BibleProject

Spirit of God E16: Q+R: Baptized by the Spirit, Union with Jesus, and the Spirit's Help in Reading the Bible

Official Transcript

Speakers

Hosts: Jon Collins and Tim Mackie

Questions asked by audience members: Zack, Chris, Asha, Stefan, and Lisa

[Intro (0:00 – 3:08)]

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hey, Jon Collins. Hello.

Jon: Hey, good morning. We get to do a question-and-response episode today—

Tim: Yeah, we do. Yeah.

Jon: —on the Spirit of God.

Tim: We landed the plane as much as one can [laughs] on our discussion about the Spirit of God throughout—whew—not just the whole story of the Bible, but even into the centuries of early Christian theology after the Bible.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. But there's so much we didn't cover, actually.

[BibleProject theme song, “Defender” by TENTS, fades out]

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You all sent in such intelligent questions. I swear this is just such an intelligent listening audience. Actually, I don’t need to swear by it. It—I don’t need to—

Jon: [laughs] It’s self-evident.

Tim: It’s self-evident. Yeah, exactly. So thank you all for sending in such great questions. As always, there’s way too many than we can respond to, but we’re happy to respond to some.

Jon: We will do our best. And I’m excited to get into them. Can I tell you one story? My wife was listening to this series, and she said, “Jon, I think I could tell you were kind of annoyed”—

Tim: Oh.

Jon: —“by the whole *pnevma* thing.” [Referring to Spirit of God E1: The Spirit, Breath, and Wind Behind Everything]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: And I was like: [jokingly yelling] “*I was!*” I was like: “*Come on, this is going too far*.”

Tim: Too far? Oh, okay.

Jon: Yeah, this whole, like—

Tim: Oh, great, tell me more.

Jon: Well, I don’t know.

Tim: Huh.

Jon: I just feel like—here’s the thing.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: [switching between a Hebrew pronunciation and English pronunciation of Torah] You started saying “*Torah”* instead of “Torah.”

Tim: Oh, slowly over the years. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. And I was like, "*God, do I have to start saying* [Hebrew pronunciation] '*Torah*'?" It just felt wrong to me.

Tim: Mmm. I know. Yeah.

Jon: It just felt like I was being someone else when I did it. So I just never did.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: I just kept saying [English pronunciation] "Torah."

Tim: Yep, that's fine.

Jon: And you say [Hebrew pronunciation] "*Torah*."

Tim: Yeah. [laughs]

Jon: [pause] But then [pronouncing the p in *pneuma*] "*pneuma*"?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I was like: [exhales] "*Oof*." And then you're like, [jokingly] "*But maybe pnevma."*

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: It's like— [pause] I don't know.

Tim: It's actually the other way around: *Maybe pneuma*—

Jon: Oh. [laughs]

Tim: —but *pnevma*.

Jon: How legit is this?

Tim: Every speaker of modern Greek says "*pnevma*."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And this is an example where modern Greek, as I understand the scholarship—which I didn't make up, and isn't, like, a secret—

[Jon and Tim chuckle]

Tim: [Jon agrees throughout] It's just, traditions die hard, especially when things get woven into regular speak. And so there's a certain way that, in the history of Western education, going back to, like, the 1600s, with a guy named Erasmus, who popularized a medieval European scholar—highly intelligent, brilliant scholar—but popularized a certain way of pronouncing Greek and then teaching how to pronounce Greek that is

historically inaccurate. And so there's, depending on what school you go to and what teacher you have and what textbook you use to learn ancient Greek, you will—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —say "*pnevma*" or "*pneuma*." Nobody should ever say [using a silent p in *pneuma*] "*pneuma*."

Jon: [jokingly disappointed] Okay. All right.

Tim: So I don't know. I don't know what else to say.

Jon: [jokingly] *Pnevma* it is.

Tim: "Here I stand. I can do no other." [from Martin Luther in what is contemporarily known as the *Speech at the Diet of Worms*.]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

[Where Did Jesus and His Followers Get the Idea of Being Baptized by the Spirit? (3:08 – 14:23)]

Jon: [chuckles] All right, let's listen to some questions.

Tim: Okay, let's start off with a great question from Zack in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Zack: [audio recording] Hey, Tim and Jon. This is Zack from Grand Rapids, Michigan. My question is about the connection between the Spirit and baptism. The phrase "baptized by the Spirit" shows up a lot in the New Testament, but I don't see it used in the Hebrew Bible. Where did Jesus and his followers get this idea? Are they saying something new about the way the Spirit works in followers of Jesus?

Jon: Mmm. Thanks, Zack.

Tim: Yep. That's a great question.

Jon: That is a great question.

Tim: Yeah. I appreciate it because it raises an important—mmm—I don't know—step forward for me at some point in learning how to make sense of the Bible. When you're tracing ideas through the Bible, like themes, when we do a theme study, an important

step for me was to learn that you can't trace a theme just by getting out a concordance or doing a word search and tracing one word.

Jon: Okay. Like the word "baptism"?

Tim: Because often—yeah, so the word "baptism." But the *idea* of what baptism *means* is actually connected to lots of different words and images. So *baptizo* just means "to immerse."

Jon: Okay. Like you could *baptizo* a plate into water?

Tim: Yeah, actually, you know what? I—we're just going to do an experiment right here.

Jon: Okay.

[Keyboard typing]

Tim: The verb *baptizo* is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.

Jon: Hmm. Uh-huh.

Tim: It is. And it's used, for example: There's a story about a Syrian army general named Naaman, who goes to Elisha—not "jah," but "sha"—because he has some sort of skin disease. And Elisha—this is in 2 Kings chapter 5—tells Naaman to "go *baptizo*" —in the Greek translation—in the Jordan River seven times.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: And that is translating our word— [pause] ah, *taval*, which means "to dip something into," or "plunge" it into.

Jon: "Dip" or "plunge."

Tim: Yep. So what you'd want to do then is not look up the word "baptize," for example. You would want to look at this word *taval*, which appears—looks like about a dozen times throughout the Hebrew Bible. So that's a word search.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agrees throughout] But the idea of something going into water or through water is a much bigger idea connecting to lots of different stories and lots of passages all over the Hebrew Bible that don't use the word *baptizo* or this Hebrew equivalent, *taval*. So once you do that, then, Zack, your question opens up about a few dozen different passages throughout the Bible that connect baptism with the Spirit and going through the water. And I've thought multiple times of actually doing this video. We said for a long time we don't want to make a video on baptism.

Jon: Did we say that?

Tim: But what we mean is: We don't want to make a video about the issues that divide a different doctrinal or church tradition.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah, plunge or sprinkle kind of stuff. [chuckles]

Tim: Right. Yeah, that kind of stuff. What we want to do is—what would be cool to do is a theme about the waters and going through the waters.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So real quick—so Zack, a way to see how it's connected would be to see how it starts with the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1, verse 2.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: That's, like, ground zero, that image right there. And then the dry land is exposed as the Spirit, as it were, drives the waters to recede on day three. That's an image picked up in the flood story.

Jon: Mhm. Okay.

Tim: Genesis 8, verse 1: God sent—

Jon: God sends a wind.

Tim: God sends a wind and the—

Jon: Which is the word for *ruakh*.

Tim: The word *Ruakh*. And the waters begin to recede. For a guy and his family and a bunch of animals, a little floating Eden that's gone through the waters that brought death and de-creation—and he went through them, and then landed on the dry ground again in a space provided by the Spirit.

Jon: Because the Spirit blew the waters back?

Tim: Blew the waters back.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Genesis 8, verse 1. So that theme continues. The parting of the Sea of Reeds in the Exodus story, God's—

Jon: Mmm. Is the *ruakh* there?

Tim: Yep, God sends a wind, and the waters that could bring death—or they could bring life depending on your posture towards the pillar of fire [laughs] and cloud, and God, right?

Jon: Wow. Yeah.

Tim: Because it brings death on Pharaoh, but it brings life—but it's death-defying, as it were—

Jon: What is?

Tim: —to go through those waters.

Jon: Oh, yeah, sure. Yeah.

Tim: So those are just a few examples. There's lots more.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Naaman's story actually fits into the pattern.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But—so you get this pattern of the Spirit being the agent that leads people through the waters on a passage from death into life.

Jon: Hmmmm. Okay.

Tim: That is a real strong motif throughout the Hebrew Bible. The prophets pick up on that and develop the idea of God doing his rescue restoration of humanity and Israel from exile. And so you get, like, a Isaiah 44, about: "I'm going to pour out my Spirit on the new descendants of Abraham. I'm going to pour out water on the dry ground and create a pool in the middle of a desert." So you have Spirit and water imagery. Not passing through the water, but in a symmetrically matching poem—in that section of Isaiah, there's another poem about: "Even if you go through water or fire, I am with you," God says.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So this is like a shotgun approach. [laughs]

Jon: Right.

Tim: What I'm saying is: The idea of passing through waters as a symbol of a kind of dying and a surrender to God and the Spirit opening up a passageway through the waters into new life, that's a well-worn idea.

Jon: I would call that being baptized *with* the Spirit or by, like—

Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: You know?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: The Spirit is enabling it.

Tim: Yes. Oh, sure, because the Spirit is separate from the waters. Right?

Jon: Right. But—

Tim: The Spirit is the one leading you through the waters?

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah, it's interesting, just this phrase, "baptized *by* the Spirit." But—

Tim: Or "*in* the Spirit."

Jon: Or "*in* the Spirit." Hmm.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. And because the Spirit can be metaphorically described as liquid in the Hebrew Bible—

Jon: Mmm. Yep.

Tim: —then it's not too far of a creative step to say the thing that you are actually immersed in is itself the Spirit.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: The Spirit is the liquid environment, so to speak, and the Spirit that gives you life will carry you through both whatever trials and death. I mean, this is why Paul, in Romans 6, refers to baptism as dying and being raised—

Jon: Mmm. Right.

Tim: —as if it's a common idea. He doesn't explain it. He just assumes that the Roman Christians just, like, know that idea.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Where'd he get that idea? And that's got to be a Bible study that he had. Maybe it's the one that made that guy fall asleep—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —and fall out the window. [laughs]

Jon: No, that one sounds exciting.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: I'd stay awake for that one.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: It seems like water's doing a double duty—maybe two different metaphors then. There's the death water, the chaos water, that we got to go *through*.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But then Spirit as water is water that actually is the water that transforms the wilderness into—

Tim: Oh, into life.

Jon: Life.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Got it.

Jon: And you've talked about this before, that waters—there is kind of two different—there's the water of life, but then there's the chaos water.

Tim: Oooh, that's right. Too much water equals flood—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —but just enough water means a garden.

Jon: So how can we be—hmm. It feels a little bit messy to say: Okay, baptism—the water is death. And then also, in the next breath: Baptism, the water is the Spirit.

Tim: Yeah. Maybe it's sort of like, we're all going to go through the great flood, as it were —

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You know, as our bodies give out, and we go back to the dust. So—I'm really merging a lot of biblical metaphors here. [chuckles]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But if you are baptized in the Spirit like the Israelites going through the waters of the Sea of Reeds, then all of a sudden, that passage into death becomes your gateway into the new life that the Spirit has in store on the other side. Something like that is the image. That's explicitly the connection that Peter makes between baptism and the flood story in 1 Peter 3. And he just says it. [laughs]

Jon: What does he say?

Tim: He, for a whole other reason about the Nephilim and the sons of God— [chuckles]

Jon: Oh. [chuckles]

Tim: —brings up the flood story. But in 1 Peter 3, verse 20, he talks about: "The patience of God was waiting"— [repeating for emphasis] the *patience* of God was waiting— [chuckles] "in the days of Noah during the building of the ark in which a few, that is, eight people, were brought safely *through* the waters." And then he says, "Oh yes, the antitype"—"the corresponding pattern"—

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: —*antitupos*—"the corresponding pattern to that is baptism that rescues you"—[laughs]

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then he qualifies: "Not the actual water that took dirt off your flesh."

Jon: Yeah, not the bathing part of it.

Tim: Not the actual bathing. "Rather, an appeal to God from a good conscience *through* [laughs] the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah." [chuckles]

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: [chuckles] He's loading ideas on top of each other here. So the idea is: Jesus went through death. He was raised on the other side.

Jon: Mhm. That was his baptism of sorts?

Tim: That was his, as it were. That was his baptism into death. And that's what Jesus called it in the Gospels. He talked about his coming death as a baptism—

Jon: Mmm. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Tim: —that he would have to undergo. So his passageway into death—that is, floodwaters—through it—that is, like on the ark—that matches onto the flood story. And that's what you and I go through. And that's why Paul will say, "If you are baptized, you died."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "And the life that you now have is the Messiah life. You and not you, because it's the Messiah living in you." Which connects to a question that we're going to get to in a couple questions, but.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So maybe, Zack, I should have started with maybe a simple, [chuckles] succinct answer, to say that: The followers of Jesus and Jesus and the apostles did not imagine themselves as doing or saying anything new.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: They were carrying forward something that John the Baptizer started down at the Jordan. Remember, and Jesus went through that baptism. And John the Baptizer was tapping into all these motifs and deep ideas about the passageway from death into life. And for me, that's given so much more depth and richness to how to imagine the Christian practice of baptism.

[Pause]

Jon: Hmm. Okay, thank you.

[Why Have You Not Referred to the Spirit with a Gendered Pronoun? (14:23 – 20:57)]

Jon: Let's move on to a question from Chris.

Tim: Yeah, Chris from [in a New York accent] New York, New York.

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: How was that?

Jon: [chuckles] It was great.

Chris: [audio recording] Hi, Tim and Jon. Thanks so much for your podcast. I've noticed, and I've really appreciated, how you haven't referred to the Holy Spirit with a gendered pronoun. Can you tell me more about your decision to do this?

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: Did—we didn't—did we do that on purpose?

Tim: We didn't make a decision—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —but it probably is a pattern in our language.

Jon: Yeah. I think that's part of my tradition, was just—

Tim: Hmm. To try and not use pronouns for the Spirit?

Jon: For whatever reason, when I talk about the Spirit, I never say "he."

Tim: Oh, sure. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jon: Or "she."

Tim: Yeah. For me, it is an intentional decision I've made over the years to try to, as much as possible, not use pronouns.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So yeah, why?

[Jon laughs]

Tim: I've made a decision. You're following an instinct that's in you from your tradition.

Jon: Yeah. I think I brought up during the series that I wondered—because the problem with it is then it might depersonalize the Spirit.

Tim: Exactly. That's a liability.

Jon: Because I noticed I kept saying "it," but "it" is something we use for objects in English.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And we—yeah.

Tim: So we did briefly—I forget what episode—we did briefly touch on this.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So quick summary: If you look at the whole scriptural collection, you have a variety of pronouns, gender pronouns, used to refer to the Spirit of God. In the Hebrew Bible, the noun *ruakh*, for "wind," "breath," or "spirit," is a grammatically feminine noun. So feminine and masculine nouns operate in many, many languages around the world. English is actually deficient in this category.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It causes all kinds of problems—

Jon: Oh, does it?

Tim: —in English.

Jon: What kind of problems?

Tim: Yeah, it's a genuine poverty in the English language.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Yes. [chuckles]

Jon: Like what kind of problems?

Tim: Ah. Well, more that: When you have feminine or masculine nouns, then what often happens is that verbs or other words have to match, and—

Jon: Ohhh, so you know what's matching what more often?

Tim: Yeah, it allows other languages to be more precise—

Jon: Ahhh.

Tim: —in how they put together sentences in ways that English is so ambiguous.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: But if you speak English, you don't know it. If you had to learn English as a second language, you know how terrible English is at this—

Jon: Do you notice how I don't like to use pronouns in writing too much?

Tim: I have noticed this over the years.

Jon: Because of *that*.

Tim: Exactly. Yes.

Jon: Because of the ambiguity.

Tim: Yep, totally. Yeah, which means you have to tend towards shorter sentences and using nouns more.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: So anyhow. And the grammatical gender of a noun in different languages doesn't always mean that they imagined that as a female or to have male characteristics.

Jon: Okay. Mhm.

Tim: Sometimes, but not always.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: And it's different for every language. But that just is the case. So when the Spirit of God is referred to with pronouns in the Hebrew Bible, it's most often in the book of Ezekiel, because Ezekiel refers to the Spirit of God almost more than any other book with pronouns. It's a feminine pronoun, "she." And in fact, in my translation of Ezekiel that I used for our BibleProject Classroom on Ezekiel, I put "she" to refer to those pronouns because that's what— [laughs]

Jon: Mhm. Because that's what it is.

Tim: That's what it is [chuckles]. And that generated a lot of interest—

Jon: [chuckles] Mhm.

Tim: —in the classes—in the sessions that we had on those passages. So that's the Hebrew Bible. And that's just—that's what they wrote. In the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit is a —grammatical feminine noun—pronouns are "she." In the New Testament, it stirs the pot more. So in the book of Acts, when this—the *pnevma* [chuckles], when the *pneuma* —

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —but never *pneuma*—is referred to with pronouns, neuter pronouns are used. So Greek has something that Hebrew doesn't have, which is both grammatical masculine nouns, grammatical feminine nouns, grammatical *neither*—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —nouns. I learned it as "neuter," but some textbooks use the word "common."

Jon: "Common."

Tim: "Common." [laughs]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So either way, it's a third category that's neither. And there's—but I think the famous example is in Acts chapter 5, where there's a pronoun used, and it's the common pronoun, neither masculine or feminine. Jon—

Jon: Which we would—

Tim: Oh, go ahead.

Jon: That's "it" for us?

Tim: It would be "it" in English. [laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In the Gospel of John, *both* masculine *and* neuter or common pronouns are used in different passages.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: So he mixes it up. So what's a faithful way to be biblical—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: —in the pronouns that we use to refer to the Spirit? It's a fascinating question, because there's no—literally every possibility is used in Scripture. [laughs]

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: Which should, I think, send our minds to the real matter, which is: If male and female are both—

Jon: The image of God.

Tim: —aspects of the image of God—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —then God is neither. And this is a great opportunity to remember that. [laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Because there are masculine *imagery*. If we start talking about metaphorical *imagery* in the Hebrew Bible or in Jesus's language of God as Father, you could say imagery tends to be male. But not always. God gives birth *a lot* in the Hebrew Bible—[laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —and is explicitly compared to a mother in the Prophets, in Jeremiah and Isaiah's poetry. So these are important opportunities for us to remember that our language is always metaphorical in our reference to God. Which doesn't mean it's useless.

Jon: Mmm. Right.

Tim: It just means we need to remember that. [laughs]

Jon: [laughs] Because it's all we got.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: Because it—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: Truly. [chuckles]

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. I mean, we have our thoughts. But if I want to try and communicate my thoughts to myself in a more explicit way or to anybody else, I have to use language.

Jon: Hmm. Your thoughts aren't just language in your own head?

Tim: Mmm, often they are, but not always.

Jon: You think your thoughts can transcend the language that you have?

Tim: Totally. I think we call these feelings. Or intuitions or experiences.

Jon: Yeah. Something you don't—you can't explain, but you kind of intuit? Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So there you go, Chris.

Jon: Thanks, Chris.

Tim: Those are our thoughts.

[When I'm Filled with the Spirit, Do I Become More My True Self, or Is It Jesus Now Living Through Me? (20:57 – 38:32)]

Tim: Okay, we have—ooh—an *excellent* question from Asha in New Zealand.

Asha: [audio recording] Hi, I'm Asha, and I'm from New Zealand. I'm so fascinated by how you've challenged the assumption that being filled with the Spirit of God doesn't mean becoming less of ourselves, but more of the version we were made to be. How does this connect to Paul's conviction, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," and that there is a death to self and crucifixion of the flesh necessary for living by the Spirit? Thank you so much. God bless you guys.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: Love that question.

Tim: It's *such* a great question. Yes. Mmm. I think—I wanted to make sure to include it because I've realized probably just in the last year or so: This question has been underneath the hood for me for—hmm—I might now realize it's been driving a lot of my [pause] interest in the Bible for a long, long time. But I'm just now beginning to realize it. [laughs]

Jon: "Where you end, and where Christ begins"? What's the question?

Tim: Yeah. The question is—it has many expressions. "Who am I?"

Jon: Yeah, "Who am I?" [chuckles]

Tim: And "Who is God?"

Jon: Okay. [laughs]

Tim: And: [chuckles] "Who am I in relation to God?" [laughs]

Jon: Right. Okay. [chuckles]

Tim: That's one way to put it.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Another way to put it is: How do I describe the relationship between what a human does in the world and then what God is doing in the world?

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: If God is doing things, is that separate from doing things? Is that distinct from doing—is it related? Are they the same?

Jon: If God's doing something, it's usually through humans in the Bible. You've made that point.

Tim: Mhm. Right, yeah.

Jon: And so how do you tease the two apart?

Tim: How do you describe those—exactly right. So Paul the Apostle clearly has a conviction about this in his mind, and he expresses it through words—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —in lots of different ways. So Asha, you grabbed on to one particular formulation that comes from Paul, specifically, his letter to the Galatians. And actually, Galatians is a great test case because it's short. And you can find about a dozen passages in Paul that are working on this idea of "*God* doing, *me* doing." Or the technical term is "agency." God's agency, and human agency.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you quoted, whether you knew it or not—probably knowing it—from Galatians 2:20, where Paul's talking about how the [Hebrew pronunciation] Torah— [laughs]

Jon: Mhm.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: [jokingly] Just own it.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] Right? Him living by—trying to live by the covenant terms of the [Hebrew pronunciation] Torah, but, like with all Israelites constantly failing to do so, he says, "died to the Torah." This is a much bigger theme in Paul. We've covered it in past series. I don't remember where. But a big part of what he's meditating on is how Israel never lived faithfully by the instructions, the Torah that God gave his people. And so they constantly were living under the shadow of the consequences for that failure, which are covenant curses that bring death. And so the gift of God to lead us to life—like, "Here's what to do"—ends up bringing death to God's people. And that's a paradox. He—it's really important to Paul. But what he sees is that: "Whoa, what if you had one faithful Israelite, the Messiah, who always did right by God and neighbor and was faithful to the terms of the Torah, and if in his love and generosity and mercy he submitted himself to suffer the negative consequences of Israel's failure to live by Torah on Israel's behalf—whoa."

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: "What would happen? And then he says, "Yeah, that's who I think the Son of God is. And he did that for us so that when we become associated with him through trust, his life and death and life on the other side of death becomes our life." Which is why he says, "Through the Torah, I died to the Torah." And you're like, "*Really? I thought the Messiah did that*."

Jon: "Died to the [Hebrew pronunciation] Torah" means died by the consequences of the curses of the Torah?

Tim: Exactly. Yep.

Jon: I said [Hebrew pronunciation] Torah. I just did it.

Tim: [laughs] You did—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: [laughs] Yeah, you did. Yeah. So notice this. He says, “I died to the Torah. Every day I wake up and I don’t do right by God and neighbor, I’m violating Torah. And I’m dying to it, because here we all are outside of Eden, dying because we don’t love God and love neighbor.”

Jon: Mhm. Okay.

Tim: So: “I died to Torah so that I could live to God.” “*What? How do you live after you die?”* “Well, I”—

Jon: Hold on one second.

Tim: Oh, go ahead.

Jon: I’m so sorry.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Don’t be sorry.

Jon: Died to Torah?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: We’re talking about, like: “Died *by* Torah.”

Tim: Mmm. “I.” Whoever is the I has died.

Jon: Okay. Uh-huh.

Tim: But the I keeps on living. Because he says, “I died to the Torah.”

Jon: What does it mean “*to* the Torah?”

Tim: Hmm. Yeah, let’s—

Jon: Because the way you’re describing it is “I died *because of”* or “*by means of*”—

Tim: Ooh, good, good. “*Dia nomou*.” “I died *through* the Torah.” “By the effect and agency of God’s command, I died.”

Jon: Okay, why is the translation “*to* the Torah?”

Tim: Mmm. That’s a good point. That’s—

Jon: That’s not helpful.

Tim: —New American Standard. “I died to the Torah.” Let’s check out NIV. “I died to the law.” Yeah, you’re right. That’s not very helpful. It’s: “I died *through* the law.” “*By means* of the law.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm. Yep, yeah, looks like it's pretty stuck in our English translation traditions. "I died *to* the law," going back to the King James even.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: Yeah, but it's *dia*, the preposition "through."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So through God saying, "Don't eat from the tree"—

Jon: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tim: —that instruction, aimed towards preserving life—

Jon: Mhm. Became the death.

Tim: —because of corrupt human desire and deception brought about death.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. Okay.

Tim: But here's what's crazy is: "I died because of God's command"—

Jon: Yep.

Tim: —"*so that* I could live in relationship to God." [pause] What? That's so—

Jon: So that.

Tim: That's a riddle right there.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: And then he explains it [chuckles] with another riddle: "I have been crucified along with the Messiah."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You're like, "*Wow*."

Jon: [laughs] "*I don't remember that in the Gospel stories*."

Tim: [laughs] Yeah. "It's no longer I who live, rather—"who is the I? That's really—who is me according to Paul—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] —if I am associated with Jesus? It's Messiah living in me, through me. And "the life that I am now living in my flesh, I live it by trusting in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." So Asha, you're right. This is Paul's densest expression of what feels like a paradox. Because what he's saying is: "It's me,

but the *me* that exists is completely shaped and determined by someone who's not me" — [laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —"who has become one with me. That is, the Son of God." Why would the Son of God be qualified to merge with me [chuckles] or be associated with me? And this goes back to 101 for, like, biblical thought, Jewish thought, which is: God as creator of all is moment by moment at one intimately with every single molecule of creation. Otherwise, it wouldn't be. Creation isn't something God did at one moment, and then it all just gets to be itself separate from God.

Jon: Uh-huh. Which is a common conception.

Tim: It is. But it's a deep, deep misunderstanding of the theology of creation in the Bible, which is why David can say, "Where can I flee from your Spirit?" "There's never been a time, a place, that I could be that's separate from your Spirit." That's Psalm 139. So if the one who authored my existence, who sustains my existence, sustained my existence even in my rebellion and embracing my own death and thinking that it's good —if that one were to, you know, become a creature and join himself so closely to me so that by means of the Spirit I'm one with my creator, that one's life becomes my life. But I don't stop being me. The Son of God doesn't stop being the Son of God.

Jon: Right. Yeah.

Tim: The two are one. And that is a great mystery that the biblical authors want us to get deep into our psyche, which means that Paul can say—actually, here's another place where it comes out in his thinking. This is a really good example of it. In 1 Corinthians 15, it's a side comment that he makes—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —where he's saying, like, "Yeah, hey, the risen Jesus appeared to me just like he did to the other apostles." And he said, "As far as I know at this point, I'm the last person, apostle, that he appeared to." And he says, "But that doesn't mean I'm not a real apostle." But then he says, "even though I'm not qualified to be an apostle." This is 1 Corinthians 15:10. He says, "It's by the grace of God that I am what I am. And his grace, given to me, didn't prove futile. I have been working actually more than all of the apostles." [laughs]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: "I'm more dedicated to the mission than most of them."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then he stops. He says, “Okay, sorry. Not me, but the grace of God *syn emoi*,” “with me.” And so you’re like, “*Wait, so what he’s saying is: ‘I’ve given my life and effort and intentionality’*”—

Jon: “This is me. This is my life.”

Tim: “This is me.”

Jon: “These are my decisions.”

Tim: But then he can also just say, “Well, not me.”

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: But he doesn’t mean “not me” entirely.

Jon: Yeah, yeah.

Tim: What he means is: If it wasn’t for God doing something, I wouldn’t even be, and I wouldn’t be doing this.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So Paul has some vision of joint agency. And what’s cool is that in Galatians, when he names, like: What is the thing that allows me to be me and God to be God, but for us to be one without stopping being separate but also being one? And the Spirit—

Jon: Oh. Hmm.

Tim: —is the one that he names. And so for example: Galatians 5, he’ll use this image of walking *by* the Spirit. “Walk *by* the Spirit, or walk *with* the Spirit, and you won’t carry out the desires of the flesh.”

Jon: Ah, yeah, which is a rabbit hole: the flesh versus Spirit.

Tim: Well, it’s almost—he sees, like, a dual principle even in human nature.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That flesh, I think referring, in one sense, to the—

Jon: Material part of me?

Tim: The material appetites and desires: hunger, sleep, desire for sex, desire for pleasure, avoid pain, that kind of stuff.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] But that also, we have another principle at work with us, our *pnevma*, [chuckles] that is able to relate to a more transcendent, noble set

of ideals and values and person that actually gives life to the flesh and makes it better. And he'll—so I have a Spirit that, as it were, can be like a director for the flesh. This is like—it was Plato had a cool image for this. It was like the rider and the horse.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: The body is like the horse, but then, like—

Jon: The rational self.

Tim: The mind is like the rider directing the horse, and when they're working in unison, man, that thing can, like, race. You know? [chuckles]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But if you just let the horse run the show—

Jon: That's a problematic rabbit hole.

Tim: Well, totally. Well, this whole thing is a rabbit hole. But this is what I'm saying: I realized this was my question under the hood—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —because it connects to so many different things about how you think about yourself and reality and God. But my point here is just: The word "spirit," the Spirit of God, is that aspect of God that Paul brings in specifically when he wants to talk about my intimate union with God that makes us one but that doesn't cancel me having to make decisions and act.

Jon: Yeah. So bringing up this Galatians passage, though: "Walk by the Spirit, do not carry out the desires of the flesh." I think I would read this and think: Okay, there's an embodied version of me that's bad, and so I need to kind of try to disregard that and live in this more platonic, like, palace of the mind.

Tim: Ohhh.

Jon: I'll access the Spirit just through thoughts and prayers and those kind of things, and try to ignore my body.

Tim: Yeah, got it.

Jon: And it seems like what you're saying here is—I think what you just said was: The Spirit will *direct* my body in a new way.

Tim: A new way, a new kind of embodiment. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: So it's not like flesh versus non-embodied.

Tim: Nuh-uh. Nuh-uh.

Jon: Flesh seems to be the way Paul talks about, you just said, appetites, a *way* of being embodied.

Tim: That's right. Yeah, satisfying desires through short-term, temporary, short-sighted, often self-focused means of gratification.

Jon: And the Hebrew Bible doesn't have that same kind of vocabulary for that idea, right?

Tim: It has—a hundred percent.

Jon: Flesh?

Tim: Oh, no, no, desire.

Jon: But desire. That's a different word.

Tim: But: "the desire of the flesh." That's what Paul—

Jon: Ohhh.

Tim: "Walk by the Spirit, and you won't carry out the *desire* of the flesh."

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: He's using the word that was used to describe the tree of knowing good and bad.

Jon: Desire. Yeah. Hmm.

Tim: Desire. And then look, what he contrasts it with is he said, "You, however, are led, guided around"—it's a cool image of someone walking side by side with you, taking your hand. "You are guided by the Spirit."

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: And then he says, "The fruit of the Spirit"—which again, Eden imagery, of course.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: And he describes the fruit of the Spirit. It's the famous ninefold: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those are all embodied—you can't do any of those without a body, right?

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: Those are also embodied.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] But it's the body directed towards a way of living that participates in the new creation, and participates in things that are not short-term, right? That are, like, enduring in this age and the next. Because when I love you and am patient and kind with you, then our relationship gets better and can get better infinitely going forward. There's no end to how better our relationship can be, [chuckles] you know?

Jon: [chuckles] I need to—man, I want to spend some time just thinking about how all the fruit of the Spirit are embodied.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's wild.

Tim: How are you self—how do you have self-control without a body? You need a body to have control over. [laughs] Right?

Jon: [exhales] Yeah.

Tim: So I think the big idea, Asha, for me, at least, that your question raised is: Paul mentions the Spirit, not always, but often, in precisely these moments when he's describing how you and I are really responsible to make decisions, have agency, to walk in step with—

Jon: Right. To be an apostle.

Tim: Yep, with the Spirit—and to live in certain ways, and make decisions. But when we do so, we are doing so in union with and by a power that didn't come from ourselves, that comes from the creator God reaching out and connecting to me in the most intimate way, that is, through the Spirit. So it's God, and it's me. Or you could say: It's God, not me, because there wouldn't even be a me if there wasn't God, the Spirit doing that. So sometimes, Paul will emphasize the distinction: "It's not me. It's God."

Jon: Mhm. [chuckles]

Tim: But then here he's saying, "You do this by means of the Spirit."

Jon: Yeah. [chuckles]

Tim: And if those seem opposite to us, then that has to mean there's a greater truth that transcends the opposite me-not-me that is the reality. And once again, language is our barrier here. [pause] Yeah. Hmm. I don't know if any of that made sense—

Jon: Mhm. Enough.

Tim: —but it's sketching a territory that for me has become very important.

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: I'll name a theologian who I kept seeing referenced by a number of scholars that I really respect, a theologian named Kathryn Tanner. And she has a very difficult book to read [laughs] on this topic called *God and Creation*. And she has—

Jon: It's difficult because—

Tim: [exhales] It's just—

Jon: It's long and dense?

Tim: It's dense, and she's using very precise philosophical vocabulary.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it was *good*. Totally tipped over my apple cart—how do you say?—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —in the best way, but it was hard.

Jon: Upset.

Tim: And then she has a much shorter, more accessible treatment called *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity* that was very helpful for me on this topic.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: But yeah, there you go. Asha, your finger's on the pulse of a really important set of issues, and the Spirit is right there in the mix.

Jon: Hmm. Thanks, Asha.

Tim: Mhm.

[If We Have the Spirit, Why Do We Need Help from Other People to Understand the Bible? (38:32 – 48:33)]

Jon: All right.

Tim: Whew. Let's ponder now a question from—I hope I pronounce this right—Stefan in Germany.

Stefan: [audio recording] Hi Tim and Jon, I am Stefan, from Augsburg, Germany. My question concerns the role of the Spirit for interpreting Scripture. How would you respond to someone saying, “We don’t need to really study the Bible or need to learn from biblical scholars how to interpret Scripture because the Spirit will teach us what we need to know if we just read the Bible”? Citing passages like Jeremiah 31 verse 34 or John 16 verse 13. Thanks for all your amazing work. I spent the last two years listening to every single one of the episodes of your podcast, listening to it almost every day.

Tim: Whoa.

Jon: Whoa.

Tim: Whoa, that’s really intense. I—I— [chuckles] well, you must’ve—

Jon: Yeah. But thank you for spending time with us.

Tim: Yeah, we’re honored to play that kind of role in your story. Yeah, you know, actually, this is a question that I remember being asked, or it’s come up going years back, even in Bible college.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: I think—you and I went to a Bible college that both really valued education, but that also came from a strand in the Christian tradition that was kind of suspicious of too much higher education.

Jon: Oh, sure. [chuckles]

Tim: As if, like, it somehow will corrupt your mind if you think too much about things.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You should just get out there and follow Jesus and know the basics, but don’t think about it too much. [laughs] I don’t know. [chuckles]

[Jon laughs]

Tim: That’s a caricature, and I can’t think of one of my professors that would have said that.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: But there are certain strands of the Christian tradition that think that too much intellectual focus can be corrosive to your soul.

Jon: Hmm. Mhm. Mhm.

Tim: I think that’s true.

Jon: Totally true.

Tim: That's been my experience. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. No, it's still pretty prevalent. And actually, you can see—everyone knows a story of someone who went off to college and learned some things, and then they lost their faith.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, so Stefan, you brought up a couple biblical passages you said that you know are often quoted when this topic comes up. One of them is from Jeremiah, where God is talking about the terms of the new covenant relationship he'll have with his people. And what he says is, "The Torah—I'm going to put my Torah within them, and write the commands of the Torah on their hearts. I'll be their God, they'll be my people. No one will teach anymore his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'You should know Yahweh,' because everybody will know me."

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. No one's going to have to instruct you to know God.

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: That's the instruction. Like, "*You know what? You should be in relationship with Yahweh*."

Tim: Exactly. It's about relationship.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Exactly. It's about relationship, not information.

Jon: Right. [chuckles]

Tim: And then, similarly, in John 16, verse 13: "But when the Spirit of truth comes, he"—and— [pause] oh, this is also interesting. Greek doesn't need to use—this is back to the pronoun question—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Greek doesn't need to use pronouns the way we do in English.

Jon: Oh. Okay.

Tim: The "he" or the third-person actor—

Jon: Can just be built into a verb?

Tim: Is built into the verb itself.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So in English, we have to say “he,” but in Greek there’s no pronoun “he.” It’s just—

Jon: But the verb would be feminine or masculine, right?

Tim: Uh, no.

Jon: No?

Tim: No. Nuh-uh.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So anyway, “The Spirit will guide you into all truth.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you could take those two lines—and I guess I’m revealing my cards, here—[laughs] you could take those two lines kind of out of context and say—

Jon: “*Don’t try to learn anything*.”

Tim: “*Don’t try to learn anything from another person. Only God is your teacher*.” You could also pull in Jesus’s radical statements about, “Don’t call anyone father. Don’t call anyone rabbi. Don’t call anyone teacher. Because you have one Father, one rabbi, one teacher.” So yeah, I think that would be to misunderstand these passages and to misunderstand a bunch of other things about how the Spirit works. So maybe one angle is to say: Let’s go to the works of the Spirit as described by the apostles. How does the Spirit work in a church community? And you’ll notice in Peter and Paul’s writings that the Spirit raises up teachers—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —who instruct by means of the Spirit, you know, God’s people. Well, if the Spirit does that—right?—that’s like a glitch in that interpretation.

Jon: Mhm. Yep.

Tim: The Spirit teaching through people and the Spirit teaching me are not mutually exclusive. Those can both be ways. That’s one way to think about it. I think another angle of response you already brought up in the Jeremiah passage: that knowing Yahweh is a little bit different than the kind of knowing that a teacher provides.

Jon: Right. Yeah. Connected, but different.

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] Totally connected. Yeah. So when you’re being taught the Bible by a teacher or a pastor or by your own study, that doesn’t necessarily mean that Scripture is a way that you are coming to know God relationally and intimately. It might. It might not. And *certainly*, you can know a lot about the Bible and

not know God. [laughs] Like, certainly. That's just obviously the case. There's no direct relationship between how much you know about the Bible and whether or not you actually know God. [chuckles] And that's what makes being a pastor or a Bible teacher a pretty dangerous profession in one sense.

Jon: And maybe that's why there's some suspicion about just relying on teachers too.

Tim: Yeah, totally. But what are we saying when—"relying on teachers"? Because—mmm—Jeremiah's hope was that every person would intimately *know* God in a relational, intimate way so that they don't have to be persuaded to be faithful to God. So we're not talking about information at this point.

Jon: Right.

Tim: What we're talking about are the deep transformations of my desires, of my heart, of my values. And when those are completely aligned with the source of my being, [laughs] my creator, who's trying to give me more life than I can handle, then—like, that's, I think, the level on which the Spirit is working in these passages, guiding you into truth. Not just true information, but that I am becoming one with God and wanting it and wanting all of my thoughts and actions to be aligned with God's will. That's, I think, the work of the Spirit being described here.

Jon: Yeah. And you can see the beauty in that, going: I don't have to wait around—

Tim: No.

Jon: —for someone smarter than me to explain something to me. I've got the Spirit.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And so me and my community, we can move.

Tim: Hundred percent. Hundred percent. Yeah.

Jon: But then it doesn't also mean, then: "*Please don't tell me that I should listen to other Bible nerds because I just—all I need is the Spirit*."

Tim: Yeah, maybe a good analogy is like knowing people in your family from having grown up with them. And then an important moment in growing into an adult is learning the life stories of your family members. And actually, learning more about them *can* become a way of deepening your relationship to them and appreciating them more, having more context for why they are the way that they are.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: It can deepen the relationship. You know?

Jon: Yeah. I see what you're saying.

Tim: Yeah, somebody who's been really hurt by a parent, for example, by how a parent would respond to them when they were a kid, and then coming to realize, like, "*Oh, my mom was raised with alcoholic parents*," for example, or "*was abused when they were a kid*."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then that factual knowledge can actually deepen my relationship because I know more about them.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: So in the same way, knowing about the Bible [laughs] doesn't necessarily mean you know God.

Jon: Or about God.

Tim: But certainly it creates an opportunity to deepen your relationship with God, and knowing—loving God with your mind. You know, that kind of thing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so knowledge about God through the Bible can be a very important vehicle for deepening your intimacy with God. That's definitely been my experience. But that doesn't mean you have to have that knowledge to start, right?

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: A child can know their parent without knowing anything about them, but a child can deepen their intimacy with their parent as they get to know more about them.

Jon: And a parent is flawed, and so you're learning about: They're good and bad. There's something about relationship with God—we believe God is good, and so what you're learning more about is just all the, like, amazing, interesting, beautiful things about God.

Tim: Oh, there you go. Thanks. Yes.

Jon: But that information—like, it might be because of some nerds in your life.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Or a book that you read or something that your pastor taught.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But that's just information that can deepen your relationship with God.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. And all those sources of information can and probably are the work of the Spirit— [laughs] right?—in your life.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. The Spirit can use that.

Tim: Hundred percent.

Jon: Love that.

Tim: Yeah, it's a great question. Thanks for that.

Jon: Yeah, and thanks for following along, Stefen. That's really encouraging to hear that this has been meaningful to you in that way.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And thanks for your question.

Tim: Mhm.

[Is the Sevenfold Spirit of God from Isaiah the Same As the One Mentioned in Revelation? (48:33 – 56:39)]

Jon: Let's do one last question from Lisa in North Carolina.

Lisa: [audio recording] Hi, this is Lisa from Clayton, North Carolina. I have a question about the Spirit of God series, episode 5, which was about the Spirit of God in Moses. You talk about the sevenfold Spirit of God in that episode, detailed in Isaiah. Is that sevenfold Spirit of God the same as the sevenfold Spirit of God which is mentioned a few times in Revelation? Thank you so much for what you do and for how much you have taught me.

Jon: Hmm. Thanks, Lisa.

Tim: Yeah, man, thank you, and you're welcome.

[Jon and Tim chuckle]

Tim: Yeah, I thought, one, this is a fun question because: gold star, what a wonderful hyperlink connection to make.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: So: Definitely. I think the sevenfold Spirit mentioned in Revelation is a result of John the visionary meditating on Isaiah 11. Where I—

Jon: Yeah, because Isaiah never says sevenfold Spirit. You just started counting.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And you started calling it the sevenfold Spirit.

Tim: Totally. Yes.

Jon: Because of Revelation, or separate?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. Well, I noticed that it was seven when I started—anytime there's a list of anything now in the Hebrew Bible—

Jon: Right. [laughs]

Tim: —I count. And it's some high percentage that it's some numeral of seven.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Not always. Actually, almost always three or three plus one, and three plus three plus one is seven, which is how the days of creation are structured: three plus three plus the Sabbath. Seven. Anyway—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] —once you're taught that that's the way numbers work from page one of the Hebrew Bible, the biblical authors just love to put lists in front of you and arrange them in creative sets of three and seven, and so on. So I noticed that about the Spirit a long time ago. And then it just struck me another—I don't know, pondering Revelation on another occasion. I was like, "*Whoooaa, that's got to be where he got that idea*." I call those smoking-gun moments—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —like solving the mystery case.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like: Where—why would he even describe the Spirit that way? He must have found that idea somewhere in his Bible.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: Okay. So we can explore it a little more because these passages are kind of cool in the Revelation. So if I remember, we were talking about Moses. We were talking about that story where he's feeling like he can't lead the people by himself, even though God already gave him a leadership crew to work with.

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: God gave him a leadership crew to work with—

Jon: Because of his father-in-law.

Tim: —through his father-in-law.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It was Jethro, and not Jethro. [laughs]

[Pause]

Jon: Oh. [laughs] Got it.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Right, it was Jethro guiding Moses, and *not* Jethro, that is, the voice of God guiding Moses. Actually, what Jethro says is, "You should do this, Moses: Build a leadership crew." And then he says, "And God is the one commanding you to do it."

[Jon laughs]

Tim: That's what his father-in-law says.

Jon: That's awesome.

Tim: So "I, but not I," "Jethro, but not Jethro."

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah. "Me, but not me."

Tim: So when Moses says he's alone, he's just having a really bad day, and he's had a break with reality, so to speak. And so God says, "Hey, how about this? I will take a little measure"—

Jon: "Side off"?

Tim: "A little side—I'll side off a bit of the Spirit I've given to you and put it on a bunch of others, 70 others—72 actually." And that 70, but 72, of the elders is a wonderful image of: Moses has so much Spirit that even just a little bit—

Jon: Mhm. [chuckles]

Tim: —can be spread out to 70 and then spill over into two more “beloved darlings.”

Jon: [chuckles] Oh, right. [chuckles]

Tim: Which is Eldad and Medad. So I think what I was linking to Isaiah was just that same principle of seven times ten [laughs] Spirit—reminded me of the sevenfold Spirit. And that Isaiah’s depictions of the servant, the messianic servant king in Isaiah 11—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —but elsewhere—Isaiah 42, 49—bring in this Spirit-filled figure is, you know, described in the language and imagery from the Moses stories.

Jon: Remind me where sevenfold Spirit shows up in Revelation?

Tim: Yeah, it’s actually right in the opening, Revelation 1, verse 4, which opens like a letter. John says, “John, to the seven churches in Asia: Grace to you, and peace from the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are in front of that one’s throne.”

Jon: Huh.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Seven spirits.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So it’s seven? Is it one? It’s described here as plural.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So that’s interesting.

Jon: And it corresponds with the seven churches. That’s interesting.

Tim: Yeah. Oh, yeah, that’s a good observ—yeah, that’s right. Yep. So here, seven churches are an image of the church in its totality.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In the same way the seven days of creation are. And so the seven spirits—are you like, “*Is that like seven churches that are all part of one body of Christ but that are seven distinct things? Is that what he’s saying?*” Because he’ll use—oh, in just a few sentences, he’ll start talking about how he had this vision-apocalypse. And he’ll say, “I was in the Spirit”—singular—“on the Lord’s day.” So he’s fully capable of talking about the singular Spirit.

Jon: The Spirit. Mhm.

Tim: So he pulls out seven spirits, and the context for that is the seven churches. Actually, there's got to be some important relationship. So I haven't done homework on this at all. I'm just noticing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: There's another—mmm, okay. When he writes his letter to the church of Sardis in Revelation 3, he says to the—mmm—"angelos"—

Jon: "The messenger"?

Tim: "The messenger" or "the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The one who has seven Spirits of God and the seven stars says this."

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: So star imagery. Hmm. The seven spirits come up again in Revelation 4.

Jon: Who's he referring to, the "he"?

Tim: Jesus.

Jon: That's Jesus.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: With the sevenfold Spirit.

Tim: Yeah, so Jesus is the one through whom the sevenfold Spirit is given to the seven churches.

Jon: Yeah, which is the Isaiah passage as well.

Tim: Yep. Yep. Then we're told that when John sees a vision of the heavenly temple, Revelation 4, he sees lightning and thunder coming out. And then what he sees in the temple—he sees "seven lamps of fire burning"—so the seven menorah lamp in the temple—"in front of the throne. These are the seven spirits of God."

[Jon and Tim chuckle]

Tim: So he pulls out seven spirits of God, I think, as a metaphor when he's using the number seven in some sort of creative, symbolic way to talk about something that's one and more than one. Actually, this connects to our conversation about "me, and not me." Because if it's the Spirit of God working in me, and then you have the Spirit of God working in you, is that a different Spirit? No, same Spirit. Right?

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: One Spirit, but working. But yet I am a distinct manifestation of the Spirit's work in the world, and so are you.

Jon: Yeah. Hmm.

Tim: So in that sense, there's millions of spirits of God—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —but also just one.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I think John's doing something like that with this image, but I would want to work on it more.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Lisa, I love that you noticed that set of connections—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —and that it prompted that question. Super cool.

[Conclusion (56:39 – 1:03:18)]

Jon: What's striking me is: You know, we've done all of this work on the Spirit of God, and so much has been really clarifying in some beautiful ways. But there's so much mystery still and paradox. And I'm not trying to clean that up.

Tim: Nuh-uh.

Jon: I just remember very early being frustrated with this idea of: Was it a wind that God sent, or was it God?

Tim: Oh, sure. [laughs]

Jon: Right?

Tim: In Genesis.

Jon: Yeah, and in the—in Exodus with the—

Tim: Yeah. Oh, that's right. God sends a wind. Yeah.

Jon: And—

Tim: Mmm. Mmm. Yeah.

Jon: Is it me, or is it not me? And is God one, or is God more than one? [chuckles] Is God's Spirit singular or plural or masculine or feminine? And it's just like—there's this, like—what we're saying is: We have language, and we can know God.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: And then our language brings us up to the brink of being like: I think we can kind of understand certain things.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But then when you lean in a little deeper, you realize, like: What are we really—we—there's still so much mystery here.

Tim: You know, actually I was talking about this very thing with a friend recently, and the analogy we came up with was a new one for me, about music, a musician and music.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Specifically jazz. [laughs]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Which is a form of music I love to listen to, improvisational jazz.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So you know, a songwriter writes a song, and that's a very dynamic moment that many musicians will talk about: receiving something from outside themselves.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah. Tapping into something.

Tim: But it's very much through them that they give form to what's in their mind and body and then write it down. And then what is written down is, like, a set of notations on a page. There couldn't be something more clearly outside of me than that—

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: —and it's a structure of, like, music.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But what's wild is that thing that came into existence through me that's now represented by symbols on paper—

Jon: Yeah, now exists—

Tim: I can give to another musician.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then they can access the thing—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —that came into being through me. And then the way that they will bring it into being and play it will be both similar and different.

Jon: Yes. Right.

Tim: But it's the same thing. And anyway, we were really having fun with this metaphor. It was a great—it was a great cup of coffee.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: And— [chuckles] because I think, like, man, this really works, because I wouldn't be playing the music if it weren't for God creating me and upholding my existence.

Jon: Mmm. Uh-huh.

Tim: But yet, it's unique way of sust—

Jon: You play the music.

Tim: Yeah, that we play out the music will have different expressions. And so it's a way of describing something that's one, a song—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —but also many, because every performance of the song will be different. But it's the same song. Anyway, it's just an analogy. I'm sure it breaks down.

Jon: I love it.

Tim: But it was a new one to me that I thought was cool. And then once—you know, if you're playing, like, the saxophone, then it's the breath.

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: [laughs] Right?

Jon: Is the notations the word?

Tim: [Jon backchannels throughout] Oooh. Yeah, something—yes, yes. It's like the form. The notations are the form, the rational form given, the order given to the music. But

then it's this breath that's the living dynamic doing of it that is one and more than one through all the musicians that play it. Come on, isn't that good?

Jon: I love that this—it's good. And then the center of this metaphor is living life like an improvisational jazz musician.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: That's fun too. [laughs]

Tim: Yeah. Which, if you were just doing it without reference to any music, it just would be noise. But the moment you get in tune with something that's not you, but you make a part of you, then all of a sudden, we're all in unison even though it's different. Come on. It's a cool metaphor.

Jon: It is cool.

Tim: Yeah. Anyway.

Jon: It's a good place to end, actually.

Tim: Mhm. It is.

Jon: Thank you all for your questions. We couldn't get to all of them. But we do look at them. And by we, I mean Tim looks at them.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: I do. [chuckles] I study them.

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah. So thank you.

Tim: Yeah, thank you, everybody. [exhales] This was a cool series. I'm glad it was different, because we revisited and—right?—a topic we did a long time ago, did a deeper dive. The video's out there now, which, again, is a remake.

Jon: Yes. Mhm. Its own little thing.

Tim: And—again, the video doesn't do everything that you could do about the Spirit, but the main ideas we wanted to get across, I think the video does really beautifully. More than was in my imagination when we started it. But you get the artists in the mix, and—

Jon: Yeah, something new happens.

Tim: Something new happens.

Jon: Us, not us.

Tim: Us, not us.

Jon: So what's up next? Psalms?

Tim: Ohhh, yes.

Jon: Psalms are next.

Tim: Yes, cool. I'm so excited about this.

Jon: Yeah. We're jumping back into the Psalms. We did Psalm 1 and 2, and then we're going to do the next bundle of Psalms.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And that'll start next week.

Tim: Slow and steady. We're going to start chipping away at the Psalms. Who knows how long it'll take—

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS]

Tim: —but we'll do it in chunks. And we're going to work on the first few Psalms.

[Musical break: BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS (1:02:09 – 1:02:13)]

Jon: BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, who is me, and not me.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: And everything that we make [laughs] is free—

[Tim laughs]

Jon: —because of the generous support of thousands of people just like you.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.

Tim: Yeah. Friends, this podcast is the result of *a lot* of labor and creative love from an amazing group of human beings. You can read their names in the show notes. You should do that, because they're really cool people to know about. We're super grateful to work with that team, and also to be a part of this with all of you. Thank you, everybody, so much.

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS, fades out]

[BibleProject sonic logo]