

[Wilderness E2 Transcript]

[Recap on the Meaning of the Wilderness (0:00—9:16)]

Jon: We are studying an important biblical setting in the Bible. It's called "the *midbar*," translated as "the wilderness." The wilderness is a lifeless and dangerous place. It's a place of fear, and death, and destruction.

Tim: However, there's this whole other set of characters who, when they go into the wilderness, they face a crisis of life and death, and they meet God, and they trust him. And then what they get in the wilderness is Eden.

Jon: In today's episode, we are going to look at the creation narratives in the beginning of the Bible as God creating life out of the wilderness. God plants a garden in the wilderness, and God takes the dust of the wilderness and forms humanity. He breathes into humanity the breath of life. So the origins of everything is wilderness.

Tim: The default state within the Eden narrative's way of thinking about it is the wilderness.

Jon: We'll consider how life and creation is an oasis in the wilderness.

Tim: Everything that sustains my life comes from something that was before me and outside of me.

Jon: Adam and Eve are placed in the garden, and they're invited to enjoy God's life. But another creature appears to deceive them, promising that there's more to be found outside of God's life.

Tim: When a deceiver shows up into the story, it's a snake. And the snake crawls in from the wild. So this is a creature that comes from the chaos realm, and then it spreads chaos.

Jon: Adam and Eve listen to the voice of chaos, and so they're banished from the garden into the wilderness.

Tim: We came out of the wilderness. We go back to the wilderness. "From dust to dust."

Jon: Today on the podcast, we're going to look at Genesis one through three as a framework to think about how all of existence is God sustaining us in the wilderness.

Tim: If God doesn't sustain our existence, enfold us into his infinite life, we will turn back into that wilderness once again, to the land of thorns, and thistles, and dust.

Jon: That's today. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (2:13—2:19)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon.

Jon: We just jumped in, as of last episode, into a theme study on the place—

[Laughter]

Jon: In the Bible called “the wilderness.”

Tim: Yes, the *midbar*—

Jon: The *midbar*.

Tim: In Hebrew. That's the most common default name for this region.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It's a region where, uh, people don't live—

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Because it's dry—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Uh, it's dangerous. You can travel through it, perhaps—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: If you dare.

Tim: Yeah. If you have the resources or someone that can provide you—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The resources. Yeah. Specifically, water.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: If you have enough water or know where to find it. So there is a stretch of wilderness from Egypt to Israel, which takes a couple weeks to get across on foot. And so that's more manageable. There's a whole stretch, though, between the hill country of—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Like, Jerusalem, Judea—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: If you wanted to head straight east to Babylon and Nineveh—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And you just can't cross that.

Tim: No. That's—

Jon: That *midbar* is—

Tim: Yeah, it's like 500 miles.

Jon: Ju—yeah.

Tim: And—

Jon: There's—

Tim: Again—

Jon: No way through.

Tim: We're thinking of rolling hills with ravines, with scrub grass and really—

Jon: Yeah. This isn't your classic—

Tim: Hearty trees—

Jon: Sahara Desert.

Tim: No, not like sand dunes.

Jon: Sand dunes.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This is what I would think of as kind of high desert, as something we have around here. But where, if you can find water, you can make a little town.

Tim: Yeah. Yep.

Jon: Uhm—

Tim: An oasis.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And there, there are—

Jon: And there are.

Tim: Those out there.

Jon: Uh, there's vegetation and there's animals.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But it's dangerous, and good luck making a living out there.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yep. That's right. And then, I was just thinking about this, there's—if you think of it as a Venn diagram of two overlapping circles, on one side is like the garden land—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And that's one circle. And then the other circle is the wilderness, the *midbar*. But then *midbar* can also refer to the transition region that goes right up to the garden land.

Jon: Yeah, the fields.

Tim: And then the word “field” can refer to a field in the garden land—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But also the transition—

Jon: Okay, right.

Tim: To the wilderness. And so “field” and “wilderness,” or *sadeh* and *midbar*, kind of have this overlapping region of—that's the transition land.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And you can talk about that transition land in terms of its—

Jon: Right.

Tim: *Midbar*-ness or its *sadehh*-ness. Because *sadeh* can also be farm field.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So yeah, that was a little—

Jon: Yeah, that's interesting.

Tim: Picture that unfolded in my mind.

Jon: Yeah, and why would you find yourself out in the wilderness? You—

Tim: Usually, to graze animals.

Jon: You could graze animals.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Because there's times of the year, rains come—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And those areas that aren't normally fertile, some grasses will grow—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And go bring your animals out there.

Tim: That's right. That's how Moses ends up out in the Sinai area.

Jon: That's what he's doing.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But you would likely not build a town. It'd have to be a pretty special little place with a well or something if you—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Were going to, like, stay there.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Or a big plaster-lined hole in the ground, a cistern, to capture a lot of water so that you can use that in the dry season.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Oh, that's what a cistern is.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: You would find yourself in the wilderness if you were fleeing from your enemies —

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And you just had to "get out of Dodge—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: As they say.

Tim: Yeah. So famously David—

Jon: David will spend time out there.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But if you had to get from one place to another and the wilderness was in between, and you had to go through the wilderness, out of slavery, into some new place, this is classically the wilderness that—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Israel—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Went through.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Uhm, so you could find yourself in there. Just—it's the in-between place to get where you're going.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. And actually—so that helps us understand the main meanings of the wilderness. One is its base default—is it's a sparsely or just uninhabited place for humans—lack of resources and dangerous creatures.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That's the environment. Then the other main set of associations then is: What happens when people get in that environment and they run out of resources and they're standing at the edge of life and death? These are moments where God comes to meet people and, based on whether they trust God, they experience that desert as a place that ends their life or they experience that end of their life as this crazy transition into an oasis and a refuge, but that seems totally, like, beyond all reason because God is providing for you in ways that you could have never done out of your own resources. And this is what's called "the test." So the word "test" in the biblical story is primarily associated with Israel's experiences of life, and death, and lack of resources in the wilderness.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's a basic summary.

Jon: Yeah. So you wanted to show us how the wilderness appears in the first pages of the Bible.

Tim: Yeah. So I mentioned in our last conversation, the way that the biblical authors use the wilderness imagery and locations is one, to talk about real places in the events and the lives of, you know, these characters. But that's the physical description. There is also a metaphysical, like, a larger set of ideas about the nature of reality, the human experience of being mortal finite creatures, God as being the eternal one, you know, from whom all things come and to whom all things go—like that metaphysical reality.

Jon: Yeah, I don't know if it's landing for me in the abstract, the—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Way you're talking about it.

Tim: Okay. Well then, since the biblical authors didn't talk about it in the abstract, I won't either.

[Laughter]

Tim: Let's just get in—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: To these narratives. But the wilderness stands, I think, symbolically or metaphysically as an image of nothingness or non-existence. And once something has been brought into existence, once you are in the wilderness or are facing the wilderness, going back to non-existence or nothingness is what we call death. These are primary meanings of the wilderness: nothingness and death.

[Musical Break (8:42—9:16)]

[Pre-Creation Wilderness and the Eden Oasis (9:16—40:27)]

Tim: The first two narratives in the Bible is the seven-day creation narrative, which has real clear literary boundaries. Then, in Genesis two verse four, a new narrative begins. “These are the birthings or the generations of the skies and the land in the day they were created.” And then God plants a garden. And these two creation narratives, they work on different timelines, use different imagery, but both of them begin with the depiction of the pre-creation state as wilderness, using wilderness vocabulary, which is just fascinating.

[Laughter]

Tim: So the first sentences of Genesis 1:1—

Jon: Mhm.

[Laughter]

Jon: “In the beginning—”

Tim: “In the beginning—” I’ll work from my translation here. Which, over time, I’ve come to prefer using the Hebrew words underneath the divine names.

Jon: Oh. “In the beginning, *elohim* created.”

Tim: So where we have “God” in our English translations, using the Hebrew word “*elohim*,” and then where we read LORD in all capital letters, usually in our English translations of—it’s the divine name Yahweh. So there’s no Yahweh in the seven-day creation narrative. It’s just *elohim*, which is not a name.

Jon: It’s a class of—deity?

[Laughter]

Jon: It’s a—

Tim: It's a title, that our best paraphrase is "spiritual being."

Jon: "In the beginning, a spiritual being—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "The spiritual being—"

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: "Created."

Tim: "Created the skies and the land." What's up there and what's down here.

Jon: Mhm. You look up—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That was created by *elohim*.

Tim: Yeah—

Jon: You look down—

Tim: Everything you see when you look up, that hasn't always been there, and it doesn't sustain itself. Look down here. Look at everything. It wasn't always here, and it doesn't sustain itself. So where did it come from? *Elohim*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Wow.

[Laughter]

Tim: That's remarkable. H—how? Who? What? When? Where? Why? Verse two says: "Let me tell you. Let me tell you the story."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Now, you should know the land was wild and waste, and darkness was over the face of the deep waters." This is the beginning state—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: The pre-creation state. So these two words—the Hebrew phrase, I translated it “wild and waste.” Modern English translations mostly do “formless and void.” The Hebrew phrase is *tohu vavohu*, and both of these words are used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. They mean unordered, *tohu*—

Jon: *Tohu*—

Tim: And uninhabited or empty. So “wild” meaning disordered, and “waste” meaning uninhabited. And this actually matches the sequences of three days. Days one through three are about God ordering sky, land, and sea. So ordering. And then days four, five, and six are about God filling it with inhabitants: the lights, the birds and fish, and the humans and the land animals. But here’s other places where these words are used. So in Deuteronomy 32, Moses is writing a poem about how God found Israel like finding an abandoned person dying thirsty in a wilderness. So in Deuteronomy 32, verse 10: “He—”that is God, “found him—”that is Israel, “in a desert land.” And it’s the word *eretz*, which is—

Jon: For land?

Tim: This is the word “land” from here in Genesis one, verse two. “In an *eretz midbar*.” And there’s our wilderness word.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: “And in the *tohu* of a howling, desolate wilderness.”

Jon: So *tohu* is a descriptive word of it.

Tim: Yep. And it’s the first of that phrase “wild and waste,” *tohu vavohu*. So it means disordered, unorganized.

Jon: Disordered. Why don’t you just translate it unordered, uninhabited?

Tim: Oh, yeah, that would be good. It just doesn’t rhyme.

Jon: It doesn’t rhyme.

Tim: Or it doesn’t have a—

Jon: Because *tohu vavohu* has that poetic—

Tim: *tohu vavohu* rhymes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the wild and waste—

Jon: Ah—

Tim: I—I've adopted from Everett Fox's—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Translation because the alliteration of the Ws captures some of the—

Jon: So wild is representing unordered.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, that computes. The wild—I mean, there is an order to the wild.

Tim: From our point of view, there is elaborate, intricate order to the wild.

Jon: When you say our point of view, you mean from a modern point of view?

Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Oh, it's—the way ecosystems—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Work and balance—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's remarkable—

[Laughter]

Tim: System of order.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Jon: But if you're not appreciating that—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And you're just—

Tim: Or not focusing on it.

Jon: You're not focused on that, and you're just thinking about: Can I survive out there?

Tim: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Jon: Is it ordered for me?

Tim: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Because when I order things—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I get a field going, I get—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: A wa—a stone wall around it.

Tim: Water source.

Jon: There's a—yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: I've got a well—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I build a little house—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And the rains will come in a way that is predictable enough. That's the order I need.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And it doesn't have that kind of order.

Tim: Unh-un.

Jon: So it's wild.

Tim: It's *tohu*.

Jon: It's *tohu*.

Tim: Yep. And God found Israel in a land of *midbar*, in the *tohu* of a howling, desolate wilderness. Howling, uhm—

Jon: Like the wind.

Tim: Yeah, the sound of the wind.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And I think where a howling comes from is when there's very few objects to block the wind.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: You get a lone tree—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Out there. Like in—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Deserts in this part of the world, there'll be just one tree for a mile—

Jon: It found some, it found some water.

Tim: In each direction. So when the wind comes, you really hear it because there's just one thing blocking the wind. And so it ends up being like a musical instrument.

[Laughter]

Jon: Is that why?

Tim: I think that—

Jon: They're hearing it whistle through that tree?

Tim: Yeah. Yes.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Yeah. So the deserts are a h—place of howling. Howling—yeah. In the Isaiah scroll, Isaiah 45, this is a direct reflection on Genesis one. "This is what Yahweh says, the one who created the skies...the one who formed it, he formed and made the land."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "He established it," like, on the waters. "He did not create it to be *tohu*, but he formed it in order to be inhabited." So here, forming is organizing an environment so that it can be filled up.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. "I am Yahweh. There's no other *Elohim*."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So there's two descriptions of the pre-creation state.

Jon: Right.

Tim: The first one is *tohu vavohu*, wild and waste. And in both cases, it's referring to land that is uninhabitable and unorganized.

Jon: The *tohu* part?

Tim: Yep. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Cool. And then *vavohu*, which you're translating "waste—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I'm seeing the word wasteland show up, actually, a lot.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I'm just realizing, I don't think I know what that means.

Tim: Oh.

Jon: What does it mean for land to be waste?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or what—wasteland?

Tim: Yeah. In our English translations, it's rendering Hebrew words that mean empty or uninhabited.

Jon: Okay. Why "waste?" When I think of waste, I think of like a trash heap.

Tim: I know. Ye—yeah. Totally. That's a great question.

[Laughter]

Tim: So I think primarily what it means is ruined. Waste means ruined—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think, in English. Ruined land. Like, land that maybe used to be good, but now is ruined.

Jon: And, uhm, waste in old English means desolate or uninhabited.

Tim: Hmm. Hmm.

Jon: It's from the Latin, which means empty—*vastus*. So that's become "waste." So somehow that word, which originally just meant desolate, began to mean trash in modern English, "waste."

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Sure.

Jon: Which is not the original meaning.

Tim: Yeah. A—

Jon: So a wasteland is a desolate land.

Tim: Yeah. Wow.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's really interesting. Yep.

Jon: I have to reform my understanding of that word.

Tim: Un—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yep. Uninhabited. And that's echoing off of the empty, the *vohu*. *Vohu* occurs a lot less, only three times in the Hebrew Bible. And one of them is Genesis one, verse two. One of them is Jeremiah quoting Genesis one, verse two—

[Laughter]

Tim: To describe what God's going to do to Jerusalem when Babylon comes, which is de-create it. It will become *tohu vavohu* again. Uhm, it's used in Isaiah 34 to describe the land of Edom once it's de-created by Babylon and all of these desert animals: pelicans, and hedgehogs, and owls, and ravens—"and God will stretch over it a measuring line of *tohu* and a plumb line of *vohu*."

[Laughter]

Tim: So usually when you stretch measuring lines, you're building something up.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But here God is stretching measuring lines to systematically tear down—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Something—

Jon: Okay, that's interesting.

Tim: To make it disordered and uninhabited.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: And once you—

Jon: So the two words are *tohu* and *vohu*. Why is it *vavohu*?

Tim: Oh, *va* is “and.”

Jon: And. Oh, *va* is “and?”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Well, that's good to know.

Tim: Yep.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. *Tohu* and *vohu*. So that's the first image.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The first description of the pre-creation state is: “The land is wild and waste.” And we're given another description of that pre-creation state. “Darkness was over the face of the deep waters—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “The *tehom*.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: *Tehom* refers to the bottomless waters of the sea, the deepest parts of the sea.

Jon: Yeah, we talked about this in Chaos Dragon—

Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: And you—and so in our last conversation, you talked about: To the west is just water.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: To the east—

Tim: This is—

Jon: Is desert.

Tim: This is so important.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. To the east is *tohu vavohu*.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To the west is the *tehom*.

Jon: Is the *tehom*.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so in a way, they're like two ways of talking about the same idea.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: The watery—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Chaos—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And the wilderness chaos.

Tim: Mhm. So it's a puzzle why the pre-creation state is described in two ways—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: At the beginning of Genesis one, as land that is uninhabitable and unordered, and as a dark, chaotic ocean.

Jon: But then what really becomes the puzzle is then when you continue on, it's all ocean.

Tim: Yes—

Jon: Right?

Tim: As the story goes on, it says: “The spirit of *elohim* was fluttering—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Over the face of the waters.”

Jon: Yeah. So then it’s just waters.

Tim: So then—

Jon: And then—

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: You’re going to find the land emerged from the waters—

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: And you’re like: “Well, but the land was already there.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So then you got to come back and be like: “In what sense was the land wild and waste—”

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: “If it’s submerged under waters?”

Tim: There you go. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. In other words, the seven days consist of God separating the waters and then bringing the dry land up out of the waters.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So we’ve really sold out to the waters.

[Laughter]

Tim: So creation in the seven-day narrative is God bringing dry land up out of the water—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then ordering the land—

Jon: And to describe the state before the dry land is ordered, and above the waters, and ready for life, is for the land to be wild and waste.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: We submerged in some way, like, not—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Accessible.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. And this is intuitive. If you ever walk out to an ocean or a sea, you can see the land disappear into the waters—

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: And then just become—

Jon: Become the waters

Tim: It just goes—right? It goes away.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So just intuit. That means that probably the land keeps going down under the waters. That's—but it's just under there. So why is this land above the waters? How did that happen? Because we can be on this land. I can't be on the land under the water.

Jon: Yeah. Tectonic plates.

Tim: Totally. Yeah—

[Laughter]

Tim: Totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: So the concept of creation in the seven-day narrative is God providing the dry land in the midst of the waters and then making it fruitful and organized so humans and animals can live together.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's creation in Genesis one.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In Genesis two, verse four, it flips. We get an introduction, Genesis two, verse four: "These are the generations of the skies and the land when they were created." And then we get a new introduction. "In the day of Yahweh *Elohim* making the land in the skies, and there was not any shrub of the field yet in the land, and there was not any plant of the field yet sprouting because Yahweh *Elohim* had not sent rain upon the land, and there was no human to work the ground, and a stream would go up from the land and it would water the face of the ground—"that's all background, verse seven is where the action really begins: "Yahweh *Elohim* formed the human from the dust of the ground."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So what's so interesting here is humans are made last in the seven-day narrative.

Jon: Yeah. We didn't talk about it, but in the last narrative, it ends with humans made —

Tim: On the sixth day.

Jon: On the sixth day. And then the seventh day he rested.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then that whole narrative ends.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: This really is truly like: "Let me tell you the story again."

Tim: Yeah, from a different angle.

Jon: From a different angle.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And this time it starts just depicting a wilderness.

Tim: A dry land—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: With no water.

Jon: No fields—

Tim: A—

Jon: No shrubs.

Tim: And it's called the field, the *sadeh*.

Jon: Ah, it's called the field.

Tim: It's not called *midbar*. It's not called *tohu vavohu*. It's just called the *sadeh*.

Jon: But it's an uncultivated *sadeh*.

Tim: Yeah. There's no shrub, which is wild, like plants that grow out—

Jon: There's not even wild plants out there yet.

Tim: Unh-un. And there's no, like, veggies.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: There's no carrots—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: And cucumbers growing because, well, one—

Jon: There's no rain.

Tim: There's, there's no water, and there's no human. And you only get cucumbers—

[Laughter]

Tim: Right—all lined up in nice rows—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: When you have water and humans.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And you only get, like, acacia trees and shrubs growing out in the wilderness—

Jon: When there's water.

Tim: If you have waters. So in verse six, how do you get from a dry, desolate waste to the garden of Eden? The first thing God provides is water. A stream goes up out of the land. And then, well, if that waters the ground, then I guess you've got wet ground to work with. "Then Y—Yahweh *Elohim* formed—"there's that word that Isaiah used, "shaped the human from the dust of the *adamah*, of the ground—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being. And Yahweh *Elohim* planted a garden in Eden," which means delight, "toward the east." So you begin with no plants, and no water, and no human. Then, God provides water—

Jon: Forms the human—

Tim: Makes the human—

Jon: Plants a garden.

Tim: Plants. So three statements of the problem, then step by step, every one of those problems gets resolved.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So let's just notice, the biblical authors put these two narratives side by side—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that we would compare, and contrast—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And meditate on them. Ge—

Jon: And I've heard you say in the first one, there's too much water.

Tim: It's just all dark water.

Jon: Everything's submerged in dark—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Abyss. And then in the next one, it's actually, there's no water.

Tim: It's literally the opposite.

Jon: Yeah. It's just dry land that needs water.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Two opposite ways of saying the same thing.

Tim: Yeah. So creation in the seven-day narrative is God bringing dry land up out of the water so that a garden could sprout. Genesis two is God bringing—

Jon: Water to the dry land.

Tim: Water up out of the dry land—

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: To—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Water it.

Jon: To bring—

Tim: So—

Jon: Plants.

Tim: And the word “create” and “make,” *bara* and *asa*, are used in the seven-day narrative. And then the words “form” and “make,” *yatzar* and *asa* are used in the

Eden narrative. And then, as we saw in Isaiah, he just draws on language from both of them.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “I didn’t create the land to be uninhabited, I formed it—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “To be lived in.” So Isaiah saw these two narratives as complimentary.

Jon: So if you start with the second story—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Then wilderness is very literal, just, wilderness. It’s land—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That doesn’t have water. It’s the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Yep. That’s right.

Jon: In Genesis one, where it says the land is, and then describes it as wilderness—

Tim: Yeah. We’re kind of getting meta.

Jon: You’re getting more meta.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You’re—

Tim: That’s good.

Jon: Turning up the volume of, like, the meaning behind the wilderness of—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It’s a place where disorder reigns and life has no place. Like, that’s really like how everything is this realm of disorder.

Tim: Okay. Okay. Excellent. So what the wilderness means is it’s: You go out to the wilderness and you face reality that: “Oh man, here I am cruising along in the nice little hill country with rain, and food, and there’s cucumbers, and—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Sheep."

Jon: You're a—you're an ancient Israelite right now?

Tim: I'm an ancient Israelite—

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. I'm not describing my actual daily life.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: And if I live in the green land long enough, I can start to feel like: "Oh man, I'm making it here. I can make this work."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Got this little plot." And when I go out to the wilderness, I face the reality that: "Oh, man, I came from fragile, mortal human creatures and I just won the lottery of that—like—I'm alive—"

[Laughter]

Jon: That this—

Tim: "And I'm here."

Jon: That this land has water, that it—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Produces—

Tim: It has water.

Jon: Plants—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Like—

Tim: E—everything—

Jon: That's necessary for me to be alive.

Tim: That sustains my life comes from something that was before me and outside of me. And take the chain all the way back. Where did they come from? And how were their lives sustained? My parents, and then my grandparents—

Jon: So to walk—

Tim: Tchew, tchew, tchew, tchew.

Jon: To walk out of the hillside into the desert is to—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Kind of walk back into de-creation in a way—

Tim: That's right. Yeah.

Jon: Kind of see—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: How order turns into disorder and yo—then you can kind of start to tell yourself this story of like: “Everything came from here—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “But somehow through the generosity of God—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Through rain—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “And through plants, there is now—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Hope for life.”

Tim: That's right. The default state within the Eden narratives' way of thinking about it is the wilderness. We came out of the wilderness, and as we're going to see, we go back to the wilderness, from dust to dust.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So the default state is nothingness. It's a way of saying that everything that we love and value is hanging by a thread.

[Laughter]

Tim: Its default state is not to exist because what we can constantly see—

Jon: Are you saying if you chase the chain down far enough—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It becomes nothingness?

Tim: It becomes nothingness. Yeah. If we go backwards in time, everything hangs by a thread. If we go forward in time, it's all on a thread and going back to nothingness again.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So Genesis one takes that meta and it's saying: "Yeah, exactly." And t—the biblical portrait of God is that God was, and is, and is to come. "*Yahweh*." "He is." God's existence is not conditional on some other things supporting God to be.

Jon: He doesn't need rain—

Tim: No—

Jon: To exist.

Tim: Yeah, totally. No.

Jon: He doesn't need a stream—

Tim: Right.

Jon: To exist.

Tim: That's right. So anything other than God that does exist has a conditional existence. So the opposite of existence is nothingness. We have an opposite. God doesn't have an opposite.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: God just is. But you and I are not—we aren't just are.

[Laughter]

Tim: I can't, I can't say that without sounding—

Jon: Isn't the opposite of being and is, is to not be?

Tim: It's non-being, yeah.

Jon: Not being.

Tim: You and I have an opposite of non-being. But God doesn't have that opposite. Be—God j—is.

Jon: But—hmm. What do you mean?

[Laughter]

Tim: This is classical theism, Christian theology—

[Laughter]

Tim: 101.

Jon: I am, but I will one day not be.

Tim: Right. And one day in the past, you were not.

Jon: I was not.

Tim: You have not always been.

[Laughter]

Jon: I am for a—

[Laughter]

Jon: Moment and then I—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Will not be.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: That's—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: That's my state.

Tim: And for anything whose existence is conditional, to even exist, there must be some one, something, greater than it within which it encases its existence. And who or what is that thing? And that is what all the monotheistic—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Religions call God—

[Laughter]

Tim: In English, the English—

Jon: Right.

Tim: Word. So the wilderness is a way of saying: For created beings, we come from the dust—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And if—

Jon: Oka—

Tim: God doesn't sustain our existence, enfold us into his infinite life, we will return to the dust. And the wilderness is the primary image to talk about that from a land perspective. The chaos waters are the other main image.

Jon: Okay. So you're saying: You can look at the land—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And you can go: "You know, I look far east and it's just like disordered, dry—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Uninhabitable—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Wasteland."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "But as it comes up this step into the hills—"

Tim: "Central hill country of Judea—"

Jon: "The hill country—"

Tim: "And Israel—"

Jon: "Suddenly it's inhabited—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "It's ordered, there's life, and we can flourish." And so one way to think about this journey of everything, not just me, not just the land, but, like, everything, is from the wilderness into—

Tim: Into the garden.

Jon: Into the garden—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Into an ordered state.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And if God doesn't continue to supply generously the water and the stable ground, we will turn back into that wilderness once again. And that is de-creation. Yeah. That's the metaphysical meaning of wilderness.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So I think the biblical authors want us to actually think on that level as well as the, the—

Jon: The literal—

Tim: More, the more literal or earthly images, because, not just because I say so, because of what the biblical authors do with these images as you go through the biblical story. So let me just sh—show you. So the Eden story is all about how God wants to give a gift to the humans to move them from a phase of fragile, mortal, conditional life and give them a gift of eternal life by making available the tree of life.

Jon: Hmm. That's in Genesis one.

Tim: Yep, Genesis two, God—right—sprouts a garden and then—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In the middle of the garden is this tree of life. But there's also this tree of knowing good and bad. God says: "Don't eat. That tree will lead you to the opposite of eternal life."

Jon: Back into waste.

Tim: Yeah, back to die, to go back into nothingness. So the basic idea of Eden is to remain alive. And Eden's this oasis.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So Eden itself is a little oasis surrounded by nothingness. And if I want to avoid returning back into the nothingness, I need to stay here and I need to stay connected to a life that is outside my own, an infinite source of life. And that's what this narrative then represents.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then what God says is: "You're going to need to trust my word to really have life. If you want access to the tree of life, trust what I say. And right now what I say is: 'Don't do this one thing.'"

Jon: “Don’t eat of the tree of knowing good and bad.”

Tim: That’s right. So isn’t it interesting that when a deceiver shows up into the story, it’s a snake and the snake crawls in from the *sadeh*, the field.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: The snake is a beast of the field.

Jon: Okay. And this is the kind of uninhabited field? This is the—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Arid field?

Tim: Yeah, so *sadeh* can refer to a farm field—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Like a cultivated region, but it can also refer to a region that’s—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: At the border—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of the desert and the—

Jon: The wild fields—

Tim: And the garden. Yeah. It comes in from the wild.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So this is a creature that comes from the chaos realm, and it crawls in, and then it spreads chaos, creates it, deceives the humans, gets the humans—

Jon: When it says it’s, uhm—it was shrewd more than any beast of the field—

Tim: Oh, mhm.

Jon: You actually gave us a list of all the, like, chaos creatures.

Tim: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Jon: Is it referring to that list?

Tim: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

Jon: Like: "There's owls, and jackals, and—"

Tim: "Hyenas—"

Jon: "Hyenas, and—"

Tim: Yeah. S—

Jon: "Scorpions, and—"

Tim: Yes.

Jon: "They're all crafty, like, desert—"

Tim: Oh—

Jon: "Creatures."

Tim: That's interesting.

Jon: "But you know who's the most—"

[Laughter]

Jon: "Crafty of all the desert creatures?"

Tim: Yeah. It's a comparative.

Jon: "The snake."

Tim: "More shrewd than any of the beasts." And think, all of them—they're crafty in the sense of they avoid being seen.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You barely ever see them.

Jon: Yeah. And they can survive out there.

Tim: Ah, it's wild.

Jon: You got to be pretty shrewd to survive out there.

Tim: You got to be shrewd. I've never quite thought of it this way.

Jon: I guess I always read this in like: You've got all the animals, all the cute bunnies, and the—

Tim: Oh.

Jon: Things, and the—you know—

Tim: And then you've—

Jon: Of all the—

Tim: Got one.

Jon: You got that snake—

[Laughter]

Jon: And he's this shrewd snake. But—

Tim: Oh.

Jon: Now, all of a sudden, I'm realizing when you say: "No, this is the creature from the wild—"

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: Because Adam's named all these other animals, right?

Tim: Mhm. Right. Yeah. The ones that are there.

Jon: The ones that are there.

Tim: Yeah. Yep.

Jon: This is like—it's the outside animal crew.

Tim: Yes. Yes. Oh, that's good. I like that.

Jon: That's interesting. The ostrich is out there, too, right?

Tim: Yeah. Yep, the ostrich.

Jon: I like an ostrich, though.

[Laughter]

Tim: I think because we've only ever encountered them in zoos.

Jon: I, I hear they're pretty gnarly, actually.

Tim: I think they're real—like, kind of like hippos.

Jon: Oh, yeah, you—

Tim: They're cute in a zoo—

Jon: Don't, don't mess with them.

Tim: But dude, they will—

Jon: They—

Tim: Rock your world.

Jon: I think hippos kill more people than, like, uhm—

Tim: Alligators or—

[Laughter]

Tim: They're very dangerous.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Okay. This is a good insight.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: This is landing for me, too, in a way I haven't quite ever thought about. All the beasts of the field—

Jon: Because the field—

Tim: Have to be cunning.

Jon: Is the—we're talking about the uncultivated field.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The desert field.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Creatures from that realm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So they're all shrewd, and this snake's the most shrewd because it can live above and below ground.

Jon: Hmm. It's pretty fast.

Tim: It's pretty fast.

Jon: It can—

Tim: It can strike with lightning speed.

Jon: It's got venom.

Tim: Yeah. It's—tricksters.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So this thing crawls in and deceives the humans, gets them to do the thing that God said not to do because they actually think that it is better than what God said.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So—

Jon: Mistrust his word.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. So once the humans choose to do what God said not to do, they have chosen to cut themselves off from the source of true life. And so what God does is he says: "I'm—"he's going to exile them, send them out of the garden. And what he says to the human in Genesis three, verse 17—he says: "Because you've eaten from the tree that I said: 'Don't eat from it,' cursed is the ground on account of you with pain—grief. You will eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it will sprout for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground because from it you were taken. You are dust and to the dust you will return.” So lo—lots of important images here. You were taken from the ground. You cut yourself off from a—the life source outside yourself. You’re going back to the ground. From the wilderness, back to the wilderness. If you want to eat any bread up out of the ground, you’re going to have to deal with a ground that’s a wilderness ground. And thorns and thistles become a primary symbol of the wilderness. But it grows stuff out of the ground, but you can’t eat it.

[Laughter]

Tim: Like in the hill country where it rains and it’s—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mild, a lot of the stuff that just grows up out of the ground, you can just eat it like fruit—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Trees. So you go back to the dust, and what the ground does grow by itself, you can’t eat from it.

Jon: Okay. So I’m getting this picture, then. You’ve got this desert land that God waters—plants a garden. And the garden he plants is, like, you’re, you’re fully in the ordered state.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: It’s so, like, ordered, everything you need is there, and you’re not given a sense that they’ve cultivated it. It’s just like—

Tim: God cultivated it.

Jon: God cultivated it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So you’re in the deep of order.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Because you talked about how there's the outskirts where you're not quite in the wilderness—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Right?

Tim: Right, right, right.

Jon: But the land—it's rough. You might go out there with your sheep.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: You might find some water, but it's still kind of considered wilderness.

Tim: Right.

Jon: And it sounds like that's where he's saying: "Now, you got to go deal with that."

Tim: Exactly.

Jon: "You got to go deal with that kind of land."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Genesis 3:23: "Yahweh *Elohim* sent the human out from the garden to work the ground from which he was taken, and he banished—"this is that "driving out—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Banished from—"so you're right, they're in the hub of, like, the most ordered —

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, place.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm. And when you're in that place, you are not sustaining your own life. Your whole existence is a gift. But if you have chosen by your own desire to separate yourself from that life that God wants to give you, well then, you will return to the default state from which you emerged, which is, for a creature, nothingness, because we don't have an infinite life inherent within ourselves. So if we separate ourselves from the condition of our existence, we will return to the dust. So that's metaphysically—

[Laughter]

Tim: The idea is being communicated through this wilderness imagery of being banished from the garden back to the wilderness, to the land of thorns and thistles.

[Musical Break (39:53—40:27)]

[Wilderness and Eden Imagery in the Prophets (40:27—57:32)]

Tim: Okay. So there you go. That's Eden narrative. So in Isaiah 41 and 43—these are passages that we looked at in our previous series on the New Exodus—Israel returning from Babylonian exile in the days of Zerubbabel and, like, recounted in Ezra-Nehemiah—the hope for that return was talked about by the prophet in the latter chapters of Isaiah in the forties. And it's portrayed as an analogy of Israel leaving Egypt, going through the desert to go up to the promised land. Now, they're leaving Babylon to go through the desert to the promised land. So God talks about how his people are like the oppressed and needy ones who are looking for water, but there isn't any water. And their tongues are parched with thirst. And God says: "I will not abandon them. I'll open up rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of valleys. I'll turn the wilderness into a pool and the dry land into a fountain of water. I'll even put cedar trees—"

[Laughter]

Tim: "Right there in the *midbar*, the wilderness." So there we're, we're drawing on the Genesis two—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Imagery. Now, God's not creating the whole cosmos, but he is bringing an Eden oasis of life in the middle of a desert.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And verse 20, then, of Isaiah 41 says: "So that they, that is my people, might see this and recognize it, that the hand of the Lord has made this—"that's the word *asa* used in Genesis one and two—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "And that the Holy One of Israel created this."

Jon: And it's referring to—what's the this?

Tim: Yeah. So this is all about: God is going to create a way for his people who were taken captive by the Babylonian soldiers in Jerusalem—people slaughtered, leaders executed, they were marched in chains—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Up to the Euphrates and then down the river to live in Babylon. A whole bunch of them are going to get to go back. That seems impossible. How's that possible?

[Laughter]

Tim: I mean, Babylon's a superpower.

Jon: Yeah. So to describe it—

Tim: The impossibility of us ever being free, and getting to return, and making that long trek back home—how, how could that ever be? And that's what this poem is—describing that return journey home, but using—

Jon: The wilderness becoming a garden.

Tim: Yeah. Using the language of creation.

Jon: Which is what Genesis two was.

Tim: Yeah. So—

Jon: New creation.

Tim: Yeah. This is something that these Israelites could never create of their own resources and power.

Jon: I see. Yeah, it's interesting to think, if you go back to Genesis two—banished from the garden. Now, into this in-between state, the wilderness, you got to work it, you're going to be ground back into—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And you would think: Cool, let's go back to the garden.

Tim: Hmm. Mhm.

Jon: But here it's God planting a new garden.

Tim: Oh, yeah. A—

Jon: Where they are.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. In their wilderness.

Jon: In their wilderness.

Tim: In their wilderness. Okay. So flip it. The prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 36, is hoping for the land that they had to leave. So in Ezekiel 36, it's an oracle to the hills, the hill country of Israel. And he says, in verse 34: "The land that was desolate, emptied, will once again be worked," that is, farmed. "In the place where it was desolate in the eyes of everybody who would walk over those hills, people will start saying: 'Whoa, this desolate land has become like the garden of Eden.'" He just straight up, like, quotes from the story.

[Laughter]

Tim: "'Waste and desolate lands and torn down cities are being rebuilt and re-inhabited.'" So the restoration of God's people to go back to their land and rebuild their life there is described in the language of creation, new creation of Genesis two.

Jon: A garden being planted out of the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. So the wilderness was a place where Israelites, after being e—you know, brought out of Egypt, literally faced death and an impossible situation, and God provided water for them.

Jon: That's the Sinai wilderness.

Tim: That's the Sinai wilderness. And we'll look at those stories in a—future episodes. So that was a moment where God provided life out of non-life.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And both the Eden story and that story is being drawn upon by Isaiah and Ezekiel to say: It looks like we're facing another situation of non-life.

Jon: Their state of slavery then is a wilderness, and then their homeland is now kind of in a state of wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. So if a new creation moment is about God creating Eden out of a hopeless environment or a hopeless situation—

Jon: Right. Yeah, okay.

Tim: So we're kind of—the Eden creation has become like a metaphor for God renewing your life or renewing your life circumstances.

Jon: Right. Yeah.

Tim: Similarly, if God is going to de-create a person, or a place, or a community, in a fascinating way, both Jeremiah and Isaiah will use the language and imagery of creation stories, but inverse them. But you remember how we have the wilderness and the sea—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And they seem opposite to us, but symbolically, they mean the same thing?

Jon: Land coming up out of the wil—sea and wilderness getting water.

Tim: Yeah. Okay.

[Laughter]

Tim: So when Jeremiah—I don't know why I'm laughing, I just—

[Laughter]

Tim: I was—when this struck me, it felt so profound and so simple, but I remember reading this when I first started reading the Bible. I would come across things like this and be like: “What? It doesn’t make any sense.” So in Jeremiah 51, he’s describing the downfall of Babylon, Israel’s oppressor. So in verse 41 of Jeremiah 51, Jeremiah says: “How Babylon has been captured, the praise of the whole earth. You used to—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Be honored by all the nations. Now, you’ve been seized. Babylon will become an object of horror among the nations. The sea has come up over Babylon. She’s been engulfed by its tumultuous waves.” So let’s pause there. So that’s inverting the seven-day creation—

Jon: Yep.

Tim: Narrative.

Jon: Yeah. Submerged.

Tim: Submerged. Verse 43: “Her cities have become an object of horror, a parched land and a desert—”

[Laughter]

Tim: “A land where no one lives, and no son of Adam walks through.”

Jon: Hmm. Okay. Which is it?

Tim: Yeah. We’re back—

Jon: Has it—

Tim: Here again.

Jon: Has it flooded and submerged—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or is it dry, desert land?

Tim: Yeah. Look at this.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: This is the same. Now, you could say: “Well, it’s poetry.” But this makes sense to somebody—

Jon: Right.

Tim: To, to call it: It got flooded by—

Jon: This is going back—

Tim: A sea or it got so unflooded that it became a dry desert.

[Laughter]

Jon: But when you’re edging up against nothingness, you are in the wilderness or in the watery state.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It’s like—

Tim: Two ways of describing the same reality of—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of nothingness. Mhm.

Jon: I guess I struggle with the word nothingness. We’ve talked about this a lot before.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: You really are trying to nail home this idea of nothingness. I feel like there’s a sense of a journey, right? And as soon as you pop out of nothingness into somethingness, it’s still so close to nothing—

[Laughter]

Jon: Right?

Tim: Oh—

Jon: That it's like—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Disordered.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It's the *tohu vavohu*. It's just that moment of nothingness becomes something, but it's really still nothing—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Is what it feels like. And that's what it feels like when you go from the hill—

Tim: That's good.

Jon: Country into the—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Into the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's like you just keep going and you're getting closer and closer to just the end of it all.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: We're working, actually, in real classic philosophical territory here.

[Laughter]

Tim: But if you have God defined as the one who's not a being, God is being, God is necessary existence, and then you have non-existence—if you have a creature who's made that is somewhere—it's not God, but also exists, so it's not non-existent—if you put it on a spectrum—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's still way closer to non-existence—

[Laughter]

Jon: Right. Right.

Tim: Than like—

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: God. So I think that's—

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's ab—more abstract way of what you're saying.

Jon: Yes.

Tim: So even things that do exist just hang by a thread—

Jon: Right.

Tim: Because we don't have—

Jon: There it is.

Tim: To exist.

Jon: Wilderness is talking about the things that exist hanging by a thread.

Tim: That's it. Yeah.

Jon: And at some point, that thread unravels into nothingness.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And that is the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Okay. So get this.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I'll—this is the last thing I'll show you. In Isaiah 21, there's this poem about the downfall of Babylon. And it's given a little heading. It's called a oracle, which means a prophetic poem. And the title—it's given a little title. It's called: "An oracle about the wilderness of the sea."

Jon: Hmm.

[Laughter]

Tim: And then it's about how Babylon's going to become a wilderness and fall and fall—as Babylon.

Jon: Yeah. There it is again.

Tim: But it's called "the wilderness of the sea."

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: It's super cool. A—what's so interesting is you can go to the commentaries, and biblical scholars don't know what to do with this phrase. It's really interesting. And many people propose that the text has been corrupted because their assumption is that's an incoherent thing to say.

Jon: It's like saying the light of the dark.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: Ye—yeah. And in literal terms, that's what it means to say the wilderness of the sea. But in terms of the symbolic and metaphysical meaning—for Babylon, its cosmos has come to an end. It's going back into nothingness, and so it becomes both a wilderness and a sea. So it's an oracle—

[Laughter]

Tim: About the wilderness of the sea.

Jon: By combining the two, it really smacks you over the head to make you go: Oh, yeah, this is a metaphysical—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Kind of thing.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Because the sea is a very tangible thing I can understand. The wilderness is something I can understand.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But what they represent as that edge of nothingness, that hanging on by a thread, then—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: To call it the wilderness of the sea—

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: It just—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Pops you into it.

Tim: Yeah. This is certainly why, flipping to the last page of the Christian Bible, when Babylon has fallen in The Revelation and the new Jerusalem comes down, it's described in a handful of ways. The, the new creation is described as a new sky and a new land. And the sea was no more.

Jon: Yeah, no sea.

Tim: No sea. But also no more wilderness.

Jon: Hmm. Oh, where is that?

Tim: Uhm, in Revelation 21, God says: “Look, I am making all things new.” And then God says: “I’m the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.” So lots of Genesis one language there. I will give to the one who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life.” Infinite water, infinite life. So there’s our little spring from Genesis two. And then in Revelation 22, this city, this heaven-come-to-earth city, is also the source of that river because there’s the river of the water of life flowing out. And there’s the tree of life there, yielding its fruit, and the leaves from the tree bring healing to the nations. So it’s as if the whole world is becoming gardenized.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So no more sea and the whole world becomes—the new creation is, is the garden.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it’s implicit that there’s no more wilderness—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But both wilderness and sea become past memories. And—so think metaphysically. This is an astounding thing to say.

[Laughter]

Tim: It’s as if all created things are brought into the infinite abundance of God’s own life. “I am making all things new.”

Jon: Hmm. So in the metaphysical sense, where wilderness represents the chance of slipping back into nothingness, there’s going to be a state where that just isn’t a reality anymore.

Tim: Yeah. If I’m sitting in Eden, slipping back into nothingness is not a concern anymore—if I am intimately connected to God’s own life.

Jon: Where are the ostriches going to live?

Tim: I know. I know.

[Laughter]

Tim: They're amazing creatures, not that I would want to be around one up close.
Yeah. I mean, those are wonderful questions that I think maybe, uh—

Jon: That's—I'm getting too physical with this metaphysical idea.

Tim: Yeah. I think that's right. It's the same thing with the sea.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, where's the river going to flow into?

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's going to make some kind of collection of water—

Jon: Right.

Tim: That will—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Be big enough—

Jon: We'll just call them lakes.

[Laughter]

Tim: To—all right.

Jon: Great lakes.

Tim: So yeah. There, we're trying to just talk physically about the metaphysical ideas the biblical authors want us to—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Think about. So the more that I've sat with these ideas and seen how the ideas develop over the story of the Bible, it has helped me so much to understand what is happening in stories about the wilderness, which is essentially what we're just going to read and meditate on for the rest of this podcast series.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. So if these are our two opposites, the garden and the wilderness, and everything that they mean, what are all of these stories about people going from gardens into wildernesses, or when people send each other—when people wrongfully send each other out of the garden?

Jon: Send each other out of the garden.

Tim: Like Abraham and Sarah do to Hagar. That wasn't her fault. So people end up in the desert for all kinds of reasons. And what happens there—that's so much of the drama of the biblical story. So that's what we'll start looking at next.

[Musical Break (54:53—54:57)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we'll leave the garden of Eden, and we'll look at three stories of people who end up in the wilderness: Cain, Hagar, and Moses.

Tim: All these stories are closely tied together in terms of verbal connections that the authors have put there because they want us to meditate on how people end up in wilderness environments and then what God does when he discovers that people are dying in the wilderness.

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Jeff: Hi, my name is Jeff, and I'm from Battle Ground, Washington.

Elizabeth: Hey, my name is Elizabeth, and I'm from the Dallas-Fort Worth area. And I first heard about BibleProject from my husband, Jason.

Jeff: I use BibleProject for learning more about my faith in Jesus Christ. My favorite thing about the BibleProject is taking difficult verses in the Bible and making them easily consumable.

Elizabeth: I love the podcast that comes out every Monday. It is my favorite thing about the BibleProject. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

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Jon: Hey, everyone, this is Jon Horton. I'm an engineering manager with our platform team at BibleProject, which is just a fancy way of saying that my team makes sure all of the right information is available to the websites and apps that we make available for free. I've been working at BibleProject for nearly three years, and my favorite part about my work is that we get to participate in this incredible movement that is bringing the Bible to life for people in new and engaging ways. There couldn't be a better investment of time and energy, and I'm so grateful that I get to be a part of it. There's a whole team of people that bring the podcast to life every week. For a full list of everyone who's involved, check out the show credits and the episode description wherever you stream the podcast, as well as on our website.