

[The Wilderness E5 Transcript]

Jon: The story of the Bible begins with God planting a garden in the middle of a wilderness, and it's a gift for all of humanity. But this oasis of life is still surrounded by wilderness. And if the humans can't learn to enjoy the life of God in the garden, where else can they go?

Tim: God's partners—if they don't want to trust God's word and wisdom, then they will be cutting themselves off from the garden that God wants to give them as a gift.

Jon: And so it's easy to think of the wilderness as a consequence. Humanity failed to live by God's life and so they're paying the price for their folly. But in every story of the wilderness, God meets humanity there and shows them mercy. And God uses the sad reality of the wilderness as an opportunity to train humanity. This is why God had Moses lead Israel through the wilderness for 40 years on the way to the land of promise.

Tim: Moses perceives a purpose of God at work in the wilderness to transform them into the kind of people who are ready to receive the gift of the garden land.

Jon: When the wilderness wanderings are over, Moses gives a long speech to the generation that grew up in the wilderness as they prepare to enter the garden land. And he says to them: "Remember, that the garden land is a gift from God, so when you experience all that abundance to come, don't let it make you proud, or the abundance can ruin you."

Tim: A heart that is not trained to view every moment of goodness in my life as a sheer gift from God—then, there can be such a thing as too much goodness that will deceive your heart and take you places you do not want to go.

Jon: "So guard yourself," Moses tells them.

Tim: The garden land can actually be the worst possible thing that could happen to a person if that's the state of their heart.

Jon: Moses also says that what they need to succeed in the garden land they've already learned in the wilderness. They've learned to trust God for daily bread. They've learned to listen to God's voice. As Moses says—

Tim: "It's not by bread alone that a human lives, but by everything that goes out from the mouth of Yahweh." The point is that whether I'm in the garden or in the wilderness, the ultimate reality is that anything that I have that is good is because of the word of

Yahweh. And unless we are connected to that wisdom, life in the good land will not be good for us.

Jon: Today, as we trace the theme of the wilderness in the Bible, we read the words of Moses, and we consider: What does it take to truly enjoy God's abundance in a way that sustains life, and how does the wilderness prepare us to do it? Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (2:54—2:59)]

[Summary and Recap of Theme (2:59—11:27)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello. We are making our way through the wilderness.

Tim: Mhm. Yes, we are. We are going to meditate on yet another set of passages in the Hebrew Bible about Israel's sojourn in the wilderness as a part of this bigger set of conversations about the theme of the wilderness in the Bible—the theme? The location.

Jon: The setting—

Tim: The meaning and significance of the setting of the wilderness in the story of the Bible. It's not an event. It's not an idea. It's not a person or a character. It's a place.

Jon: But the place is an idea.

Tim: But the place represents, yes, an idea.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: So—

Tim: Which is th—and the idea is “nothingness.”

[Laughter]

Tim: The opposite of life, and order, and abundance, and goodness, and community, and life with God—that's all garden. And the wilderness is the polar opposite of all that.

Jon: Hmm. The polar, polar opposite is nothingness.

Tim: In our—from our point of view.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But as you make your way towards nothingness—

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: You're going deeper and deeper into the wilderness.

Tim: That's right. The wilderness will reduce anyone in it to nothingness—

[Laughter]

Tim: Because it'll—the dust will reach up out of that dry—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Ground, and it'll drag you back into the—

Jon: It—

Tim: Dust.

Jon: It's the boundary lands of life. It's where everything's on a razor's—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Edge.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The wilderness.

Tim: The wilderness. So—

Jon: But God wants to create out of the wilderness.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. The Eden narrative, which is the second creation narrative, begins in Genesis chapter two, verse four. It has this amazing portrait of God bringing a garden out of a dry, waterless wilderness where there's no plants, no humans, no animals, just nothing can survive there.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it's a primary biblical image of non-creation, non-existence.

Jon: And the story of the Bible is how, through humans' own folly, we head out into the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Because what the garden is, and then the life within the garden, exists in this larger context of a wilderness. The biblical authors are meditating on the ideas that creation can only be and exist if it is sustained by God's life-giving, creative, sustaining love. Which means that if God's partners, his imaging partners that God has created and enlisted to share in the goodness of existence—if they don't want to cooperate with God or if they don't want to work on his program, or his—in the Eden narrative, if they don't want to trust God's word and wisdom, then they will be cutting themselves off from the garden that God wants to give them as a gift. And so—actually, this is a perfect starting point. Today, we're going to be talking about Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, the way that Moses recounts it in the book of Deuteronomy. But to really get what Moses is trying to communicate about the wilderness in Deuteronomy, we actually do need to go back to a moment in the garden of Eden narrative.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: And it's the moment when God exiles Adam and Eve from the garden. And the reason why—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Is really interesting. We talked about it a couple episodes ago, but it'd be good to focus here again.

Jon: One thing that you were pointing out was, while we drive ourselves into the wilderness, God allows us to go into wilderness, it's almost like this is an unnecessary, tragic thing. We should be in the garden. We're going out into the wilderness. It's one way to think about it.

Tim: Mmm. Yep. Yeah.

Jon: But then when we get to the Exodus story, we look—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: At it from a different light—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Which is—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: That God's rescuing them from slavery, wants to bring them back into the land, the garden land, and there's a direct route, but they're not ready for it.

Tim: Yes, that was super important.

Jon: So he takes them through the wilderness.

Tim: Uh-huh.

Jon: So God's leading through the wilderness, and suddenly, the wilderness becomes necessary. It becomes part of the journey to prepare you for—

Tim: That's—

Jon: The land.

Tim: That's right. Yes. Adam and Eve get exiled because of folly, meaning, not following God's wisdom. Hagar in Genesis ended up in the wilderness because of Abraham and Sarah's folly, and mistrust, and their abuse. But then the Israelites end up in the wilderness both because of Pharaoh's selfishness, and pride, and oppression, but then, what you're drawing attention to is in Exodus 13, like, the morning after Passover— excuse me, not the morning after, the night of Passover—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: When they leave, God doesn't take them by the direct coastal route—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Up to the land of Canaan. He takes them out of the wilderness because he knows their limitations. He said they might see that there's hostility from the Philistines on that coastal route. "So that they don't see war and turn around, I'm going to take them into the heart of no man's land."

Jon: Yeah. It's a time of preparation.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. So now, through Israel's journey in the wilderness, Moses then sees and perceives a purpose of God at work in the wilderness to transform them into the kind of people who are ready to receive the gift of the garden land.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Yep. That's what you're putting your finger on.

Jon: Yeah. They're not ready for what it's really going to take to go into the land.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: They're not prepared mentally—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Emotionally.

Tim: And then what happens is that an army chases them from Egypt—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And God overwhelms that army, Pharaoh's army, in the waters of the flood. So already we're up to, like, lesson number one.

[Laughter]

Tim: God will—

Jon: You can trust God.

Tim: You can trust God even if you are pinned in between what looks like death and death. In between an army or the waters of the sea, God will make a way through. And that's lesson number one. Once they get through the waters, then they go into the wilderness, and they experience a whole other series of threats, which is a lack of resources.

Jon: Yeah. These two different ways of thinking about the wilderness—one is the unnecessary, tragic result—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Of not being able to live in the garden—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And trust God.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The other one is actually a necessary—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Gift—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That will prepare you—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: For the garden.

Tim: For the garden. Yes.

Jon: Are those—

[Laughter]

Tim: No, that's right. They're—

Jon: Complimentary in some way?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Because the way Israel ends up in the wilderness is because of another human's folly and evil, that is, Pharaoh. But then the fact that God brings them into the wilderness for longer than is technically necessary—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or maybe it is technically necessary because he knows—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That the people won't be ready to inherit the land of Canaan yet.

Jon: Genesis chapter two does not have any sort of preparation for the human—

Tim: I see.

Jon: To be ready for the garden.

Tim: No. Mhm.

Jon: He like—he forms the human—

Tim: Ah, okay.

Jon: He plants the garden—

Tim: Okay.

Jon: And he says: “Let’s go.”

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: “We’re here. We’re doing it.”

Tim: Okay.

Jon: “I don’t need to prepare you by you traveling through the wilderness to get to the garden.”

Tim: That’s right. Okay. So the Eden narrative maybe provides, I think, what is part of a key to a—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Response to your question. So let’s do that thing I said a couple minutes ago—

Jon: All right.

Tim: And let’s look at literally the last paragraph—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Of Adam and Eve and the Eden narrative. It’s right at the end of Genesis three. And there’s some little hints there that I think will address your question. And the question is: Ending up in the wilderness, is it the result of merely human folly—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And selfishness, or is it a part of God’s mysterious purpose to teach his partners important lessons so that they can inherit the good land? Which is it?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And maybe those two work together in a way that might feel surprising. So let’s first look at this little paragraph at the end of Genesis three.

[Musical Break (10:59—11:27)]

[Why Adam and Eve Can’t Stay in the Garden (11:27—23:08)]



Tim: We're looking at Genesis three, verses 22 through 24. It's the last paragraph of the Eden story. And, uh, this is after Adam and Eve have made their foolish decision, after they tried to evade responsibility, and then after God sings his song of lament, this poem of the sad consequences of the human decision. Then God provides clothing for Adam and Eve. And then we read this, verse 22: "And Yahweh Elohim said: 'Look, the human has become like one of us.'"

Jon: Is that singular, "the human?"

Tim: *Haadam*.

Jon: *Hahadam*?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. "'Has become like one of us, knowing good and bad. And now, so that he won't send out his hand and take also from the tree of life and then eat and live forever —'"

Jon: Incomplete sentence.

Tim: It's an unfinished sentence.

Jon: Okay.

[Laughter]

Tim: But you get the idea. God wants to prevent something from—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Happening.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So in other words, what he's saying is, now that they've made this choice—

Jon: They're not ready.

Tim: They're not ready to be here.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: They're not ready. And what is that "not ready to be here?" They have decided to use their own wisdom to know and discern between good and bad. And you combine that self-declared authority to know and define good and bad with eternal life, and you have a—

[Laughter]

Tim: A really sad, tragic creature.

Jon: Can I double-click on this?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "The humans have become like one of us."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The "us" is?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: Well, it's interesting. I was just noticing the literary design of this paragraph.

Jon: Uh-huh. Oh, yeah, cherubim in the end?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So the—you have Yahweh's speech here. Then you have three lines designed as little chiasm in verses 23 and 24: "Yahweh Elohim sent him out of the garden to work the ground from which he was taken, and he banished the human."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So God exiles him twice.

[Laughter]

Tim: He sends him out, and he banishes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Which are two ways—

Jon: Of saying the same thing.

Tim: Same thing.

Jon: Yep.

Tim: That's the center of this little unit. And then what God does is he stations the cherubim. Actually, it's the word *shakhen* for "tent." "He made them to 'tent' at the east of the garden."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's an allusion forward to the cherubim at the door of the—

Jon: At the tabernacle.

Tim: Of the tabernacle.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "At the east of the garden of Eden," because the door of the tabernacle was on the east side, "he made the cherubim dwell there, and the flame of the whirling sword," which in theory goes in a hand—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But the hand's not mentioned, "to guard the way to the tree of life. So you have: "The humans become like one of us—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Up above, and he's going to try and send out his hand. And then you have God stationing angelic, spiritual-being creatures who have a flaming sword implied in the hand.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you have the hand of the human—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And then the hand—

Jon: Taking the fruit.

Tim: Taking the fruit. And then you have the hand of the spiritual beings with a sword to prevent the taking of the fruit. So I think, on its first layer of meaning, the “one of us” is referring to the divine counsel or to the—God’s royal court.

Jon: So in some way, the divine counsel have access to this knowing-good-and-bad thing.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, angelic creatures are a part of God’s crew that he works with to work out his purposes in the world. So they have a knowledge of good and bad. Mhm. Now, it’s important to recognize that in the history of where this idea is going, the idea of the divine counsel and that Yahweh has a second self or a representative, one of those spiritual beings, a representative that is so close to Yahweh—

Jon: The angel of Yahweh?

Tim: The angel of Yahweh, that that figure can be called Yahweh—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, Yahweh in a visible form—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So we’re paving the way towards the seeds of what will become Trinitarian thought in the story of Jesus in the New Testament. And so to see the Trinity, you know, here in the “us,” “one—”

Jon: Oh.

Tim: “One—”

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: “Of us—”

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: In God’s mouth, I think is a—it’s an outworking. There’s continuity between the divine counsel idea—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And where that idea goes. But I think it’s a part of the unique story of how the Bible came together that the portrait of God’s own identity is a developing one through the story, what God reveals about God’s self.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you asked a question about—

Jon: Well, the—

Tim: Who—who's the "us."

Jon: Who's the "us?" On the surface level, or I guess on the main level, it is the divine counsel.

Tim: First level.

Jon: First level.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But you said: "Trace that theme—"

Tim: "Trace that theme—"

Jon: "And you're going to find more interesting things."

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: God has his crew, but then God himself—

Tim: Is a crew.

Jon: Is a crew—

[Laughter]

Jon: As well.

Tim: Within the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Within the Hebrew Bible.

Tim: Uh. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: All right.

Tim: So that's a whole—

Jon: Well—

Tim: That's—

Jon: That's a whole rabbit hole. And—

Tim: Whole—

Jon: There's—we have a whole, um—

Tim: God series.

Jon: God series on that.

Tim: Yep. That's right.

Jon: Okay. But the reason I'm asking, though, is I want to understand this idea of: They know good from bad, and now the humans do, and that's a problem.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Because we've talked about how God wants the humans to know good from bad.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jon: So is there just some subtext in here? Like, should I be reading this: "Look, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good from bad, but they're doing it wrong."

Tim: Mmm. Well, clearly, they have done it wrong.

Jon: They have done it wrong.

Tim: That's the whole premise of the story that just happened, that God said: "Don't eat from that one tree." So yeah, now we're to the riddle of—

Jon: I guess it's to say: "The humans have become like one of us, but they did it the wrong way."

Tim: Right.

Jon: That's the subtext.

Tim: Oh—

Jon: "They did it the wrong way."

Tim: Yes. Okay. Good. Good. Yeah. What you're probing out here is: You want to find the problem so that you can know—

Jon: Yeah. What's the real problem here?

Tim: Better: What transformation needs to happen in the wilderness—

Jon: Yes.

Tim: So that you can—

Jon: Yes.

Tim: Get back to the garden land and—but this time it's good?

Jon: Right.

Tim: Because right now, being in the garden anymore is bad.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I don't think the solution is: Well, let's just go back to a naive state where we don't know good from bad.

Tim: Right. Yeah. Clearly, that's not what God asks of anybody.

[Laughter]

Tim: When o—once they're outside the garden, God's constantly going to be asking people to trust him and to learn wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, apparently the bad thing isn't knowing good from bad as such, it's having developed a habit of defining good and bad based on my own limited wisdom. That was Adam and Eve's problem.

Jon: So my interpretation of this line is: "Look, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good from bad, but the way they're doing it is going to destroy them."

Tim: Yeah. "And others."

Jon: "And others." But that line's not in there.

Tim: No, no. It's implied—

Jon: It's implied.

Tim: It's implied because of the story that just happened.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: All right.

Tim: But we know that God's purpose was for humans to be in the garden.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That was God's desire.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So this is now an unfortunate consequence. And so if God is going to restore humans to the life of the garden, they are going to have to change.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it's going to have to do with this problem humans have of declaring good and bad based on their own limited wisdom or based on their distorted desires.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. That's what the Eden story teaches you.

Jon: And if they're in that state with distorted desires, defining good and bad on their own terms, and they are also living forever, we've got a real big problem.

Tim: Yeah. Not for God necessarily.

[Laughter]

Tim: I mean, God will be sad that his creatures are living in eternal, self-caused torment.

[Laughter]

Jon: Well, it would be cruel —

Tim: You know?

Jon: For God to be like: "Here, keep living forever in this state." Like: "Let's just —"

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: "Perpetuate this —"

Tim: Yeah.



Jon: “Horrible—”

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: “Situation.”

Tim: Yeah. So we’ve adopted the phrase from Sheldon Vanauken to describe this scene as God’s severe mercy of exiling the humans, but with a promise, buried up in God’s lament a few verses earlier, that there would be a seed of the woman who would reverse all this in some way.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So in a similar way, then, for the same set of reasons that God exiled Adam and Eve, because they are not in a state to enjoy the garden land anymore, so what God is doing with Israel is then the inverse of that. God wants to bring them into the garden land, but because they are not yet ready, he’s going to take them into the wilderness and bring them through experiences that will teach them. So we looked at the narratives of those experiences in the previous conversation from this one. So those are the wandering in the wilderness stories of the Israelites, Exodus 15, 16, 17, and then Numbers 11 through 21. So we looked at that.

Jon: Yep.

Tim: And what the people consistently do is grumble, complain, and then when God does provide, they don’t really trust God.

[Laughter]

Tim: When God gives them daily provision, they constantly try and hoard, and—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Get more for themselves. And then i—

Jon: The severe mercy becomes its own type of problem.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. That’s right. They don’t like God’s severe mercy.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so they start rebelling against it until eventually they just say: “We don’t want to go into the garden land.” Like: “We’re going to go back to Egypt.”

Jon: Yeah. They're meant to, in the wilderness, learn: "I can trust God. There can be enough. When I'm experiencing the limits of myself, God will provide."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: They're supposed to be learning all these things. And they're learning it because God keeps showing up for them.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

Jon: But instead of learning it—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: They—

Tim: They don't.

[Laughter]

Tim: I mean, re—when—it's just like, when it comes down to: They're hungry and thirsty again, they don't trust God, and they're tired. They're tired of having their trust tested in God. So it culminates with the rebellion of the spies in Numbers chapters 13 and 14. And that's when God says, like: "Okay. You don't want to go into the land. You don't think I can protect you. So you guys journey in the wilderness for 40 years until the Exodus generation dies off, and the children who went out in the Exodus from Egypt, when they're adults, they can inherit the good land." And that's the moment where Moses finds himself with that second generation. And he's brought them around the east to the edge of the land, right at the Jordan River, about to go in, and Moses gives a series of impassioned speeches to the children of the Exodus generation that—we call the speeches the Deuteronomy Scroll.

[Laughter]

Tim: So let's take a moment now because we're going to see Moses pick up all these ideas and then apply them to the children of the Exodus generation. So to Deuteronomy we go.

[Musical Break (22:41—23:08)]

[The Purpose of 40 Years in the Wilderness (23:08—41:59)]

Tim: So Deuteronomy is a big, complex scroll. This is the fifth scroll of the Torah. We did a whole nine-episode series on Deuteronomy a couple of years ago.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So like, that's all—

Jon: The year of the Torah.

Tim: The year of the Torah. So that's all back there. So I'll just kind of summarize. The opening line is: "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness," that is: "In the *aravah*," which is the kind of desert—

Jon: The step?

Tim: Prairie land.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. "Opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, and Lavan, and Khatzerot and Dizahav—"you know those places?

Jon: No, I don't know those places.

[Laughter]

Jon: That's all east of the Jordan, though?

Tim: But summary: "It's just 11 days walk from Horeb," which is referring to Mount Sinai, "by way of Mount Seir, to Kedesh Barnea, which is where the Israelites rebelled and chose to not go into the garden land."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “Now here we are in the 40th year of the 11th month.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Moses—”

Jon: Talk about two—

Tim: Spea—

Jon: Steps forward, one step back.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: Two steps forward—

[Laughter]

Tim: 1800 steps back.

[Laughter]

Tim: Something like that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In a circle. Okay.

Tim: So in Deuteronomy one through three, the opening speech, Moses essentially just summarizes what a disaster the last 40 years have been.

[Laughter]

Tim: I mean, it's just a disaster. And he constantly highlights the disaster of the Israelites' responses versus, um, what God kept doing for them.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And he keeps mentioning how terrible the wilderness has been. A—this was 40 years.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I mean, he's had a really—it's not just like a bad day.

Jon: No.

Tim: It's not just like a bad year.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's like—

Jon: Half a lifetime.

Tim: Half, half your lifetime. Yeah. So he calls the wilderness, in chapter one, verse 19, that they've been wandering through—he calls it: "The great and terrible wilderness."

[Laughter]

Tim: Mean—"great" meaning huge. "Huge, terrible wilderness."

Jon: Yeah. You showed that verse before, right? That sounds familiar.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: At the very beginning.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yep.

Jon: The great and terrible.

Tim: Yeah. Uh, he also highlights how, in chapter one verse 30, he said: "Yahweh, your God who goes before you, when you go into the land, you guys, across the river, he's going to fight your battles on your behalf just like he did back in Egypt when you were kids. And he's going to go before you in the wilderness where you saw how Yahweh,

your God, carried you just like a man carries his son all the way that you've walked." That's a very important image. So just like a father would carry their son through the wilderness. "But despite all of this, y'all just do not trust Yahweh your God still." Then he recounts the rebellion of the spies and how the people wanted to turn around. He recounts how Yahweh brought them on the east side, and they encountered giants—Og —

[Laughter]

Tim: Uh, living in, uh, Bashan, and Yahweh conquered the g—even more giants and so on. So all of this leads up to a really important speech in Deuteronomy chapter eight. And Deuteronomy eight really is the moment where Moses focuses in on: What has God been doing? "Why did he carry us for 40 years when it really was just—we could have finished this in 11 days?"

Jon: Right.

Tim: Like: What was that for?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You could say: "Well, it was because of the rebellion of our parents." And okay, that's true. He just highlighted that a lot. But is there something more that we're supposed to take away? What is it that would make the people ready? And i— Deuteronomy eight is a really powerful meditation. In essence, to pull the cat out of the bag—is that right? Pull the rabbit out of the hat?

[Laughter]

Tim: Cat out of the bag?

[Laughter]

Jon: The cat's out of the bag, meaning—

Tim: P—pull the punch line?

[Laughter]

Tim: Um, there is, for a heart that is not trained to view every moment of goodness in my life as a sheer gift from God that is not my own, I didn't make it, and I don't sustain it, it's just a gift that inspires gratitude and humility—if that's not the state of my heart, then there can be such a thing as too much goodness that will deceive your heart and take you places you do not want to go.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And in that case, the garden land can actually be the worst possible thing—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: That could happen to a person if that's the state of their heart.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's the big idea.

Jon: If they reach out their hand to the tree of life and live forever—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: In this state.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This is Moses' way of exploring in more depth what—so this is good biblical, like, meditation literature style. That little kind of ambiguous thing that God said is getting fully explored here in Deuteronomy chapter eight. So let's dive in. So Moses says to the Israelites: "All of these commandments that I'm commanding you today—"mmm, the first time the word command appears in the Torah is in Genesis two, when God commands the human saying: "Don't—"

Jon: Hmm. That's the divine command.

Tim: Yep. That's the first divine command. Now we've got hundreds—

[Laughter]

Tim: Of Israel, but all of them—

Jon: Yeah. And for context, we got a lot at Sinai. We've learned a lot throughout the stories. They're sprinkled in the Torah. But then here in Deuteronomy, he's restating the law—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: For this next generation.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yep. You got it. So: "All the commandments I'm commanding you today, you must keep to do them so that you may have life and multiply—"those are our key words of the Genesis blessing: to be fruitful, multiply, have long life in the land. Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "And so that you can go and take possession of the land that Yahweh swore on oath to your ancestors." So first of all, there's a whole bunch of wise commands God's giving you. If you keep them, you will have life, and the Eden blessing will be yours. So first of all, you need to keep and do them. And you're going to do that by, verse two: "Remembering all of the way that Yahweh your God led you these 40 years in the desert." And then we get some purpose statements. "Why did God do that? In order, first of all, to humble you." This is the Hebrew word *ena*, which, there's a, a noun—or actually it's an adjective form of the *ani*, which is the poor or afflicted—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: The people in a low social position.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So this is what Abraham and Sarah do to Hagar.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's the same word.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: It gets translated "oppress."



Jon: Oh, it does?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: This word—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: *Ena*?

Tim: Yeah. So what it means is to put someone in a position of social rank below you so that they are dependent on you.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And that's what God is doing to Israel in the wilderness.

Jon: Yeah. That's what the wilderness does to someone.

Tim: Yeah. It reduces you—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To nothing—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: A place of utter—

Jon: It opres—

Tim: Dependence.

Jon: It oppresses you.

Tim: Yeah. Now, I guess the difference is Abraham and Sarah *ena* Hagar, and, like, she has to run away and she's just—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, you know, desperate out in the wilderness, and God's the one who provides for her. Here in this wilderness, God *enas* his people, but then he is the one providing for them. So it's a pretty—

Jon: So—

Tim: Different scenario.

[Laughter]

Jon: Well, we're at the puzzle again, which is: Is the wilderness the unfortunate place—

Tim: Oh, good.

Jon: That we—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Go because of our own folly and oppressing others, or is the wilderness a place where God can lead us into to prepare us?

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: And if you use this word in the sense of: "I'm forcing you or myself into the wilderness," oppression feels like a good word.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Right.

Jon: But when we talk about God doing it to us, you can kind of see it's got the same—

Tim: It might look the same.

Jon: It might kind of—

Tim: On the surface—

Jon: Feel the same, where I'm being pushed into an area where I'm not going to have enough. I'm going to feel like I'm at the end of myself.

Tim: Yeah. I'm going to be scared.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I'm going to be afraid. I don't—

Jon: I'm not going to—

Tim: Know what's next.

Jon: Mhm. Not as many resources, and I don't have as much control. And this is what it feels like to be oppressed. Yeah. It's so interesting.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: For God to do that for us, it's the testing motif.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: If—

Tim: That's what God says next.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Literally, that's the next phrase. "So Yahweh led you in the desert in order to *ena* you, humble you, and to test you to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not."

Jon: Yeah. In The Test, we always talked about: A test could either be a trap or an opportunity depending on the, the person doing it—

Tim: Yeah. And their purpose.

Jon: And their purpose.

Tim: Their intent. Yeah.

Jon: And so same thing with this word, *ena*.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: *Ena* could be oppression or an opportunity to be humbled and to accept something more—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Depending on the purpose or the person.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. And the purpose is to bring to the surface what is in your heart. And that's Hebrew, *lev* or *levav*. It's the center of desire, and will, and purpose.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So what do you desire the most? What do you trust the most?

Jon: What's in your heart?

Tim: Yeah. What is in your heart? And the test brings that to the surface. So he unfolds it more in verse three. He says: "So God *ena*'d you and he let you go hungry. But then he fed you—"

[Laughter]

Tim: "With the, what-is-it."

[Laughter]

Jon: “The *manna*.”

Tim: “The *manna*.” Yeah. “And this *manna*, you didn’t know it, and your ancestors, they didn’t know it, but he fed you with it in order to make you know.” This is so—

[Laughter]

Tim: This is a good example. It’s a good wordplay on “know.”

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: So the test is for God to know what’s in your heart.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He gave you food you didn’t know, that your fathers didn’t know, in order to make you know—

[Laughter]

Tim: “That it’s not by bread alone that a human lives, but by everything that goes out from the mouth of Yahweh.”

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: This is an important line—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: For lots of reasons.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. This is helpful to read this line in context—

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. Isn’t it? Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Jesus quotes this line.

Jon: Of this whole wilderness theme. Yeah, because Jesus quotes this line and—

Tim: In the wilderness.

Jon: And it is a—it's been a riddle to me.

Tim: Mmm. Mmm. Yeah. What is it that really keeps humans alive?

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: I'm tempted to think that it is food because—

[Laughter]

Jon: Well—

Tim: That has been true of my entire life experience—

[Laughter]

Tim: From the moment I've been born.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The food that is provided for me keeps me alive.

Jon: Yeah. And in one sense, it does.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But what is real life, garden life? Garden life is being able to live by God's wisdom.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's how you can have that kind of life. And to do that, you need a heart that is willing to listen to the wisdom of God and to step in line with it.

Tim: Mmm. Yeah. And here's another way to think about that. So think back to the Eden narrative. It's out of the nothingness of the wilderness that God pops a spring up out of

the ground and plants a garden. So even the garden itself is full of now food for the human—fruit. By fruit does the human live in the garden.

[Laughter]

Tim: And if the human is only ever in that garden and forgets as the years go by of the dust from which the human came, then it would be very easy for that human to think like: “Oh, it’s the fruit that keeps me alive.” But even the fruit is itself surrounded by the nothingness of the wilderness—the garden is surrounded by the nothingness. And so sometimes you could just tell yourself that in the garden, and you’ll remember that and be like: “Hey, thanks God for the fruit today, because I know that it doesn’t have to exist. It just exists because you are providing it for me today.” So that’s one way to know that it’s not by fruit alone that a human lives. But then there’s this other experiential way because the fruit only is sustained there by the word of God that brought it into being in the first place. So in a way, you can learn that lesson in the wilderness, which is the opposite, which is: “I’m out in the wilderness and then God just provides, like, once a day, a bit of heavenly fruit, that is the *manna*, the bread from heaven. And then it’s just a little daily bread that keeps me alive.” And that’s another way to know. And one is certainly more pleasant than the other. But the—

Jon: It’s more pleasant to be surrounded by—

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: As much bread as you need.

Tim: But the point is that whether I’m in the garden or in the wilderness, the ultimate reality is that anything that I have that is good is because of the word of Yahweh, not from the food itself. The food is the result—

Jon: The food is—

Tim: Of the r—

Jon: Dependent on the word—

Tim: Word of Yahweh. Yeah. And it’s very clear when it’s manna, and it’s like, the only reason it shows up today is because—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: God said it would.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But I forget that when I'm in the garden.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: So maybe the analogy is that—we've talked about this before. You and I have grown up in a time and a place where we've never experienced—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Any kind of real dire food scarcity, food insecurity.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And so it's very easy to think that—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I live off of food. And it requires an imagination to say: "But where does food come from?" You know, you do this with your kids. You know? "Well, it arrives on the truck—"

[Laughter]

Tim: "To the store." "Well, who put it on the truck and where'd the people who put it on the truck get it from?" "Well, it came from a field." "Well, wh—"and, you know, go all the way back and you can eventually get to: "It came from God."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: It's that kind of thing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But it takes work, imaginative work.

Jon: Yes. But then it takes a lot of trust because—even myself, I grew up with plenty of food. I have plenty of food now. It doesn't take too much, especially as I'm getting older, I don't know what it is, for me to start to worry about—

Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: Food—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Insecurity.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, no, yeah.

Jon: Like, just a thought o—experiment.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It just occurred to me. I talked about this in—when we went through Sermon on the Mount. I don't know how to grow food.

[Laughter]

Jon: Like if there's a problem—

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: The food chains go down—

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Jon: I don't know—

Tim: You're in a bad situation.

Jon: How I'm going to feed my family.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Like, I would be completely dependent on however the community rallies. And so if there's famines, you know, for whatever reason, it's like: What do I do?

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: And then I can worry about it. But “today has enough worries of its own—”

[Laughter]

Jon: Jesus says.

[Laughter]



Tim: That's right.

Jon: And—but ultimately, everything comes from God.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Can I trust—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In the goodness of God?

Tim: Yep. Apparently, that is such an important lesson to learn. Because—let's think back to Adam and Eve. So apparently, the number one lesson was to know that it's not by fruit or bread that a human has life. And underneath that is—

Jon: But it is.

[Laughter]

Tim: Uh—

Jon: Right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Isn't that part of the irony of this?

Tim: Well, I guess, you know, it's a stark contrast. It's not by—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That alone—

Jon: Alone. Yeah.

Tim: That a human lives. Rather, it's the word of Yahweh that provides the bread and the fruit.

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's the ultimate lifeline.

Jon: It's so easy to go around thinking: If I just had enough food or enough whatever, like, that's what life is.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's the good life—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Is just th—enough.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But where is that all coming from? And I live in such a way that I think I've got to get that and take that as I need it and I see fit. I'm not actually creating real life. And so enough food is not actually true life.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Here, let's finish this little part of the reason why.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So he says: "It was in order to make you know that not by bread alone does a human live, but by everything that comes out of the mouth of Yahweh." He says: "Your clothing did not wear out on you. Your feet did not swell over these 40 years."

Jon: Hmm. Is that a new detail?

Tim: Yeah, it's an interesting little thing. Y—no, your feet can get swollen—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Walking on hot sand.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "And you should know in your heart that as a man instructs his son—"it's not the word *Torah*, it's the word, um, *yaser*. Hmm. Sometimes I'm—translate it as "discipline," but it's about: You're teaching through hardship. You're teaching through challenge.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Just as a, a man instructs his son, so Yahweh, your God, was instructing you: 'Keep the commands of Yahweh, walk in his ways, and,' last word, "fear him."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that's an important theme too—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Back to the Garden of Eden story and then into Proverbs. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Like, that's true wisdom. And we're back to—now we have multiple ways to talk about what comes out of the mouth of God and multiple ways to

talk about how I relate to the word of God. It's to follow, to keep, to do, to remember, and to fear. And then what God does is he speaks, and he commands, and he provides.

Jon: And instructs.

Tim: And instructs. Yeah.

Jon: Hmm.

[Musical Break (41:32—41:59)]

[The Wilderness Is the Truth (41:59—1:05:28)]

Tim: So let's probe a little deeper then. Okay? So that was all about God's purpose.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So what is it that God knows about humans that he would bring somebody through such a severe mercy? Verse seven: "Well, Yahweh your God is bringing you into a really good land—"this is *toṽ*, the Hebrew word *toṽ*. "I mean, this land has streams of water. It's got springs, and it has deep waters coming out in the valleys and on top of the hills. It has springs everywhere."

[Laughter]

Tim: "It's a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranate trees, olive trees that have olive oil. Man, there's honey. There's beehives everywhere. I mean, it's a land where you can eat food in it without any scarcity. You will not find it lacking anything. The stones are made of iron, and the mountains are a place where you can mine copper." It's got what you need. It's the Eden land. "And you will eat, and you'll be satisfied, and you will bless Yahweh your God because of the good land he's given to you." What a gift.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I mean, who doesn't want that?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You know? "Guard yourself—"oh, ah. This is great. This is the word of what the cherubim were commissioned to do—

Jon: Oh, yeah?

Tim: At the end of Genesis three, "to guard the way" with that sword—

Jon: They guard—

Tim: "To guard the way."

Jon: They're guarding the entrance to the garden.

Tim: Yeah. Now the idea is he's going to bring you into the good land, so guard yourself.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: "Become your own guards—"

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "So that you don't forget Yahweh your God and not keep his commands, and regulations, and statutes that I'm commanding you today." And then he uses the same word that God used in Genesis three when he said: "The human has become like one of us, knowing good and bad. And now, so that he doesn't stretch out his hand," or: "And now," the English word "lest" is sometimes used here—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Lest he take—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Send out his hand and take—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The word lest means "so that not."

Jon: Oh.

Tim: The Hebrew word: *pen*. And Moses uses it here. So he says: "Lest, or so that it won't take place, that when you've eaten, and you're satisfied, and have built good houses, and live in them, and have multiplied herds and flocks, and you accumulate all

kinds of silver and gold, and everything is multiplied, here's what we want to prevent: your heart getting raised up on high," like its head up in the skies like a certain city I can think of, "and then you forget Yahweh your God. You know, the one who brought you up out of Egypt, the house of slavery. You know, the one who led you in that great and terrible wilderness. Don't forget it's full of snakes, and scorpions, and parched ground where there is no water. He's the one who brought you water out from the flinty rock. He's the one who fed you manna in the wilderness, which your ancestors did not know, in order to humble you and in order to test you. So that," here's a new statement, "he could do good, *tov*, to you in the future."

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. He wants you in the land—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That abundant land.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's the good.

Tim: That's the good.

Jon: That's the future good.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's the inheritance.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "And the wilderness was a necessary way to prepare your heart because—"and this is what I'm hearing you saying, or Moses saying—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "When you get there and you're going to eat all this good stuff, it's going to be good."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: "Good food, good houses, good resources—"

Tim: "Your heart will be raised up on high and you'll forget Yahweh."

Jon: "You'll forget Yahweh."

Tim: Yeah. "And then, what will you say in your heart?" This is the next line.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “My strength and the might of my hand—”here we are back to the human’s hand in the good land.

Jon: Yeah. “I—”

Tim: “The strength o—of—”

Jon: “I did this.”

Tim: “My hand has produced this wealth for myself.” You actually come to think that you’re the one who made it. Man, this is human psychology. There can be something that is so plainly obvious, but when you tell yourself a different story about something day after day after day, you can actually convince yourself that something that you know isn’t true can eventually seem like it’s true. It’s really wild.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Unless you have some mechanism to, like, remind you of reality.

Jon: Huh. Yeah. It’s even trickier, though, when the illusion feels very real.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm. That’s right. Yeah, totally.

Jon: You know? Like—

Tim: Yeah, if I farm—

Jon: I have a job—

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Or a farm—

Tim & Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or we can make it real.

Jon: Well—

[Laughter]

Jon: Let’s make it—

[Laughter]

Tim: Like to our time and place, or we can be ancient Israelites—

[Laughter]

Tim: We're farmers.

Jon: I see this plot of land. I see the potential in this plot of land. I take the rocks out of it. I build that wall to keep the deer out—

[Laughter]

Jon: I—

Tim: The boar. The wild boar.

Jon: The wild boar.

[Laughter]

Jon: I till it. I sow the seed. I watch over it and I harvest it. Like—

Tim: I did that.

Jon: I did that.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And when I'm eating the meal with my family, I could feel good about myself.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I did all of that.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I did.

[Laughter]

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

Jon: And so it's not hard to tell yourself that story because that is the story you just experienced.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Underneath that story, though—

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Is: Well, but did you create that land? Did you create the seed? Did you actually grow the crop? Did you water the land? Does any of this, like, exist because of you?

Tim: Yeah. Or as Moses says: "Who is the one who gave you strength to produce the wells?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Who birthed you?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Who's responsible for your existence?

Jon: Did you give yourself this body?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Did you give yourself this mind that saw the potential in the field? And so the illusion's very real. You hav—it's almost like you have to step underneath of it and start to question some pretty basic, fundamental things you take for granted.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. And that takes work, mental effort. You're thinking against the grain of your daily experience, where you feel—you can feel like you're the one doing all the work.

Jon: So is that what we're saying? That's what the wilderness does?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The wilderness, like, pops the illusion for you fast.

Tim: Yeah. That's great. It's a way of pulling back the curtain to use another metaphor.



[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: Aba—it's an apocalypse. It reveals what is ultimately true about reality, which is: We don't supply our own existence. We aren't responsible for where, when, or how we were born or into what kind of circumstances. We aren't really in control of where we go and what we do. We think that we are. And we do have agency. And I think this is what the biblical authors are trying to show about humans in the world and why we're unique: that we do have agency. But that agency is wholly dependent on things far beyond us. And if we see ourselves as real agents and images of a divine purpose, and being, and will, then we'll recognize that our agency is real, but also real limited. And that will make us, yeah, dependent on the wisdom and word of someone greater than ourselves, who is the real provider for everything. My hand did not produce this wealth. Even if my hand produced it, it actually didn't ultimately.

Jon: It is in cooperation with something bigger, and deeper, and more fundamental—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That actually—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Is—we're dependent on. And—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: To forget that will then lead us into a way of life where we actually can't receive the good anymore. We'll—

Tim: Yeah. We—

Jon: Be unable to actually have life.

Tim: Yeah. We'll be unable to discern between good and bad.

Jon: We'll be in—thinking—

Tim: And it—

Jon: We're enjoying the good, but really we'll be creating—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Bad.

Tim: Yeah. And you know, maybe this is where—back to those narratives about Abraham and Sarah are helpful because, like, they weren't wholly evil people.

Jon: Right.

Tim: They were themselves a suffering, hurting couple dealing with the emotional pain of infertility, right, after decades. So they were reacting even out of their pain for abusing their Egyptian slave, which ended up putting her in the wilderness. So the reasons why we're really bad at discerning between good and bad is because we ourselves are this complex mix of good and bad. And unless we are connected to a source of wisdom about good and bad above and beyond our own, life and the good land will not be good for us. We're to the heart of what the wilderness does—

Jon: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Tim: To people that prepares them ideally to go into the good land. That's exactly what Moses—a—you can imagine—I think we are meant to imagine Moses could have given this speech to Adam and Eve, like, the day—

Jon: Okay, let's talk about that, though.

Tim: And Cain, and Cain and Able—

Jon: Oh, when they were exiled?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: To say like: "We want to get back in God."

Jon: But what's the speech before they're exiled—where it's like, they're natively kind of placed in the garden, but still as children of, of sorts, like they need to learn to trust God's wisdom, but within the garden.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So God isn't saying: "All right, guys, here we go. We're going to travel through the wilderness so that when we get to the garden, you're going to enjoy it so much." That's not Genesis two. Genesis two is just—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Welcome to the garden."

Tim: "God commanded them—"yeah.

Jon: "Here you are. Welcome."

Tim: “Here you are. Eat from every tree of the garden.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That’s what God says.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Enjoy.”

Jon: Is that story supposed to kind of clue us in to be like: “Yeah, that’s not really possible. You need the wilderness.”

Tim: Mmm. Mmm.

Jon: Or—

Tim: No, no, no, no. Actually, this is great because even though the word test is not used in the garden, here Moses is saying, God’s commands to you as you’ve been journeying through the wilderness—and the commands have been about: “Take the manna for each day.” The commands are about trusting what God has provided for you, that it is enough.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In the garden, the test was the single command—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Which is “enjoy—”

Jon: It sounded like “ollie ollie oxen free.”

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: “Every tree—”

Tim: Yeah: “But—

Jon: “Eat.”

Tim: “There’s one.”

Jon: “But there’s one.”

Tim: “But there’s one—”so instead—it’s the inverse—

Jon: The test is simple.

Tim: But it’s also the inverse of the desert. In the desert, there’s no trees.

[Laughter]

Tim: There's just one little piece of daily bread there.

Jon: Okay. Oh, yeah, that's interesting to think about that.

Tim: Whereas in the garden, there's trees everywhere, and there's only one that you can't eat.

Jon: So the, so the molding the humans into people who trust in God's word more than the bread in the garden was still happening.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: But it was simpler.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: It was an easier test. It was a bite-sized test.

Tim: It was a bite-sized test, and they still blew it.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. But this is why, for years, we've meditated—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: On the—God's command about the tree.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Why not the tree? The tree is an opportunity for them to learn wisdom, not by taking from a tree, but the tree presents an opportunity for them to trust God's word.

Jon: Listen to the word.

Tim: It—that's real wisdom—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That is the subtext of the Eden story.

Jon: That's ultimately what they need to learn in the garden.

Tim: That's right. To live by—not by fruit alone, but by the word and the command that proceeds from God's mouth.

Jon: You can learn that in the wilderness, and it's actually much more stark and—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Memorable.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But you can learn it in the garden, too.

Tim: You can learn it in the garden. That's right. Yeah.

Jon: But how difficult is it to learn it in the garden? Because in the garden, you can just easily start to go: "I got everything I need."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Why do I need to listen to the voice of God?"

Tim: That's right.

Jon: "Look at what I have."

Tim: So—

Jon: "Look at what I've done."

Tim: So notice the—what God wants to teach—the way God is trying to teach them when they're in the garden is by voluntarily depriving themselves—

Jon: Yeah. Oppressing—

Tim: Of—

Jon: Them—

Tim: Of some piece of good that they could have—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "But I choose not to."

Jon: Isn't th—that's interesting.

Tim: Mhm. Okay, dude—

Jon: Think of the tree—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: The prohibition against the tree as an oppression.

Tim: Dude, this is so fascinating. In the book of Leviticus, when it refers to different feast days—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: When the Israelites are to fast—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: The Hebrew phrase for fasting in the Hebrew Bible is *enanafshi*, “to oppress myself.”

Jon: Oh, okay. Well, this—

[Laughter]

Jon: Whole time we’ve been talking about the wilderness, and it just feels like—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It feels like fasting—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Is what we’ve been talking about.

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So again, the Hebrew phrase for fasting in the Hebrew Bible, there’s another one, *som*—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That just means “to fast.” But the one that’s most commonly—

Jon: Like a turn of phrase?

Tim: Used—

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: In the Torah is to *enanafshi*, “to oppress myself.” *Nafshi* being “myself—”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “My nefesh.”

Jon: “My nefesh,” oh, yeah.

Tim: “To oppress my being.”

[Laughter]

Tim: But I, I voluntarily—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Deprive myself of—

Jon: Right.

Tim: Something that I could have, but to remind myself that I don’t live by this good thing —

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I live because of God’s wisdom, I periodically deprive myself. This is the logic of fasting. It’s a way to teach yourself to fully appreciate the good things that you do have.

Jon: Which makes so much sense that when Jesus goes in the wilderness for 40 days, he’s fasting.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: That’s why he’s out there.

Tim: That’s right. And he quotes from this speech.

Jon: And he quotes—

[Laughter]

Jon: From this speech.

[Laughter]

Tim: Okay. But I like this. You can actually learn what you need to learn in the garden or in the wilderness. Just one's more pleasant than the other. Actually—but it's not pleasant. It's not pleasant to deprive yourself when yo—

Jon: No, it's never—

Tim: When you're in the garden.

Jon: It is never pleasant to s—deprive yourself.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And I guess what we're saying, though, what Moses is saying, is when you're in the good land of the garden, the illusion becomes so much more real to you that y—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This is because of you.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so the voice of God will slowly slip away to be like: "What do I need that for?" And the snake can easily be like: "Yeah, actually, you really can't trust that. He's holding out on you."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Like, in the good land, that becomes harder in some way.

Tim: Mhm. Totally.

Jon: Although, in the wilderness, it's not like—

Tim: It's not enjoyable either.

Jon: It's not enjoyable and not like Israel f—did—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Great.

Tim: Yeah. It definitely requires more—hmm, I was going to say willpower, ah, but not really. Willpower is a depleting resource—

[Laughter]

Tim: Uh, throughout the day. I think, really, it's about desire. What do I desire more—



Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Than food? Do I have a desire that transcends my physical appetites? And if my desire really is to live in intimate closeness and dependence on the word of Yahweh, the word of my creator, then I can deprive myself temporarily in trust that there will be enough again soon. And the wilderness is an unpleasant way to learn that lesson, but that is what the lesson is. Again, back—this is Deuteronomy 8:16: “This was in order to humble you, in order to test you, so that he could do good to you in the future.” There will be a garden—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But this season is a test.

Jon: So that you can actually handle the good—

Tim: You can handle the good.

Jon: That God is going to do to you in the future.

Tim: Yeah, that’s it. Yeah. Mhm. When you locked on to why God didn’t take them—the Israelites on the direct route—

Jon: Yeah, there’s a direct route back to the land.

Tim: In the last point, I think this—we’re on to something very important to the heartbeat of this idea, this theme. The wilderness is the truth. The wilderness tells the truth that the ground of human existence isn’t ourselves. It comes from someone outside ourselves, which means our existence and every little piece of goodness that sustains my existence is just a sheer gift of God. And it’s hard to remember that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The wilderness is both the nothingness from which I came, and then it’s also—I kind of like walk into that nothingness on purpose in little ways. I can do it to myself, or God can lead me into it. But it’s all for the purpose of trusting that he has good in store for me that I still need to get ready for.

Jon: Yeah. God can teach me what I need to learn in the garden or in the wilderness. When we choose the wilderness or when God knows we’re not actually prepared to go back in the garden—

Tim: Yeah. Yep.

Jon: Then God will teach us what we need to know in the wilderness. And there’s something about the wilderness where these tests are much more stark—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And then God's provisions are that much more—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Apparent.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. And surprising and—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Clear. Mhm.

Jon: And so you're learning the lesson in a very basic way. You can't say you did this because you're in the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: God showed up for you.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Where, in the garden, it's much easier to forget. But I think the question I've been having is: Is the wilderness necessary? And Genesis two tells us no.

Tim: Mmm. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: This could have all happened in the garden. If you just read the Exodus narratives of the wilderness, it kind of feels like: Well, maybe it was—it is necessary. But that's because God knows they weren't going to enter the land. And so if they're not going to enter the land, then, yeah, we got to learn a th—few things in the wilderness first.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But it's not because you have to go through the wilderness. You could learn this in the garden. But we are now in the wilderness. We will buck against going into the land. And if we're in the land—

[Laughter]

Jon: And we're not ready—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: We're going to—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Forget—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Lift up ourselves. And so we got to learn this in the wilderness.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. It's good. Deuteronomy eight is a wonderful example of the Bible as meditation literature, that a chapter near the end—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of the Torah is actually fully exploring an idea that was implicit within the garden of Eden story about God's command. So this was an important step for me as we talk about this theme—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To focus in on. What happens next in the story is the Israelites go into the land. Moses dies. This generation goes into the land, and they do a pretty good job of trusting God and inheriting the land. And God drives out or defeats many of the Canaanites that try to attack them and are hostile. Some Canaanites join them and settle in the good land with them and enter into the covenant. It all falls apart when this generation dies in the days of the judges, and it's just chaos. This is the book of Judges and the early chapters of Samuel. And so God raises up a leader for his people. And I'm just really summarizing here. It leads to the arrival of a king named David that God raises up David to replace Israel's first, self-chosen king, a guy named Saul. And David and David's story is the next biblical character where the wilderness comes into play in a really big way in his story. It features here and there, but in the David story, if you just look at a concordance, the words for wilderness, *midbar* and *sadeh*, desert and field, like, just, are off the Richter scale at a certain part of his story. It's super interesting. And it's all about a season of David's life where God leads him into the wilderness before he gives him the garden of Jerusalem. And so we're going to look at David's tests in the wilderness in the book of Samuel next.

[Musical Break (1:03:05—1:03:08)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we're going to look at the time that King David spent fleeing from his enemies in the wilderness.

Tim: The wilderness has shaped David like this incubator to form David's faith and trust.

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Patrick: Hey, my name is Patrick, and I'm from Phoenix, Arizona. I first heard about BibleProject through the Read Scripture videos on YouTube. I use BibleProject for teaching classes at my church and for my own personal formation.

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