Oh, so I guess I'm God, because I only exist in and*"—

Jon: [chuckles] "*From within God.*"

Tim: —"*from within God.*"

Jon: It's like a little gut bacteria being like, [in a squeaky voice] "*I'm human.*"

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Yeah, and so now we have to flip, and we have to say: What we're dealing with in the Jewish-Christian claim of God as the creator of all things is that God exists in and of God's self, but God has also by God's will chosen that something else should exist other than God as itself, as a thing to exist with its own identity other than God so precisely for relationship. It's like the generous—"God's the generous host." That phrase. And while that thing that God has brought into existence is not God, it has a kind of independence, but that independence is relative, because it only exists in full dependence on God. So how do you develop language for talking about—

Jon: Something that's independent, but still fully dependent.

Tim: A dependent independence.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: And its very existence can only exist if “the one who is” pervades and sustains and keeps it alive.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so *ruakh* Elohim is one of the ways the biblical authors are talking about that metaphysical concept—

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: —is that it’s God, the *ruakh* Elohim in Genesis 1, verse 2, but then also, once God has brought something into being with its own relative independence, the way God personally interacts with it, but as its own thing. And that’s what you get it with Genesis 8, verse 1. God causes a *ruakh*. And there we’re like, “*Oh, it’s a wind. So it’s not God.*”

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: But it’s—I don’t know, man, we’re at the coincidence of opposites here. [laughs]

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] Okay, so if I’m an ancient thinker, and you’re telling me the story, and I say—you’re telling me, “*Elohim caused a ruakh.*” I’m thinking to myself, “*Okay, the God of the universe, the first mover, within which I exist and everything has life, is causing spirit to push off these chaos waters.*”

Tim: Yeah, that’s right. Yeah.

Jon: And so am I kind of simultaneously thinking it’s an independent thing from God, but also in some way—

Tim: Is God.

Jon: Is God?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I am thinking both things?

Tim: It’s distinct from God because it’s right here in creation. [Tim makes wind noises] I can feel it, and I inhale it. I can even contain it within my lungs.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that’s—

Jon: So obviously it can’t be God.

Tim: So that can’t be the *whole* of who God is. That can’t be *all* that God is.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: In the same way that I am not God in the sense: I am not all that God is. But yet, in another sense, I am filled with the *ruakh* of God. And I only exist because of the *ruakh* of God. And so in some way, I do really participate.

Jon: Yeah. Now, is there a verse—I think in Job or something we looked at before that kind of makes it pretty explicit—that it's the *ruakh* of Elohim in you that keeps you—

Tim: Yeah, I mean, we're going to get there.

Jon: We'll get there.

Tim: But yes, just to make it clear, Job, in Job 27, says, "The *ruakh* of God is in my nostrils."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] So it's the same phrase as Genesis 1, verse 2: "*Ruakh* Elohim is in my nostrils."

Jon: Okay.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "God's in my nostrils."

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: By which he doesn't mean, like, "*All that God is, above and beyond, is in my nose.*"

Jon: Yeah. Sure.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] But that something very real that is divine and comes from the divine as God's gift to me as someone who's both contained in God and other than God, is in me. It's, I guess, a classic version of a paradox. How can all creation be both distinct from God, but yet wholly dependent and participate in God's existence? And the word *ruakh* of God, in Genesis 1, verse 2, or God causing a *ruakh* to blow within creation, Genesis 8, verse 1 —

[Music fades in]

Tim: —are two ways of stating that paradox.

Jon: Two ways at it. Hmm. Okay.

Tim: And you know, within human knowledge, we're to the point where: "Is it this or is it that? Because both seem real." Usually, that's the invitation to the greater thing—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —that transcends them both.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And the limit is just my limited understanding.

[Musical break (40:07-40:39)]

[Ruakh as a Mind or Idea (40:39-53:39)]

Tim: There's a whole other set of uses of *ruakh* in the Hebrew Bible, but the only word I can think of that does justice to these uses is our word "mind."

[Music fades out]

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So for example, in Genesis 41, the Pharaoh, king of Egypt, has a dream about these wonderful seven cows grazing by a stream. And then these seven mutant nightmare cows—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —come up from the land, and then devour the healthy cows, and so on. And what we're told is that he wakes up in the morning, "and his *ruakh* was agitated." "His *ruakh* was troubled."

Jon: The Pharaoh's?

Tim: Yeah, Pharaoh's is.

Jon: After dreaming this thing?

Tim: Yeah. So he sends for the magicians of Egypt. Nobody can tell him what his dream means. He comes across this Hebrew slave who can tell him what it means. And what he says is—we'll look at it in a couple conversations. But his *ruakh* is troubled.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So I guess it could mean that his breathing was—

Jon: [laughs] He couldn't breathe quite well.

Tim: [laughs] Yeah. But here, let's stack this alongside another example, Numbers 14.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's the story of Moses sending the spies into the land. And ten of the twelve spies come back with the report that's like, "No, there's giants in the land. They're going to kill us. We can't go in there. God can't rescue us." And a guy named Caleb and Joshua say, "No, the Lord can deliver us. Like, he brought us out of Egypt. He can do this." And when God compares Caleb to the ten spies who didn't trust him, what he says is, "Caleb has a different *ruakh*, and he has followed me fully."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: When David is sharing the blueprints for the temple in Jerusalem, he says that he had a dream, and he saw the blueprints in, like, a divine dream that God gave him.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It says that he gives to Solomon the plan then, this blueprint plan, and "the plan of all the temple that was in the *ruakh* with him."

Jon: [inhales] "The plan of everything that was in the *ruakh* with him."

Tim: Yes. Yeah. So there's a *ruakh* with him. I guess you could say it's his *ruakh*.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And—

Jon: The plans are in there.

Tim: —the plan of the temple are in his *ruakh*.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That feels a lot like “mind.”

Tim: I—so you could—yeah. So there’s many more examples like this, but we’re talking about the same thing. Like, I think our closest is our concept of—

Jon: Psyche?

Tim: Uh, no. No. An idea.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Like, what is a concept? What is an idea—

Jon: Well, and where does it live?

Tim: —in a human—that’s right.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, if you come to me and share an idea, which you have many times—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —over the course of this project, where’d—like, if I got an X-ray—

Jon: Yeah. [laughs]

Tim: No, no, like a CAT scan or whatever, and—

Jon: Yeah. An MRI?

Tim: An MRI and scanned your brain—

Jon: Yeah. Where would you see it?

Tim: Am I going to see the idea molecule? You know?

Jon: Right.

Tim: This very mysterious part of human cognition is what we call ideas or concepts.

Jon: Yeah. Or information.

Tim: Information. So I don’t want to try and do a full—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —discussion of that, but to say—it’s very intuitive to say that you received—you came into contact with something that was outside you—

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: —that you received from somewhere outside you.

Jon: Yeah. The inspiration.

Tim: And because you and I, in biblical thought, are porous, our bodies and our hearts and minds and will are porous, things can enter into us from the outside, like an idea, like a plan to build a building.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then you share it with somebody else, and what you could say was: It was your *ruakh*, because it's invisible, it comes from within you, but also came to you from outside. So it went into you —

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —you received it from somewhere, some input you got, then you somehow think about it, whatever thinking is—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —and then you say something or do something. And now, that invisible thing that came to you, is within you, and then goes out of you, has a visible effect in the world. Now there's a building where there wasn't one before.

Jon: Yeah. Hmm.

Tim: And one of the words for that in biblical Hebrew is *ruakh*. That—we have to use the word mind at that point. But *ruakh*.

Jon: Yeah, and “mind” not meaning your brain, “mind” meaning that invisible processing, storing, contemplating, communicating—these abstract, invisible things.

Tim: Yep. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. And in David's case, I think why it's phrased in this unique way—“in the *ruakh* that was with him”—is it wants you to see this as both something that's David's *ruakh* but also that comes to him from God. Because we're told that it was a divine blueprint that he saw.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So it was both his *ruakh* and God's *ruakh*. In other words, it's—*ruakh* is the point at which the divine and human meet, and the point at which God can influence humans by uniting with them in this invisible way. [pause] [laughs]

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] Yeah. [pause] So thinking like an ancient, you got this invisible *ruakh* energy. I'm breathing it in. It's sustaining everything. And at some point, I need to start talking about my own sense of—hmm—mindful agency. And it's this invisible part of me that's very real and almost a more real sense of myself than anything. And the word I have also is *ruakh*. And we call that the human spirit. But just like there's this blurring between: "Is that the Spirit of God in the trees or is that a *ruakh*" —

Tim: [chuckles] That God sent—

Jon: "—that God sent?"

Tim: —that's, like, something other than God.

Jon: Yeah, it's a tension there, but there's also a tension in, like: Is this my spirit? Or am I being filled with the Spirit of God?

Tim: Exactly. Yes.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] And this *is* my spirit, because I'm an independent creature made in God's image, but I'm independent. But then, I can't exist without God's —

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So right there, at that intersection of divine and human, there's a mystery, and that's very much at the heart of what the biblical authors are trying to say. And so what's so fascinating—we'll look at some of these passages later on in the series—so the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians—we call it One Corinthians—knows these people intimately. He planted the church in Corinth. There's a bunch of terrible things happening from his point of view going on. And he wishes he could be there, but he can't right now, so he's writing a letter. And so there's a bunch of instances in chapter 5 of First Corinthians where he talks about: "Hey, listen, right now at this moment, I am absent from you guys in body." Like: "I'm not physically present with you." But what he says is: "I am"—this is First Corinthians 5, verse 3—"I am present *en pneuma*, with you." Or he says in verse 4, "In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled together and I am with you in *pneuma*." [laughs] And so our translators have a challenge right there—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —because what he's saying is that because God's Spirit is there with you, gathering with you when you gather, and because I am connected to

God's Spirit right now, through God's Spirit, it's like I'm with you. Is that what he's saying?

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Or is what he's saying is: My spirit is so joined and connected with you and with God's Spirit, anytime you guys get together, I'm there. So the debate in English translations is: Do you capitalize the word spirit here?

Jon: Ohhh. Is this Paul's spirit or God's Spirit?

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And the longer I've sat with that paradox of how to translate spirit right here in First Corinthians 5, I've begun to wonder if the point isn't the paradox.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Paul is with them, but not because he's physically there, but because he is united to God's Spirit and God's Spirit is united to them.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And there's passages in John that we could look at of when Jesus says, "I will be in you, my disciples, and you'll be in me, and we'll be in the Father." So this isn't just a Hebrew Bible thing. This idea of the union of God and creation, of divine and human, is part of the point of the word *ruakh*. And it's pretty intuitive because the hummingbird and I—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —are both depending on something that's not us to keep us alive—

Jon: Yeah. Mhm.

Tim: —and that long precedes us, and that also blows in the trees. What do you want to call *that*?

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: And that's the fundamental meaning of *ruakh*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So essentially what we just did was what we took about three hours to kind of work through— [laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —years ago.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: We did a little more that we're going to fill out more. But that's the first step.

Jon: Okay. That's the refresher.

Tim: So I guess, if there's a million unanswered questions right now that just got raised —

Jon: Yeah, there are.

Tim: —that's very much the point—

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: —that we'll begin to address all the loose ends—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —as we go forward.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What we should look at next, then, is how *ruakh* is fundamentally associated with what we would call life, but also with death. *Ruakh* is talking about the knife's edge between life and death that all living creatures live on.

[BibleProject theme fades in]

Tim: So we'll look at a whole bunch of biblical texts about that.

[Musical break (50:36-50:40)]

Jon: That's it for today's episode. Next week, we're going to explore how the Spirit of God is the originator and sustainer of life, and how thinking about the Spirit in this way draws attention to our own mortality.

Tim: [Audio clip from Spirit of God (Reboot) E2: The Spirit of Life and Death] This is the biblical author's way of exploring humans as frail, as mortal, as not sustaining their own existence.

Jon: And we'll look at how the story of the Bible is an invitation for the mortal to somehow become more.

Tim: [Audio clip from Spirit of God (Reboot) E2: The Spirit of Life and Death] Whatever immortal life that humans are going to experience is not something they have of their own nature. It's something that is given to them as a gift.

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Kendall: Hello, my name is Kendall, and I'm from Salem Academy.

Leo: Hi, my name is Leo. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. I first heard about the BibleProject in 2019 when I felt an awakening, and I wanted to listen and learn more about the Bible.

Kendall: I first heard about BibleProject from my teacher in Bible. I use BibleProject for learning about the Bible in my Bible class.

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[Phone beep]

Ellie: Hi, my name is Ellie, and I'm from Virginia. I work on the Products team here, some of the background of everything that serves our app and website and Classroom. I have wanted to be an engineer since I was in middle school. Also then, I started dancing competitively when I was seven. And then, all throughout high school, my junior year, me and one of my friends choreographed a duet. We did it in, like, the span of two weeks, and we won a choreography award for it. Which, we were in the same category with my choreographer, who I respected a lot. And so the fact that we got a callout for this was, like, super exciting. If you have a captive audience for me, like, I'm there. [laughs] There's a whole team of us that make the podcast come to life every week. For a full list of everyone involved in this episode, check out the show notes where you stream the podcast and on our app.

[BibleProject theme fades out]

[BibleProject sonic logo]