# H2R P17: Poetry E1

## The Thunder of God

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# The Thunder of God

Jon:     Hi, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Today on the podcast, we have a conversation about biblical poetry. Did you know that one out of three pages in your Bible are poetry? Specifically, ancient Hebrew poetry, it's all over the place. That's why in this podcast episode, we're going to talk about appreciating the art of biblical poetry.

To do that, we're going to spend a lot of time today reading Psalm 29. So if you have the option, I'd recommend that you pull that Psalm up on your phone or turn to it in your Bible. It'd be nice to follow along. If you're driving or something, just take it all in. So in the spirit of poetry, let me offer you a poem. Roses are red, violets are blue. Poem spark, the imagination.

Tim:     That's what poetry is meant to do.

Jon:     Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're in a series on how to read the Bible, and we've done like eight videos so far. We finished off Narrative and we're going into poetry, which is a large part of the Bible. A lot of poetry in the Bible.

Tim:     Yeah, about one-third of the Bible is poetry.

Jon:     That's a lot.

Tim:     It's a significant amount.

Jon:     One out of three verses?

Tim:     One out of three pages.

Jon:     Pages?

Tim:     Pages.

Jon:     That's a lot of poetry.

Tim:     Yeah, it is a lot of poetry, an enormous amount. And it all shares in a part of one specific cultural heritage of a way of writing in poetry at the Israelite Jewish poetry tradition.

Jon:     Yeah, it sounds like the Dr. Seuss way of writing poetry.

Tim:     Yeah, that's a whole interesting thing I think we should talk about is that every culture has its own categories of what constitutes poetry. And it differs from culture

to culture. That's been actually one of the really interesting things about the history of biblical poetry, as it's been studied in the last few hundred years is spent a lot of the arguing and debates that scholars love to do is whether it's poetry or not.

Jon:     Whether was in the Bible is poetry?

Tim:     Correct, yeah. Whether it should receive the title "Poetry"? Or how do you tell...

Jon:     I didn't know that was a debate.

Tim:     ...what is poetry versus non-poetry because it's blurry? But what ends up being the case is half the time, it's people really what they're arguing over is their conceptions of what makes something poetic. Those are really relative categories because they're shaped by wherever you happen to grow up.

Jon:     I do remember when I was really young, well, maybe in high school or something, thinking about what is it that makes something poetry. Because it's all the same words, but there is something you can you can tell when something is poetry.

Tim:     Yeah, you can often feel it before you can define it or talk it.

Jon:     And it weirded me out that you could take the same words in the same language and talk plainly, but then you can also then use it to talk in some fundamentally different way. It was always elusive as to how that actually came to be.

Tim:     Yeah, that's right. There's a whole part of this conversation, especially what this video will be about. We going to have two videos planned on reading biblical poetry. The first one is just on the artistry of the language of biblical poetry.

         A lot of these categories won't be unique to Hebrew or Bible poetry. They're kind of universal qualities, but each culture puts them into practice in different ways. So it's both kind of a universal conversation we're having about what makes some language more functional and some language more artistic. What is that?

         I've at least boiled down to some categories that are helpful for me. Then there are some unique things about biblical poetry that once you can see them for what they are, they really enrich your experience of one-third of the Bible. So I think it's helpful too.

Jon:     Cool.

Tim:     I thought we could begin by reading a poem from the book of Psalms, Psalms 29. I remember reading this poem for the first time in, I don't know, somewhere in my

first year or two, as a follower of Jesus, and I remember just reading the poem, and just going, "What? What is going on right now?"

Now, I've come to love this poem. It's beautiful. It has going on inside of it all of the dynamics that make Hebrew poetry what it is. Do you want to read it? Do you want me to read it? Because reading it's half the thing.

Also just for the listener on the podcast, this might be a challenging conversation to listen to because half of what makes really reflecting on biblical poetry is being able to see it on a page and ponder it that way, and linger over the words, and read, and reread and read slowly.

Jon:    These notes will be in the show notes. If they want, they can—

Tim:    Link to them?

Jon:    No, it's actually in the show notes.

Tim:    That's cool. Great. So how about this? Since I've come to love this poem? I would like to perform a reading of Psalm 29.

Jon:    Yeah, great. And am I allowed to interrupt or should I just take it in?

Tim:    Just take it in.

Jon:    Okay.

Tim:    This is an experiment for you and whoever's listening. I'll do a reading, and then I want you to reflect on what just happened. I want us to try and give words to what just happened, and then the rest of our conversation will be giving form to that feeling that you have.

Jon:    Okay.

Tim:    One preface to note, and we'll talk about this at length, is that poetry often presses words into unusual settings to make them mean more than they would often mean in normal speech. There's a Hebrew word that's at the center of this poem gets repeated more than any other word. It gets translated in our English translations as "voice". It's the Hebrew word "qol".

So it's kind of like "Ruach" and that "Ruach" can refer to just invisible energy. So it can be impersonal like wind, but it can also be personal like spirit. And we call that breath or spirit. In the same way, Hebrew "qol" can be impersonal, in which case—

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Jon:        A sound?

Tim:        Yes, it gets translated as sound. Whenever you see the word "sound" in the Bible, 99%, it's the word "qol".  When it's a personal qol, it gets translated as voice.

Jon:        Got it.

Tim:        When it's referring to natural qol, qol that happen in nature—

Jon:        Like the sound of stream or something?

Tim:        Yeah, that's right. And one of the most common ways that gets used to describe the qol of a storm, namely Thunder. There are some rare words for thunder, but the most common word for thunder is qol. In my reading of Psalm 29, I'm not going to use the English translations. I'm just going to say the word qol. But for you to know, it's a word that can be used to mean sound, voice, or thunder.

Jon:        So it's thunder, even if it's just...it's not qol of the storm, it's just qol and sometimes it means thunder? Tim:    Correct.

Jon:        Okay.

Tim:        All right. Psalm 29 "Give to Yahweh, O sons of God, give to Yahweh glory and strength. Give to Yahweh the glory due his name; worship Yahweh in the splendor of holiness. The qol of Yahweh is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, Yahweh thunders over the mighty waters. The qol of Yahweh is powerful; the call of Yahweh is majestic. The qol of Yahweh breaks the cedars; Yahweh breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The qol of Yahweh strikes with flashes of lightning. The qol of Yahweh shakes the desert; Yahweh shakes the desert of Kadesh. The qol of Yahweh twists the Oaks, it strips the forest bare. And everything in his temple cries out, "Glory!" Yahweh sits in thrown over the flood; Yahweh is enthroned as King forever. Yahweh gives strength to his people; Yahweh bless His people with shalom." With peace. So good.

Jon:        Yeah.

Tim:        Psalm 29.

Jon:        Now the word "thunder" is in there, and that's the word "qol" too that you said thunder?

Tim:        It's actually the less common verb. It's a verb for the thunder. To make thunder.

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Jon:     Okay. And it's not qol?

Tim:     It's not qol there. It's actually the word for thunder.

Jon:     Okay.

Tim:     So if I were to ask you, this just like on an intellectual or rational level, what is this poem about?

Jon:     This poem is about comparing God's power to that of thunder. Yeah?

Tim:     You tell me. Why do you think that?

Jon:     Well, you gave the big hint. I mean, all of the metaphors are you can just imagine thunder doing all these things: Breaking cedars into pieces, making animals jump, striking with flashes of lightning.

Tim:     Actually, making mountain ranges jump like animals.

Jon:     That was what it says?

Tim:     Do you set that? He makes Lebanon leap like a calf. It's Sirion is mount Lebanon.

Jon:     And Lebanon is a mountain. It's a hill.

Tim:     Yeah, it's a forest at mountain range. Sirion is Mount Hermon. The tallest mountain in the region.

Jon:     Wow.

Tim:     So even more so turns up the volume on that theme.

Jon:     Yeah. Shakes the desert, flashes of lightning, twisting oaks, strips the forest bare. I mean, yeah, that's all you can just imagine lightning doing everything.

Tim:     Yeah. So at one level, the center of the poem is describing a thunderstorm. A thunder and lightning storm. It has flames, shatters trees, shoots them apart, makes earthquake.

Jon:     It's a good image.

Tim:     Notice the movement of the qol. It begins with over the waters, so it's rolling in off the Mediterranean.

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Jon:        You can see the storm coming.

Tim:        Yeah. So it's a poet sitting up on Mount Carmel or something, where Elijah had the showdown with the prophets and he's watching. You can be there and just look at the Mediterranean qol and watch the storm come in.

Jon:        To watch the thunder come in.

Tim:        It goes up north Lebanon, then it moves over the hill country south to Kadesh, the desert of Kadesh.

Jon:        Where's that?

Tim:        Near the staging area where the spies went to go enter into the land. Kadesh Barnea or desert Kadesh. So it moves from North, all way to South. Earthquake blasting trees apart. That's the center of the poem is describing a thunderstorm.

            But every single time the word "qol" appears, it's someone's qol. It's Yahweh's qol. So we're equating the power of a thunderstorm with the power of the cloud writer. It's creation theology. That's what the poet's doing here.

Jon:        You wouldn't know that. Most translations I'm sure just say the voice of the Lord?

Tim:        Yeah, that's right. But you could pick up from the poetry that it's describing a thunderstorm.

Jon:        Sure.

Tim:        But yeah, the fact that it's the voice of the Lord instead of the just the sound or the thunder. If you're just listening to it, you also can't see...I have highlighted color patterns, all the key repeated words. And if you see it, they kind of appear in groups.

            Note the first four lines had that repetition. "Give to Yahweh" "Give glory" "Give glory to His name." So you have a description of a thunderstorm who is being called in the opening line to give glory to Yahweh.

Jon:        The sons of God.

Tim:        The sons of God.

Jon:        The angels?

Tim:        Or spiritual being.

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Jon:        Spiritual beings?

Tim:        The sons have Elin or a variation of Elohim. It's actually the subordinate gods who are being called to recognize they've been—

Jon:        Lowercase g, gods.

Tim:        Lowercase g, gods.

Jon:        Spiritual beings.

Tim:        Spiritual beings. It's not even a human audience at first that's implied or addressed. That's fascinating.

Yeah.

Tim:        And notice the triple address, "give, give, give," all three in the beginning. You could have just said it once, but you say it three times.

Jon:        That's a big part of poetry is repetition.

Tim:        Repetition. Yeah, repetition. Notice also there's a word used only in the opening pair of lines and in the last pair of lines. I have it in yellow there. It's the word "strength." In the opening lines, the spiritual world is being called to recognize Yahweh is more powerful, and to recognize He has strength. Acknowledge that He has strength.

            Actually, look at these closing lines. "Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood." Why are we talking about the flood?

Jon:        Yeah, that seemed to jump out of nowhere. But I guess a thunderstorm comes with a lot of water.

Tim:        Yes. Look at verse 3, the storm began in the poem over the waters.

Jon:        Yeah. It's like sucking up the waters and bringing them on the land.

Tim:        Yeah. So if Yahweh's power, if the thunderstorm is this image of the creator's power, He's obviously even more powerful. And if it moves over with the chaotic sea, and overland, He has power over both. So this final lines are like drawing these theological implications of if the storm is powerful overwater and land, how much more Yahweh? But it uses the word flood. It uses the precise word that's used in the book of Genesis to describe the flood. Now, we're talking about the chaos waters of Genesis 1. So he's King over chaos.

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**Jon:**     He's King over chaos.

**Tim:**     He King, over chaos. That's right. Chaos is powerful, but Yahweh is more powerful. He also is enthroned as King. Kings aren't just powerful. They're powerful over a people. And then that's the next line. "The Lord gives strength to his people."

So the opening line is spiritual beings recognizing the strength of Yahweh. But now Yahweh's power and strength overall chaotic forces is relevant specifically to the people over which He rules and Yahweh gives His strength to them. And then the last word of the poem is shalom. He blesses them with shalom.

**Jon:**     And that comes out of nowhere, too, because everything's so chaotic and destructive, and unruly. Then the last line is "Blessing with shalom.

**Tim:**     It's calming. It's calming, isn't it? After all, the thunder, He gives strength to His people blessing them with shalom, with peace.

**Jon:**     Yeah.

**Tim:**     Actually, that last line, "the Lord blesses His people with peace" is riffing off of the blessing of Aaron in Number Chapter 6. But "Bay he bless you and keep you, cause his face shine on you," and then it ends as "May He give you shalom."

Psalm 29, you can dissect it, and it's kind of like killing the butterfly on the examination table. But it's worth really reflecting on how it works as a poem. So you named repetition and you immediately clued into the imagery. I'm just curious what else stood out to you or stands out to you?

**Jon:**     The whole midsection of this poem is just one metaphor after the next of the voice being like thunder in different scenarios. And it's very repetitive. "The voice of the Lord is powerful." "The voice of the Lord, majestic." Voice of the Lord, break cedars." It's like gets you in a little bit of a trance there in a way.

**Tim:**     Yeah, sure. You're really just thinking about one core thing - the power of a thunderstorm.

**Jon:**     Right.

**Tim:**     The technique is, there are some realities that we encounter, that thinking about them from one perspective won't be sufficient. You need to turn it over and look at it again through a different way of talking about it. And then again, and again. I mean, how many lines? There's like 16 lines here basically making the same point that a thunderstorm is really powerful and that it's Yahweh's power. So repetition.

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But it's not just free for all. It's a structured repetition.

There's a rhythm. There's a rhythm to it, which is easier to see when you look at it. Even just what we noted, the center of the poem is 16 lines. How do you know they are lines? What's a line?

Jon:    What's a line?

Tim:    I've broken the poem up into lines.

Jon:    Oh, but it wasn't originally that way?

Tim:    Well, it begs the question of, "How do I know that it is consist of lines? What are the clues?"

Jon:    I just imagined in Hebrew it was also in lines.

Tim:    Oh, that's very interesting. Among the dead sea scrolls, there are a number of biblical poems that are broken up into their poetic lines.

Jon:    But that's not normal?

Tim:    It's a really ancient practice.

Jon:    Oh, okay.

Tim:    I'm just saying if you were just to throw words on a page, how do you recognize something as a poetic line?

Jon:    Oh, right.

Tim:    What a poet does is give very clear indications that this language isn't just free-flowing, it's following a pattern, a rhythm.

Jon:    When I write poetry, or when I have, the line is kind of when I get to the end of my page. It's like, "Oh, I got to switch." But there's more thought than that.

Tim:    Yeah, that's right. So that I think, can transition us into, as we think about this poem, all the poems in the Bible, what are some of the universal characteristics that mark the kind of speech that is poetry that is able to take entities or realities of our experience, put them under our view, but in a way that doesn't just think about it from one perspective and the languages and drawing attention to itself as intentionally artistic?

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Actually, I have a good quote here. This is from Adele Berlin, who in our narrative conversations I quoted from her excellent book on biblical narrative. And she has a great book on biblical poetry.

She says, "Poetry conveys thought. There is something the poet wants to communicate. Poetry conveys that thought in a self-conscious manner through a special structuring of the language that calls attention to the "how" of the message as well as the "what". In fact, in good poetry, the how and the what are indistinguishable. As Robert Alter puts it, poetry isn't just a set of techniques for saying impressively what you could say otherwise, rather, it's a particular way of imagining the world. So Psalm 29 is talking about the power of God as creator through a poetic exploration of a thunderstorm, but it's structure the language about the thunderstorm, she says, in a self-conscious way."

Jon:     It's being very plain about what it's doing?

Tim:     Yeah, it just repeats the same word like 12 times. Half the lines are about shattering trees. Wouldn't one line have satisfied about the trees? Apparently not because the goal isn't just to communicate information, it's to invite you into an experience.

Jon:     I think I know what she means by good poetry the "how" and the "what" become indistinguishable." I don't know if I do know what it means actually. Help me understand what she means?

Tim:     Biblical poetry is always about something. There's a message.

Jon:     There's a what.

Tim:     There's a what that the poem's about.

Jon:     This poem is about the power of God?

Tim:     Yeah, that's right. It's about the power of God that should make spiritual beings bow their knee to Yahweh and should make God's people feel shalom. That's what it's about.

Jon:     And you could have just said that.

Tim:     Yeah, you could just write a short statement, "Oh, sons of God, bow the knee to Yahweh. He's very powerful and He blesses his people. Amen."

Jon:     "Dear sons of God."

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Tim:        So very clearly, this long poem is saying something through what she calls a self-conscious how.

Jon:        And the how, then is all the metaphor, it's all the repetition—

Tim:        The rhythm, the dense, overlapping repetitions. It's self-conscious. Somebody sat down and crafted all those lines very carefully. Again, it's easier seeing it in color, but there is key repeated words right at the beginning, right at the end that link different things together. So someone worked for days and days on this thing. And that's what she means the how. In good poetry, the how it's self-communicates the what, along with the what.

Jon:        Because the poet could have easily just written a statement, but that wasn't enough for the poet. The poet wanted you to experience the statement in a way that made the statement come to life in a new way.

Tim:        So in this case, repeating all of these scenes of thunderstorms shaking things, breaking them apart, shattering and twisting trees, it's all of a sudden the words are doing to you what a shaking, and a quaking and why winds are going to end.

Jon:        It's a little exhilarating too.

Tim:        Yeah, it has the energy. Literally, the poetic techniques become a part of the what of the message. They become indistinguishable.

Jon:        Becomes a way to experience the what.

Tim:        Yeah, that's right.

Jon:        That's cool.

Tim:        It is cool.

Jon:        I would like to make a note that I don't know what a young wild ox is like.

Tim:        Oh, man.

Jon:        "Sirion like a young wild ox leaps."

Tim:        That's because these [inaudible 00:24:39] is extinct species.

Jon:        It's gone.

Tim:        The auroch.

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Jon:    The auroch.

Tim:    The auroch. Do you know these?

Jon:    No, I don't know what they are.

Tim:    A-u-r-o-c-h.

Jon:    It looks like a cow, like a bull.

Tim:    But if you see it in comparison to something, it's...

Jon:    It's pretty big.

Tim:    ...like the size of the short bus or a big 15 passenger bus.

Jon:    It's massive.

Tim:    I mean, they're like the size of elephant body.

Jon:    There's one in here that has like a mane like old lion.

Tim:    The wild ox, massive, massive creatures.

Jon:    Wonderful. Scientists are thinking about bringing these back.

Tim:    I mean, I think, I don't know, Texas Longhorn, those can get pretty big, but I think these things were bigger.

Jon:    And these are wild animals.

Tim:    Actually, the most dangerous animals in the Bible aside from like crazy [inaudible 00:25:34] in job. The human, the Leviathan is always a lion or the wild ox.

Jon:    And they were always referring to these guys?

Tim:    Yeah, yeah. It's massive, massive horn creatures. That fits into the strategy of the poem too. He makes a young calf leap and the ultimate of that species leap. The Wild ox. He makes them the babies leap and the most powerful wild ox leap.

Jon:    Like a young wild ox would be like a full grown but still scrappy and ready to dominate? Has something to prove?

Tim:    Yeah, yeah.

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Jon: Like the older ones they like are tired of charging people and stuff. So you're not as afraid of those. But the young ones, don't mess with those.

Tim: That's exactly right. The way I think would be helpful, the role of these videos is to introduce people to Biblical Poetry 1. I want to give people some handles on just the basic things to look for in the communication techniques the biblical poetry is specifically just with language. That's what video one's about. The art of biblical poetry. Then video two will invite people in just the wild imagination of these authors, and how they use metaphors and imagery.

To begin the video, we might want to think about how to invite people into more familiar ways of poetry. Poetry is a language that has a "what" communicate, but it's intentionally pouring energy into the "how." The artistic use of language.

All cultures have ways of doing this, and you could call them poetic conventions, right? So every human culture develops a functional useful language, and then it develops this other...Some cultures develop this other type of language that's more reflective, artistic, emotive, we call e caught poetry. But it can happen through many types of techniques.

The way it happens in the West, mostly, is through rhyme and meter. That's how we typically think of poetry. I just put the silly classic here, but it's such a great example. "Roses are red, violets are blue." "Sugar is sweet, and so are you."

Jon: Thank you.

Tim: You are welcome. I did look you in the eye as I said that. So there are four short lines, each consists of three words, except the last. The fourth has four words. Look at right there. Three lines have three words, the fourth has four words.

Jon: Yeah, the cadences.

Tim: That's good.

Jon: Pa, pa, pa, pam. Pa, pa, pa, pam. Pa, pa, pa, pam. Pam, pa, pam. So the fourth one's different.

Tim: That's right. There are multiple conventions coming together there. There's rhyme: Blue and you. There are overlapping metaphors: flowers and sugar. There's wordplays: Sugar, sweet. You are sweet. A person is sweet in a really different way. There's all that. Then there's what's called the meter, which is the syllable patterning.

Jon: Right.

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Tim:    That's the heritage that in the West, we get, I think, primarily through the English poetic tradition that translated or mediated the ancient Greek lyric poetry tradition. That's like from way back, from the late Kingdom period in Israel the Greeks were up. In like the 600, 700 BC, the Greeks were up.

Jon:    These were like the Odyssey and Elliot [SP] kind of things.

Tim:    Yes. So origins of that system I still don't quite understand called iambic pentameter.

Jon:    Wow, you know the word.

Tim:    Slots are different. Because Shakespeare was mediating a form of iambic pentameter into English poetry. A lot of his plays are structured by—

Jon:    Part of the reason is to help memorize these stories, right?

Tim:    Yeah, that's right. Poetry is the type of literature that is originated for sure as an oral art form - composed orally, and performed orally. And once it's written, it takes on a whole other set of characteristics. That's interesting. But then you get Haiku poetry, which isn't about rhyme, but it is about syllables, the 5-7-5 pattern.

Jon:    Very terse.

Tim:    Yeah. So let's think there. Why would you write in Haiku poetry? The poet is you're taking upon yourself some practice that your culture has, and actually sets limits on you.

Jon:    Right, yeah. Try to say a lot...

Tim:    Through a little.

Jon:    ...through very little.

Tim:    That's right.

Jon:    And in this case, that little in whatever your cultural practice is, you also have to structure the language to match these patterns. That is the way you do it. Some case like Shakespeare's, you see his true brilliance, it seems to me, if you could understand the metrical system that he was working within, then you're just like, "His vocabulary was off the charts. He didn't have like thesource.com.

Jon:    Yeah, yeah.

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Tim:     I really think you're taking on limitations through which you will express something more profound than the normal.

Jon:     Well, it forces you to search for options that you wouldn't first think to search for.

Tim:     That's right.

Jon:     Because I've written songs and the same thing happens because you're like, "Oh, I need a two syllable word here instead," or "I need something that rhymes." So you have to start searching for other ideas. Then that makes you go, "Oh, I never really thought about this, this way." But that's a good way of putting it. It structures your own understanding of the topic.

Tim:     Yeah, that's right. So the writing of poetry becomes a discovery process. You're discovering your own language, which then helps you put ideas together and new combinations. Then all of that together creates a dense, artistic statement that...Oh, this is a quote that I read when we first got together. It's a classic introduction of poetry by Lawrence Perrine called "Sound and Sense." It's not a technical definition of poetry, but I like it.

He says, "Poetry is a kind of human language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language." So he's not talking about form or meter or anything. He's just saying, "The net effect is language that does more than language normally does."

I think at the heart, that's what I want this video to be about. I want to introduce people to some of the conventions and practices, these limits that the poet's take on themselves constructing speech in a rhythm. But the net effect of it is that through these new combinations, poetry carries a surplus of meaning and overabundance of meaning. For me, that's the driving core concept.

Jon:     So what's the overabundance of meaning for you in Psalm 29 with the thunder and God's voice?

Tim:     I think what captures my imagination is it's somebody meditating on the most powerful, again for 3,000 years ago. And still, today, to be in the middle of a thunderstorm is one of the most humbling experiences. You're puny, you're powerless.

So experiencing a thunderstorm is a window into my own nature as a human and to the powers at work that rule and providentially rule over creation, which in Israelite is

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Yahweh. It's all of a sudden, this powerful, frightening existential experience of a poet trying to translate that.

So this poetic medium becomes a way of inviting the reader into an emotional existential experience of their mortality of Yahweh's repetitive, driving unavoidable nature of these lines over and over again. There's an overabundance of meaning that you could never communicate any other way except through this form, which does it beautifully.

I mean, I'm not in the habit of doing my theology by looking at rain clouds. We live in Portland and we look at a lot of rain clouds. This poet's a Bible nerd, for sure. He's one of the bibilical authors, but he also apparently thinks you should read the rain clouds.

Jon:    You should just enjoy a storm rolling through and think about the power of God.

Tim:    Do some theological reflection in light of a powerful rainstorm.

Jon:    Now, when they're thinking about the voice of God, is that connected to the Word of God?

Tim:    Totally. The other thing this poem is a hyperlink to is the appearance of Yahweh in the Garden of Eden in interrogation scene after the humans take from the tree. And it says, "The qol, the voice of Yahweh; they heard the voice of Yahweh, the sounds of Yahweh in the wind of the day." It usually it gets translated as the qol of the day, the breezy time. But it doesn't say that. It says in the wind.

So it's like, yeah, always voice showed up with the wind. It's a storm scene.

Jon:    Oh, it's a storm.

Tim:    Yeah, totally. It's a preview. It's a design pattern. It's previewing when Yahweh will show up with Israel at Mount Sinai. And what they see is the qol - the voice. They see the voice of Yahweh.

Jon:    At Sinai?

Tim:    Mm-hmm. It's very odd.

Jon:    I thought they saw the glory?

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Tim: Oh, they do in chapter 24, but in Exodus 19, they look up at the storm cloud coming over that mountain. And what it says is, "They saw the voice of Yahweh, which is thunder. But it's such a visceral experience, they see it.

So this poem is tapping into a whole design pattern in the biblical narratives about Yahweh showing up when his voice, his command as the creator, it's powerful and inspiring. The poem communicates that. I think when you get into it, the poem does that. That's what I mean the overabundance of meaning.

We've already developed the impressionist painting aesthetic, and I'm kind of excited about that visual medium to unpack that somehow, as we talked about different techniques of biblical poetry, it'd be cool if we have lines of poetry that we can ponder together in the video, talk about the technique, but then stuff is growing out of the words. Such things. That's just one idea.

Jon: Right.

Tim: But the idea is the words communicate more. They grow stuff out of them that you can't quite analyze. You just experience it. Experience the poetry.

We know the biblical authors knew when they were writing in poetry because they had words for these compositions. There's at least three. There's few more, but the three most common ones, they called them a "shir", which is translated as "song".

Jon: This is what they would call their poetry?

Tim: Yeah. They actually had vocabulary to describe this kind of artistic speech. They call it "shirah". It's the word for "sing".

Jon: Is it because a lot of these were sung?

Tim: Totally. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So they would be melodies?

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Same thing with the Odyssey and Elliot, I think they thought those were song.

Tim: I think that's right. That makes perfect sense. Same thing with music then. When you set poetry to music, your words are imitating the conventions of the music, which set limitations on you within a tradition but also create opportunities for you to create new meanings.

# The Thunder of God

So yeah, "song" is one of the ancient Hebrew terms for poetry. Another word "mizmor" it's the word "Psalm." It gets translated as "Psalm"

Jon: And this is a word I only know because of the Bible.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: So I don't even really know what that means.

Jon: What is a Psalm?

Tim: Well, it comes from a verb "zamar", which is another word for to play music. To play a song.

Jon: Oh, to play?

Tim: It's a synonym for song. "Psalm" simply means "song." Sung poetry.

Jon: What's the difference then? "Song" is related to the word "Sing for us," but "Psalm" is also the word for "Sing."

Tim: In other words, "Psalm" is a verb in Hebrew. You can refer to something you do and then the end result—

Jon: You're Psalming?

Tim: Yeah, you psalm. And then what you have at the end of that is a Psalm. A sang poem. These words aren't used enough and we don't know enough about the choir system in ancient Israel. We just don't know enough to be able to distinguish these words like, a "shir" was this type of song and a "mizmor" more was this type of song"

The next term, we do know about this one. It's a "qinah" and it's a song of grief or lament. So the book of Lamentations, there's a qinah that David sings when Saul and Jonathan are dead. So this was a type of song. Just a grief song. That was a whole cultural tradition. This long poems of grief.

These labels are given a lot to poetry in the Bible. So we know the biblical authors knew—

Jon: Thought in these categories.

Tim: Yeah, they knew when they were entering this mode of writing.

Jon: Sure.

# The Thunder of God

Tim:     Then the question is, "Okay, what was the little menu list?" Like when you're working on your computer, and you go up to the menu at top or what I guess—

Jon:     What are the tools?

Tim:     What are the toolset? I guess that could be a dated metaphor in a few years here.

Jon:     The menu list?

Tim:     Yeah, what's the toolset? And this has become a huge area of debate for going on all over 200 years.

Jon:     What tools they had?

Tim:     Yeah. There are Bible nerds arguing about the nature of ancient Hebrew poetry. My favorite description is a poem written by Bible nerd, it's a poem about Hebrew poetry, how it works.

Jon:     Right.

Tim:     I don't fully agree with it, but I agree with most of it. But it's clever. It's by John Hollander. He says, "The verse of Hebrew Bible is strange, the meter of Psalms and proverbs plexus. It's not a matter of number, no counting of beats or syllables. Its song is a music of matching, its rhythm, a kind of paralleling. One line makes an assertion. The other part expresses in other words, sometimes a third part will vary yet again.

Jon:     Yeah, clever.

Tim:     Yes, it's clever. Bible nerds. So Hollander's claim is, no meter, no syllable counting.

Jon:     Which makes it difficult for singing.

Tim:     It could.

Jon:     It would.

Tim:     It could.

Jon:     I mean, if there's a set melody—

Tim:     Oh, I see.

Jon:     I guess I just imagine what would happen.

# The Thunder of God

Tim:    Well, it makes it difficult for, I guess, a Westerner to imagine singing. But you probably had this experience if you travel internationally and you hear other cultures like traditional music, and sometimes it sounds off to somebody from other culture. It sounds like it's not in harmony, and it's just not your culture. So it doesn't sound like biblical authors experienced this as a problem because they have vocabulary for poetry.

Jon:    Well, I can understand it feeling weird because of the melodies in a different...I don't know you call it, but keys. If I'm going to introduce a new poem to you, and I want you to be able to sing it, either I have to give you a new melody that you're going to know it by, or I just say, "Hey, we're going to use this commonly known melody, and we're going to use my new psalm."

I guess I always imagined that because that's a lot of the way that some of famous hymns were put together was through common melodies that we just changed the words to. At least that's what I've been told.

Tim:    Yeah, interesting.

Jon:    And that just makes it a lot easier for people to go, "Oh, cool. I could sing it on this because I know the melody already." But if you're going to do that, you have to adhere to the structure of the meter of that melody?

Tim:    Yeah. Part of the challenge is the poetry in the Bible represents a long history. Some of these are very ancient poems, but some of them are poems that have been taken up into literary texts, and then edited or new parts are composed to make them fit into the written medium.

Even the book of Psalms is a great example of this. It's not a hymn book. It's very much now in the form that it's in a written literary composition that's meant to be read. And you can just see it by the editorial structures, the headings. There's really interesting. There's like poems like Psalm 14. Half of it gets repeated in half of another Psalm. I think it's Psalm 70.

So you can tell there was a mode at which these are being sung and were studied and treasured and written and reflected on as written text. In which case the meter thing, like maybe way back in Moses days they were singing this, but by the time they've reached the stage they are at in the Bible, the meter doesn't matter, which makes sense of the lack of any syllable rhythms.

Jon:    So the point is, in Hebrew poetry, the meter and the syllable count?

# The Thunder of God

Tim:     Yeah. Meter and rhyming.

Jon:     And rhyming.

Tim:     Roses are red, violets are blue.

Jon:     Yeah, they're not rhyming. I remember being told in Hebrew you don't rhyme words, you rhyme thoughts.

Tim:     Right, I've heard that too.

Jon:     That's not helpful?

Tim:     I don't think it's helpful.

Jon:     You don't think that's helpful?

Tim:     I want to head a different direction in how we got people.

Jon:     Okay. Get us in that.

Tim:     All right. The first thing is the rhythm. There is a rhythm. There's a whole bunch of Bible nerds who are using the phrase "free verse" to describe the rhythm. And free verse means essentially, my goal is to write short, dense lines.

         And there is some guiding rules. The line consists almost always of three to five words in Hebrew. Not in English. Oh, yeah, this is interesting. If I write a sentence in English "he picked him up" or "he picked it up," subject, verb, direct object, those are always in English at least three separate words.

Jon:     Four words "He picked him up."

Tim:     Oh, yeah, four words. There you go. In Hebrew, that's one word.

Jon:     How?

Tim:     Viakahehu [SP]. So the "he" is built into the verb. Then you have the verb, and then you can attach the direct object to the verb itself in one word.

Jon:     This is like German, you're just like cramming words together?

Tim:     Yeah, yeah. So words can have many syllables, but you can have a whole sentence in one word in Hebrew. The word "and" attaches itself to the beginning of a word. So

you can have the sentence "and he picked him up," Viakahehu, is one word in Hebrew.

So it's the perfect language to make dense statements in. You can pack a lot of meaning into one word. And if you've got three those suckers to work with, then you could have three sentences in a single line.

Jon:        Well, it's one word, but it's really a word that's four words.

Tim:        Correct? In terms of its grammatical makeup, it's four—

Jon:        Because in English, we can make it "he picked him up" one word. Hepickedhimup.

Tim:        You can say it quickly.

Jon:        He picked him up. I can write it without any—

Tim:        Andhepickedhimup.

Jon:        That kind of sounds like—

Tim:        In Hebrew poetry, a poetic line, usually it's pairs of lines, pairs of short lines, three to five words, usually, the first line is a complete sentence or a complete clause. The second line is either a subordinate clause, a parallel clause. But you've always got a complete sentence in the line. And usually they're in pairs, so people call them to A line and the B line.

This is universal, but very often, the A line will be a main clause or a complete sentence, and then the B line is either a full parallel clause or its subordinate on the first one.

Jon:        Subordinate meaning?

Tim:        The A line "and he picked him up" "With strong arms of might" will be the B line.

Jon:        Okay. So it could be "And he picked him up // he lifted him high."

Tim:        That's correct.

Jon:        That would be a parallel line?

Tim:        Yeah, that's right. But not all lines are parallel lines.

Jon:        But not all lines are parallel lines.

# The Thunder of God

**Tim:** That's why thought rhymes aren't helpful.

**Jon:** Got it.

**Tim:** So rhythm. There's a cadence in the rhythm, but it has to do with number of words. And there's a pretty big freedom. About three to five words on average.

**Jon:** Got it.

**Tim:** Hebrew has a way of removing unnecessary words. They'll remove the words "the". Like in English the word "the" or "a" or "and" there was a way to have a stripping the speech down of what to call pros parts of speech. So they can do that in Hebrew, strip the thing down. And some English poetry works like that too sometimes.

**Jon:** Sure. So this is just one writing poetry or is this also in speaking?

**Tim:** It's a characteristic of biblical poetry. Rhythm, that's the first thing. There is a rhythm, but it's a free verse rhythm. Free verse is a technical category that literary nerds use, where you have in mind some basic parameters but within those parameters, do anything you want.

**Jon:** Freeform jazz.

**Tim:** Yeah, totally. It's a thing. There are many cultural traditions that have a free verse tradition.

**Jon:** For us, it's more like spoken word poetry. It's very free verse.

**Tim:** Yeah, that's a great example. Good job. It's a great example. Which means, just because it doesn't rhyme with meter the way English does, it doesn't mean there isn't wordplay and rhyming going on just not in a metered way. So Hebrew poetry, totally.

**Jon:** There's lots of rhyming. There are lots of words that sound similar.

**Tim:** Yeah, exactly. They'll have whole poems that play with certain letters, repeating certain letters, and so on.

**Jon:** Got it.

**Tim:** One of my favorite poems in Isaiah is Isaiah 5 called "The song in the vineyard." The metaphor of God planting Israel. It says, "God waited for the vineyard to produce grapes, but all it produced was stinky grapes."

# The Thunder of God

Jon:        Stinky grapes?

Tim:        Rotten grapes.

Jon:        Rotten grapes, okay.

Tim:        Grapes that are immediately rotten. It's the grapes that it produces are the grapes that are already rotten.

Jon:        It sounds like a bad dream.

Tim:        Yeah, totally. Oh, and you'll get this because of the Justice video. So God says, He was looking for "mishpat" but what he saw was "mispagh." Bloodshed.

Jon:        Mispagh.

Tim:        Mispagh is bloodshed. Looking for mishpat, what He sees, mispagh. He was looking for tsedaka but what he saw was tse-aka - the cries of the oppressed. That's a great example. It's straight up rhyming. It just doesn't follow meter.

Jon:        It's a type of rhyming.

Tim:        It's a type of rhyming. You're using words that rhyme.

Jon:        That sound very similar.

Tim:        It sounds mishpat, mispagh.

Jon:        It's not rhyming like English.

Tim:        I understand. It's not rhyming by our standards. In Hebrew, that's—

Jon:        But poet's do that. We understand that kind of rhyming.

Tim:        Yeah, totally.

Jon:        It's not the classic rhyme.

Tim:        Yeah. I wasn't taught to look for this a ton when I learned Hebrew. But man, I've just worked through a couple studies recently on wordplay in the Hebrew Bible, it's off the charts. They're doing it everywhere. I had no idea. It's really remarkable. It just one of the things you can't quite translate. Rhyming doesn't translate—

Jon:        Word playing being rhyming of words and stuff?

# The Thunder of God

Tim:        Yeah, that's right.

Jon:        So is [tohu vo vohu? 00:53:10] an example of that?

Tim:        Oh, yeah. Sure, that's an example. Or there's the whole story the building of Babylon in Genesis. All the vocabulary centers around words that have the letters B an L.

Jon:        Oh, really?

Tim:        Yeah, totally. If you just read aloud in Hebrew, the whole thing was like, "[Habu, nible, lanu, ir? 00:53:33]  "

Jon:        Lots of Ls and Bs.

Tim:        Ls and Bs, all leading up to him calling him bololeng [SP], BLL, the language and calling it barvel. BBL.

Jon:        That's my favorite thing about poetry is when there's a repetition of sounds.

Tim:        Yeah, super common. Yeah, super common in many kinds of poetry. If it's not rhyme, it's the how of the speech that it creates the surplus, the overabundance of meaning. That isn't about a concept, it's about a feeling that you get when you hear it.

Jon:        Now, it gets discouraging to know that this is happening in the Hebrew. I don't speak Hebrew or read it and I can see that being discouraging to other people.

Tim:        Yeah, totally.

Jon:        Well, here's another thing. If God knew that this was going to be the poetry and language in which for many people groups throughout history were going to use as their Scriptures—

Tim:        Their basic instructions before leaving—

Jon:        No, not even that, though. Like their way to understand the story of God, and for their imagination to be shaped by what God's doing in the world and who He is and who we are.

Tim:        Yeah, sure.

Jon:        So much of this now is then buried in the Hebrew.

Tim:        Or Greek?

# The Thunder of God

Jon:    Did God think, "Oh, everyone will just learn Hebrew and Greek." Or just like, "Well, those little treats are extra for the people who want to do extra work."

Tim:    Well, after all we talked about in terms of the sophistication and the multi-layers of depth to the stories, that is for sure going on. Even if you read it in Hebrew. There are stories and these stories and poems full depth isn't available to somebody on the first reading. That's built into just the style of communication.

Jon:    I could get there. I get there.

Tim:    But the Hebrew thing. Here, we're back to, I don't know, a core thing that we keep coming around that the Christian Jewish confession is God choose to reveal Himself through a historical medium of a people, and a culture, and their language and their text.

Jon:    Like the poet, He restrained himself to certain limitations.

Tim:    Yeah. God's poet accepting limitations to communicate through humanity. I mean, what is the incarnation? The same questions in principle come with the incarnation of Jesus. I never got to hear Jesus speak in Aramaic. I only get to hear him in Greek translation through apostles. I am nowhere near Israel Palestine right now.

        So that's more of a theological reality that's built into the Jewish and Christian tradition is this God weaves Himself into human history, which means that when He reveals Himself, it's in the categories of the people He's communicating through.

Jon:    Do you think every Christian community needs their resident Bible nerd to read the Bible with?

Tim:    Oh, I think a healthy Christian community, yeah, needs Bible nerds. At least if that community is interested in keeping itself anchored in something other than just what's perpetually new.

Jon:    So how many Bible nerds do we need per capita then?

Tim:    That's a great question. And by nerds, I don't mean degrees, but somebody who's really—

Jon:    Yeah, someone who I could sit down with and they can tell me and they could say, "Hey, you won't see this, but look at the rhyming of the words here."

Tim:    Yeah, that's right.

# The Thunder of God

Jon:     I mean, here's the thing is I would love to be able to do that, but I just know, I'm not going to be able to. I would love to play the violin. I'm not going to.

Tim:     Sure.

Jon:     But the more we have these conversations like this, I'm like, "Oh, maybe I do need to."

Tim:     No, no, I don't think so. Look how much we did on that poem on Psalm 29 just in English.

Jon:     Yeah. But you had to tell me about qol.

Tim:     I had to tell you about one Hebrew word that helps unlock the wordplay. But that's it. That's all I had to say. It's all you need somebody who...I mean, I'm with you, but this is just the reality. The apostles knew this. This is why Paul said, 'A healthy, complete body of the Messiah has an apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist.

Jon:     Yeah, the many parts.

Tim:     Right?

Jon:     Yeah.

Tim:     And the spiritual gifts, all that. And teacher, a nerd is on the list. Of course, you need to teacher. Look at our sacred texts. They're really hard to understand a lot of the time. Thank you for raising that important question, Jon.

Jon:     You are welcome.

Tim:     The companion to rhythm in biblical poetic style is a phenomenon that's come to have the term parallelism. You gave it another phrase earlier - thought rhyming.

Jon:     Thought rhyming.

Tim:     I mean, we saw it in Psalm 29. Yahweh's voice shatters the trees. It twists the oaks. It makes the mountain skip like a young calf. It makes another mountain skip like a wild ox.

Jon:     So two similar thoughts, one after another.

# The Thunder of God

Tim: Yeah. Though, look at the opening. The opening, four lines of Psalm 29, it's a triple repetition with a fourth variation. "Give to Yahweh or sons of God, Give to Yahweh glory and strength. Give to Yahweh glory, worship the Lord."

Jon: Those are three subordinate one—

Tim: You would say it's three parallel lines with the last one coming in as a little sub.

Jon: Oh, those are three parallel lines with the fourth subordinate kind of surprise?

Tim: Yeah. Here it's following the classic like 1-2-3 twist. You set the pattern.

Jon: Actually, the classic is 1-2 twist.

Tim: Oh, 1-2 twist. That's right. This is the 1-2-3 twist. In biblical poetry, oftentimes, it's the 1-2 twist or it's just the 1-2.

Jon: Yeah, the 1-2 punch.

Tim: This is called parallelism. There's a guy named Robert Lowth, Englishman who was a divine.

Jon: A divine?

Tim: Yeah, it's an old English term for scholar.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He's credited with writing the first systematic dissertation on biblical poetry. It's called "Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews" in the new year 1753. Here's how he put it. Would do you noticed this feature of parallel repetition?

He says, "There is a certain conformation of the sentences, which is chiefly observable in those passages which frequently occur in Hebrew poetry, in which they treat one subject in many different ways, and dwell upon the same sentiment: - so the voice of Yahweh in Psalm 29 - when they express the same thing in different words, or different things in a similar form of words: and since this artifice of composition seldom fails to produce an agreeable and measured cadence, we can scarcely doubt it must have imparted to their poetry an exquisite degree of beauty and grace." That was all one sentence.

Jon: His sentence has a lot of beauty and grace as well.

# The Thunder of God

Tim:   Yeah, right. His other major contribution was he wrote a commentary on the whole book of Isaiah just commenting on the nature of the poetry. So it's not a theological commentary, it's a commentary on poetic style.

Jon:   When I read like old English like this or older English, it sounds like that people were so much smarter than we are right now.

Tim:   Like this guy.

Jon:   "The artifice of composition." Would that be something that just a normal Englishman would say?

Tim:   It is. He is writing. Literally, when you write, you tend to be a little more articulate. When people write.

Jon:   Yeah, sure. I don't know. Nowadays, when someone writes, and they're doing that, it almost feels like they're trying to show off.

Tim:   Or being fancy. That's true. That's a good point. But that's just our becoming acclimated to the email, texting, scratch out your thoughts in bad grammar type of English.

Jon:   And just add an emoji so everything's fun.

Tim:   It's the idiocrasy. So he's got to sum on something. And pretty much everybody writing in poetry since him has been just developing and filling out what he intuited and tried to—

Jon:   He wouldn't be the first one to notice that.

Tim:   No.

Jon:   I mean, it's not like a hidden feature.

Tim:   No. He's the first one who wrote a systematic dissertation and he created categories of parallelism. We called some synonymous - basically, the same idea through multiple lines. He called some antithetical - where to contrast.

Jon:   And that would be, say, "Express the same thing in different words synonymous or different things and similar form of words.

Tim:   Correct, something too opposite. We looked at a couple of proverbs. That's how most of Proverbs are cast. But he also created a big middle default junk drawer

which he just called synthetic parallelism, which just means the second line doesn't say the same thing and doesn't say the opposite thing. It's just another thing.

What most of biblical scholars has tried to figure out, is how many of those things are there and why? And there's been lots of debate. Now there are people who are just saying, "Let's just stop trying to categorize them. Let's just paint a spectrum." They just have its free verse, so they can do virtually anything they want with these two lines. The point isn't to categorize it. The point is to just experience it.

So this is something interesting. This is down at the bottom of Page 4. Almost all the proverbs in the book of Proverbs are cast in these little parallel mostly two liners. The word for proverb in Hebrews "mashal" it means to compare. A comparison of two things.

Jon:       Proverbs means to compare.

Tim:       A comparison.

Jon:       Interesting. So I can rename "Psalms" in my Bible as "song" and "Proverb as "compare"?

Tim:       Yeah. Proverbs is comparisons.

Jon:       Comparisons.

Tim:       Comparisons. Through this poetic medium, the two lines put two things together.

Jon:       Because proverbs are generally just two lines, oftentimes.

Tim:       Yes. Sometimes it's triple. Triplets comes along, but they're most often two. Here's just some classics and you can just see the potential is on the form here.

Proverbs 16:32 "Being slow to anger is better than being a warrior, and one who rules their passions, than one who captures the city." So the "slow to anger" is compared to somebody who can rule their passion. Then the advantages of "being a worrier," being able to chop someone's head off is compared to somebody who can capture a city. Pretty simple.

So you would say there are two corresponding elements being compared here? Actually, it's multiple. There's one thing, somebody who has self-control.

Jon:       This makes you think that to the author of the proverb here, dealing with your passions is like a brawl. It's like a fight.

# The Thunder of God

Tim:        Oh, yeah.

Jon:        It's a war in and of itself.

Tim:        Yeah. The metaphor creates this surplus of meaning that you now reflect on.

Jon:        Yeah.

Tim:        Your anger and your passions can make you powerful. But if being able to control your passions to some degree is better, it means that strength can be really destructive. So here it's a warrior or somebody who captures a city, I guess that can be good. Of course, that can be good if you're the one who wins.

Jon:        Capturing a city?

Tim:        Yeah.

Jon:        So it's like the point is capturing a city is hard, but—

Jon:        Takes a lot of passion.

Jon:        Yeah, I mean, it takes a lot of warring.

Tim:        Warring, yeah.

Jon:        And the same degree of the fight you have to put up to capture a city is a fight you have to put up to rule over your own passion.

Tim:        Got it, yeah.

Jon:        And so the city that you are controlling is your own internal passion.

Tim:        Yes, that's right.

Jon:        So in the same way, if you want to capture a city, you need to be a warrior. But if you want to capture your passion, you got to be slow to anger.

Tim:        You need to be more than warrior almost. It's saying better. More powerful.

Jon:        You're going to be more work. There's more work to control the chaos inside of you than it is to capture a city.

Tim:        Than it is to capture a city, yeah. What's great about this example is, this isn't just thought rhyming in terms of "Oh, I just want to add extra line to this." The second

line really enriches the meaning, the depth of this proverb. Being slow to anger is better than being a warrior.

Jon: In itself, that line makes you think, "Oh, it wants me to not to be this crazy guy who runs around and tries to control things with my power. It wants me to be a subdued, thoughtful, slow, and intentional kind of person." That by itself, you're like, "Okay, that makes sense." But then the second line makes you realize doing that is actually a lot more warring.

Tim: There's a battle involved.

Jon: There's a battle involved.

Tim: You need to rule that's chaotic. And if you're able to do that, you're actually better than somebody who can capture a city.

Jon: I can imagine the capturing of a city is not easy.

Tim: I've never had to do that.

Jon: Never had to do it. Never been in that situation.

Tim: And I am certain I never will.

Jon: Well, not too many generations ago our ancestors were capturing cities.

Tim: No, you can't take that for granted. That's a good example. These are two parallel lines, but they're not just saying the same thing, though they are exploring one core idea.

Again, overabundance. When you pair slow to anger and ruling passion with warrior and city, you have four components there. It's like an example where one plus one plus one plus one equals 18. It's just all of a sudden you put those four things next to each other. The poetic form—

Jon: We call that synergy.

Tim: Yeah. It's poetry. It's the nature of poetry. It's the art that you can communicate more by choosing these limitations to say less. It's awesome. It's great.

Here's one where they're opposites. Proverbs 13:3. "One who guards his mouth preserves this life. One who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

# The Thunder of God

Jon: It's another self-control proverb.

Tim: Yes, it is.

Jon: "One who guards his mouth preserves his life. One who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." It's saying the same thing in the opposite way.

Tim: Yes. This is what Lowth was saying you can say different thing with similar form of words, or the same thing through different form of words. But each one begins with "one". There are two contrasting ones - one that guards his mouth. One who opens his lips - with opposite outcomes. And it's obviously not promoting opening wide your lips. Also notice just opening your lips is a metaphor for talking too much.

Jon: Talking, yeah.

Tim: Talking with no—

Jon: And it's sometimes by eating.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: For me, though these kind of problems are hard for me because I'm the guy who will guard my mouth. But it's not because of self-control, it's because of like fear. I need to be more like, I don't know, like Peter.

Tim: That's a good point. This proverb is aimed at more certain temperaments I guess. I the same. I would rather observe what's going on in a room than contribute to it.

Jon: I need a proverb that's like, "Better is the man who..." You know that...it's a poem or something of your dance like no one's watching and love like you'll never get hurt. That's the poem I need. Not like, "Don't open your mouth, you'll make a fool of yourself."

Tim: I expect to see on someone's screensavers or something.

Jon: Totally. That's classic.

Tim: That's funny. Michael Fox, my Hebrew advisor at the University of Wisconsin, he used the metaphor "Proverbs are like a pocket of change. No one coin is right for everyone situation. Different ones for different circumstances and different combinations at different times." So that's totally true. This proverb isn't the right thing for everyone to hear every moment, but it's probably right for everybody at some moment.

# The Thunder of God

The point is, poetic form, this is an example where he uses the same grammar form. "One who guards his mouth, one who opens his lips," but they have opposite points.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: The third proverb, just looking at three, it fits into that category in the middle that Robert Lowth called synthetic. Here's Proverbs 19:17. "One who lends to the Lord is one gracious to the poor. He will repay him for his good deed." This is actually an astounding proverb.

Jon: How so?

Tim: It's promoting being generous.

Jon: Yeah, charity.

Tim: But it begins by saying, "One who lends to Yahweh." You're actually donating to Yahweh. One who donates to Yahweh, that's the one who donates to the poor. That's the first line. In Hebrew, this is one of these things where most of those English words fit into a single Hebrew word.

Jon: So that's like two Hebrew words?

Tim: That's actually four.

Jon: Four Hebrew words.

Tim: Then the B line doesn't tell you a parallel thought. That would be "One who lends the Lord is one who is gracious to the poor."

Jon: One who gives to...

Tim: Yeah, people in time of need or something like that.

Jon: ...Elohim.

Tim: Oh, yeah, it would be like that. Here, the B line just comes and gives a result. As a consequence, the Lord will repay the one who is gracious. So it's just a consequence. It's the thing that happens because of the reality of that. So you can see this from is really plastic. Poets can use this parallel line.

Jon: But the things that are always in common are two lines, a couple of lines.

Tim: Two lines, sometimes three.

# The Thunder of God

Jon:        Sometimes three and sometimes four.

Tim:        Very rarely, four. Like, in the opening of Psalm 29.

Jon:        Psalm 29 is four?

Tim:        Yeah. But standards to and the relationship of the two can take on all these variations. That's why the free verse category I think is helpful. It's just you're freestyling—

Jon:        You're trying to create structure where there is actually little structure.

Tim:        Yeah, that's right.

Jon:        But there is structure.

Tim:        Yeah, there's a rhythm. The rhythm is one thing, the next thing.

Jon:        Sometimes the third.

Tim:        And there's even a biblical poem that draws attention to this in Psalm 62. This is fascinating. I love this. It's so good. "One thing God has spoken; two things I have heard. That power belongs to God, and covenant loyalty is yours, O, Lord, for you'll recompense each person according to their deed.

            The two parallel lines are drawing attention to themselves. God is saying one thing in this little poem, but what the poet hears is two things. Then he goes on to give you two parallel lines—

Jon:        That one thought.

Tim:        Yeah, totally. Isn't that's good.

Jon:        Yeah.

Tim:        It's good. He's playing with the form.

Jon:        He knows what he's doing.

Tim:        He knows exactly what he's doing. So God's powerful, God's also loyal to his covenant. Two statements, one thing. And what is the outcome of that thing? If God's powerful, and He is loyal to His promises—

Jon:        Then those who are loyal to him, we'll see the goodness of his—

# The Thunder of God

Tim:    Everybody will get what they deserve. That's the point. But I love just opening draws attention to the idea that the poet's aware that he's got a core thing that he wants to communicate, and he's using more than one poetic line and to describe it. There you go.

You can just go through, and if you start reading these poems slowly, what you'll notice is that this back and forth of usually two line. The second line often intensifying or it's creating some subtle juxtaposition of something. This is comic. Like a warrior paralleled with capturing a city. "Wow, okay." Then that gets your imagination firing. That's what this poetry is meant to do is put one thing, one line next to another line to fire your imagination to say more than could have been said otherwise.

Jon:    Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Our show today was produced by Dan Gummel. The intro music is by the Band Tents.

If you've been enjoying our show, you might also like Tim's podcast called "Exploring my Strange Bible." It's a collection of Tim sermons, notes and lectures over the last decade. And speaking of notes, throughout these podcasts conversations, Tim and I, sometimes reference his notes that we're both going through and people have asked, "Hey, can I get access to those notes?" And the answer is, absolutely.

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