



# BibleProject Podcast

## A God of Our Own Making Character of God E2

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Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins, Tim Mackie, Carissa Quinn

- Jon** Hi, this is Jon at the BibleProject. Last week we began a new series looking at two important verses in the Hebrew Bible. It's in the book of Exodus 34:6-7, and it goes, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and faithfulness, maintaining love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. Yet, He does not leave the guilty and punished, bringer of iniquity to the children and their children to the third and fourth generation."
- Last week, we looked at this tension in this verse, how God is both slow to anger but also full of justice. This week we're going to unpack the narrative in which these verses are found. God has just rescued His people Israel from slavery. Now they're out in the wilderness and God is establishing a covenant relationship with them at a mountain called Sinai. Moses goes up and down the mountain to meet with God seven different times, mediating this covenant relationship. The covenant terms are summarized in famous Ten Commandments. The first of which is to worship Yahweh alone, and the second, not to create any idle images.
- Tim** Exodus 24 ends with Moses going up the mountain to kind of seal the deal, to tell God, like, "Yeah, the people are going to do it, we're going to do this, we're going to be your covenant people." So he goes up. And the whole thing is the people just said, "We'll accept these vows. We're going to get married. It's going to be awesome." This is the very next thing that is going to happen in the narrative. Exodus 32:1 is where the story picks up and it's where everything starts to go terribly, terribly wrong.
- Jon** Down at the base of the mountain, Israel decides that they're going to make an idol statue. They pull together all the gold that they have and they create a statue in the image of calf, and say, "This is Yahweh." They're breaking the very first covenant vow while Moses is still establishing the relationship.
- Tim** The point of the golden calf narrative is to say God's purposes have always been to work out His plan in the world through a covenant people. Problem—that covenant people from the moment He married them have not wanted to be married to the real Him. The people

through whom God wants to rule the world are unfaithful from the beginning. In Jewish tradition, in Jewish interpretation, Jewish scholars view the golden calf story as Israel's Genesis 3 kind of fall narrative.

**Jon** This brutally honest story about the origin of the covenant relationship between Israel and their God sets the stage for how Israel will continue to wrestle with God throughout their entire story. As we take in the story, we'll see how, just like Israel, we try to remake God in an image that suits us and these attributes of God of been compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and faithfulness, they'll begin to take a new shape and a new meaning. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Okay, here we go. We're talking about Exodus 34:6-7, two verses in the Hebrew Bible that are quoted and re-quoted in different ways more than any other part of the Bible by biblical authors. Again, with us is Tim, of course, and then also along with us for this whole series is Carissa.

**Carissa** Hi Jon.

**Tim** Hello.

**Carissa** Hi Tim.

**Tim** Here we all are in our separate homes. Again, still quarantined.

**Jon** Still quarantined.

**Tim** Or whatever term. There are so many different terms. Staying at home.

**Jon** Sheltered.

**Tim** Shelter in place. Anyway.

**Carissa** Hibernating.

**Tim** Totally.

**Jon** So we're recording this in April—the world has stopped—but these conversations will come out in the fall and we have no idea what fall is going to be like. But you do, you listening to this. So don't spoil it for us. We talked last week when we read these two verses.

**Tim** I'll just read them again. Exodus 34:6-7. "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loyal love and faithfulness, a keeper of loyal love for thousands, forgiver of iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet, He will surely not declare innocent the guilty, visitor of the iniquity of fathers upon the sons and upon the sons of sons to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7.

**Jon** The first part of that verse is really nice and quotable. Tim, you actually showed us too that the first half of the verse is the most re-quoted part of these verses. Or I should say the first of the two verses is the most requoted, and it's those five attributes of God. Those five attributes are what we're going to get after in the subsequent episodes. The God goodies as you put it, these really lovely attributes of God that you would want in really any friend or companion.

But then the second part of these two verses gets intense about God He won't clear the guilty. Like, "Don't get so used to the fact that I'm a nice guy. I'm not going to clear the guilty. And not only that, but I'm going to be that way for every generation that follows." There's a consistency. We talked about the consistency to God's character there. 00:06:00

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. So there's these balancing halves. There's God's overwhelming generosity and mercy and loyal love. This is about His eternal commitment to stick by His promises. However, that doesn't mean that He's just going to overlook or ignore generations of His covenant people that violate the covenant or rebel, or act in ways where they don't deal faithfully with God and neighbor. So however many generations rebel, He will bring justice on them, but eternally for thousands. He will always respond with mercy and compassion, implied, not stated explicitly, but implied if any of those generations, or any people in the generations turned towards Him. I think that's the basic idea.

**Jon** Cool. What we want to do in this episode was jump in to where in the narrative of the Bible this proclamation about God takes place? 00:07:00

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. Why does God say these words to Moses when Moses is like hiding in a cave on top of Mount Sinai? How did he get there? And why is he there? And why is God saying this to him now?

**Jon** Moses is on top of a mountain in a cave?

**Carissa** Should we talk through just the broader narrative of Exodus? What's happening in that whole story?

**Tim** Yeah.

**Jon** Good. I like the idea of the opening scene. Like, how did they get there? Then let's back up.

**Tim** Yeah, reverse engineer?

**Carissa** No, it's a good question. Why in a cave with Moses asking, "Show me your glory?"

**Tim** Yeah, that's right.

**Carissa** Taken out of context, that kind of feels like, “Oh, can I do that?” Or “Why is he doing that? I think it’s an important question. What’s the literary context?”

**Tim** Yeah. It’s the goal that I the reader go find the mountain, cut a hole up in and ask God to show me His glory. Is that the point here? I don’t think that is the point, actually. Oh, because there is somebody who tried that in the Bible. His name is Elijah. He went to the top of the same mountain and asked God to put on the same show again. And God did not cooperate that time. But that’s a whole nother story.

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**Jon** Wait, is that the story where it’s like a whisper and stuff?

**Tim** Yes, yeah. There is a storm and a wind or earthquake but God wasn’t appearing in any of those things. He appears the opposite in that story of how He appeared to Moses. And what He tells Elijah is that he’s being relieved of his duties and to go anoint his replacement. But that’s a whole other story. This story is so awesome.

### **Section Break**

00:09:00

**Tim** So Exodus 34 is the final chapter. The immediate literary unit that the scene is in when God says these words is in a three-chapter episode that goes from Exodus 32 to 34. And it’s the famous golden calf story, where Israel makes golden calf. But why is Israel making a golden calf at the foot of the mountain? To understand that you need to go broader than to a whole section of Exodus that began at chapter 19 when they came to Mount Sinai. But why are they at Mount Sinai? To get there you have to go all the way to chapter 1 of Exodus. Now I have made it way too large. But I think it’s helpful.

**Carissa** Here, I’ll summarize really fast. Okay. At the beginning of the book of Exodus, the Israelites are in Egypt. They’re oppressed by foreign rulers, God hears their cries and promises to bring them up out of Egypt to be with them. And there’s that huge emphasis on knowing Yahweh. And that’s what He does. He brings them out in a miraculous way through the water, so that they and others wouldn’t know that he’s God. Then all seems to be going well. And this is when they come to Mount Sinai?

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**Tim** Well, there’s a couple of hints. There’s a couple of hints of like they’re grumbling in the wilderness on the way.

**Carissa** Yeah, there’s grumbling. And that is interesting because the people grumble and God provides, and they grumble and God provides. Almost like it’s foreshadowing.

**Tim** I mean, they don’t do anything too terrible, they just don’t trust the God that just delivered them. There’s some stories where they begin

to introduce complications leading up to a bigger complication. And it's only after you get into the story and you see that it all went terrible that you go back to those earlier parts and be like, "Oh, yeah."

**Jon** You're speaking of the Israelites leaving Egypt.  
This is Passover week right now, isn't it?

**Carissa** Yeah, for us.

**Jon** Real-time?

**Tim** Yeah. We're in the 24 window of the Passover. That's right.

**Jon** This isn't going to matter so much to people in the future but it's really interesting that people doing Passover are having to do it during quarantine and figure that all out. Huh?

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**Tim** Yeah.

**Jon** It makes it more visceral to where like...I actually read someone talks about how they're praying for the plague to not hit their house.

**Carissa** Yeah, that is interesting.

**Jon** That's part of the story. Thank you, Carissa, for that. Can we even back up even further? Because in the book before, in Genesis, God chooses this family that ends up in slavery, and Moses is going to talk about that. Like, "God, you chose this family, you promised to make this family a great nation that will bless the world."

**Tim** That's right. These people that you rescued is the descendants of Abraham that God made a covenant promise to. You're right. Because that's going to come up in the golden calf story. In a way, what, Carissa, you just summarized is the first half of Exodus. And it's kind of the first main block. It starts in Egypt. You go out of Egypt through the wilderness to the foot of the mountain.

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**Carissa** Like maybe up until Exodus 19, and then Moses goes up on the mountain.

**Tim** So what's interesting, and the story actually signals this, that the beginning of Exodus 19 is the beginning of a new kind of large literary unit that set at the mountain. Because Exodus 19:1 begins with a summary and a date, actually, which are often ways that literary units begin with a date introduction. So Exodus 19:1. "In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt..." That's chapters 1 through 18, "...on that very day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. When they went out from Rephidim..." that's the wilderness that they were just in in chapters 15 through 17. "...they came to the wilderness of Sinai and they camped in the wilderness in front of the mountain."

They're going to camp at this mountain for a year and they're going to leave this mountain not in the end of Exodus, not in Leviticus, not until Numbers 10. So they're going to be here for a lot of text in the Torah. But specifically, chapter 19 on through the end of Exodus 40 is one big literary unit of the first kind of main thing that happens at Mount Sinai.

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**Carissa** And that seems like the really significant things in there are the Ten Commandments and the tabernacle instructions.

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. What God says right after these words to introduce Exodus 19 is God says, "Hey, listen. I redeemed you. Listen to my voice and keep my covenant. And if you do that, you'll be my special possession, a kingdom of priests to all the nations." So we're back to that promise to Abraham here. What we learned is, oh, God is going to enter into a covenant with these people. I wonder what that's going to look like. And what you just said, Carissa, it looks like the Ten Commandments is like the most dense form. And then there's going to be about...I forget the number. I think forty-two commandments to follow, just in this scene in the book of Exodus.

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So God gives the Ten commandments and forty-two more. I'm pretty sure it's 42. After that, at the end of chapter 24...think of it like a marriage. It's sort of like God proposed to the family the moment they camp out, and people say, "Yes, we're going to do it." "Ten commandments?" "Yes, we totally will do it." So Exodus 24 ends with Moses going up the mountain to kind of seal the deal—to tell God, like, "Yeah, the people are going to do it. We're going to do this. We're going to be your covenant people."

So this is the scene at the end of Exodus 24. Moses went up the mountain in verse 15 of Exodus 24 and a divine cloud covered the mountain. And the glory. There's the glory of God. It rested on Mount Sinai, a cloud covered it six days, and on the seventh day, God called Moses from the middle of the cloud. And the eyes of the sons of Israel to their eyes, the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain. And Moses went into the cloud, as he went up the mountain, and he was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

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**Jon** That's a long time.

**Tim** Dude, it's a long time. Forty days and nights.

**Jon** These are important numbers, obviously. Seven and forty.

**Tim** Also, the cloud covered it for six days, and then on the seventh day, he went into the cloud. We're told in that same verse 16 that the glory of God was resting up there. Do you get it? It's a good one.

**Jon** Like God rested on the seventh day, you mean?

**Tim** Yes. As if the glory of God Sabbath on this mountain, Moses wait six days, and on the seventh, he goes up into God's rest on the mountain. That's totally what's going on.

**Jon** He goes to rest with God in the mountain.

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. It's like we got Genesis 1 on the brain here. For sure. So he goes up. And the whole thing is the people just said, "We'll accept these vows. We're going to get married. It's going to be awesome." This is the very next thing (00:16:00) that is going to happen in the narrative. 00:16:00

**Jon** Oh, yeah. Now they got forty days to rethink it.

**Tim** Totally. That's right. What follows is seven divine speeches.

**Jon** Can you imagine, by the way, if you were like in a wedding, and it's like you did the part of the ceremony, and then you take like a forty-day break to decide if you want to go through with it?

**Tim** Totally. That's right. The camera shifts from here and it goes into the cloud. And the cameras on Yahweh and Moses in the cloud and Yahweh speaks seven times and he reveals the blueprints for the tabernacle. In a way you could see this whole section is God says, "Hey, let's get married." The marriage ceremony. And then Moses goes up to get the plans for where Israel and God are going to move in together. They get married, then they are going to make plans to build a house together. Exodus chapter 32:1 is where the story picks up, and it's where everything starts to go terribly, terribly wrong. That's the kind of the narrative context. So it may be worth reading just the opening sentence of Exodus 32. You, Carissa, do you want to do that? 00:17:00

**Carissa** Okay. "Now, when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.' Then all the people tore off the gold rings, which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf. And he said, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' Now, when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh.' So the next day, they rose early and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 00:18:00

**Tim** Dance party.

**Jon** We talked about this, Tim. I think we (*unintelligible*). That wordplay, it's talking about something more than just... 00:18:16

**Tim** Well, the core root of it is the word root of Isaac's name. Yitzhak, which means to laugh.

**Carissa** Like to jest around.

**Tim** Yeah.

**Jon** NIV says indulge in revelry.

**Tim** Totally. It's not child's play kind of scene. It involves physical touching. It's the kind of play that involves physical touching. This is interesting. There's a story in the book of Genesis 26, where a guy named Yitzhak, whose name means 'he will play' or 'he will laugh'.

**Carissa** Isaac.

**Tim** Mm hmm. And he lies about his wife. He goes into a city and he's afraid that somebody is going to kill him and take her. So he says that she's not his wife. That's his strange way of protecting himself. But then the leader of the city looks out a window one morning, and we're told that Isaac was playing with Rivkah (Rebecca) his wife. It's his name. But you know, he's not just like telling a joke. That's the point here. It's like snuggle time.

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So whatever the people are doing, there seems to be something. Either they're having a dance party, or you can look at a bunch of other uses of sahak. It seems like there is some kind of sexual connotation. And that's certainly how this was understood in the history of Jewish interpretation.

**Jon** One thing I never noticed before...I can't believe I didn't notice this. I thought they were building a golden calf to replace Yahweh. But they're here saying, "No, this is Yahweh."

**Carissa** Yeah, they called it Yahweh.

**Tim** No, that's totally right. That's right.

**Jon** I never saw that.

**Carissa** You know what's really interesting about that, too? Is that it seems like it's a reflection on the Ten Commandments, which they just heard Yahweh speak from a fiery cloud, both don't make gods before me, don't make them out of gold or don't make anything in the image of an animal, like a calf. But then also, what about don't take up the name of Yahweh in vain or to the empty thing? It almost seems like this is an example of taking the name of Yahweh and appropriating it to this other thing.

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**Tim** Oh, yeah.



**Carissa** Do you think that's right?

**Tim** Interesting.

**Carissa** It just seems to go through the Ten Commandments so clearly made me wonder if that one is connected in this way.

**Tim** So the first thing you drew attention to was don't have any other gods, it says, "Before my face." This is from the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. "Don't make an idol or any image of anything in the skies above on the land or the waters under the earth." What it doesn't clarify is are these images of Yahweh that are prohibited only or is it images of other gods too? Well, the next line is "don't bow down to them, don't serve them for I Yahweh I'm a passionate God. And then don't carry the name of Yahweh your God in vain."

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It doesn't explicitly only address issue of other gods. The idol could represent Yahweh or it could represent other gods. So that's the first thing. Because you're right, Jon. What they saying is that this golden calf is Yahweh. And then Carissa, that's interesting about carrying the name. We just had this conversation with Carmen Imes in real-time recently. And I guess whenever this releases that won't be have been recently. What she's advocating is the phrase "to carry the name" means when God's people represent Him by having their name upon them, so to speak. But this is almost an inversion where it is they are acting as if this piece of metal is also now a carrier of the name, which is of course idolatry. I think that might be the inversion of it there.

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**Carissa** That's interesting.

**Tim** Yeah, Jon that's a good observation.

**Jon** Well, I mean, it's much worse, it seems like in my mind, to say, "Okay, well, Moses is up there. We're tired of waiting. Let's just create a new god." And for whatever reason, that was always the template in my mind it's what they're doing they're creating a new god. But what they're doing is they're saying, "Okay, that's taking too long. Let's create this idol that is Yahweh and we can just get started. Let's get the party started."

**Carissa** Almost just let's do it in our own way.

**Jon** Let's do it in our own way.

**Carissa** Same God but let's do it the way we want to do it.

**Jon** And God gets really mad about that. And I can understand, but it seems less understandable than creating a new god for some reason to me.

**Tim** You're saying His angry response is less understandable if they're making a totally different god. Is that what you're saying?

**Jon** It's less understandable if they're making a god for Him.

**Tim** To represent Him? 00:23:00

**Jon** "We're on Team Yahweh but we want to just get started. We just want to go."

**Tim** Interesting.

**Jon** So the best thing we know how is create the idol and then we can start the revelries. It seems like it may be an obvious...help me out.

**Tim** I was having the opposite response, thinking, "Oh, yeah, this actually explains better why God's response is so severe." What happened was, God came and he appeared to the people. We didn't talk about this, but He invited all of them to come up on the mountain back in chapter 19 and 20. He said, "Listen, I'm going to show up. It's going to be intense. And when you hear the ram's horn blast on the third day, the people to go up onto the mountain. The ram's horn blast and the people stand back and they're afraid, and they shudder, and they say, "Moses, you go." So Moses goes up alone. 00:24:00

It's clear that the people have a relationship to Yahweh that's uncomfortable for them already. But now we're 40 days into it, there's a storm up there. And that storm up there is Yahweh somehow? And now Moses has gone? This doesn't make any sense. I think that's the image here.

**Jon** "So let's do this on our own terms."

**Tim** Yeah. The idea is, I don't know how to handle smoking mountain fire God who calls our leader away, and now He's gone. You know what we do have categories for? Idols. Because these are gods that we can make and we can handle them and we know how to feed them and throw parties for them." This is like, "We know how to do this. This is normal."

**Jon** Well, how much more intense is this story then for...I mean, if you're saying, "I want to follow Yahweh," how easy is it to suddenly go, "But I'm going to do it in a way that more understandable to me?" 00:25:00

**Carissa** That is easy.

**Jon** That is super easy.

**Tim** You've done that already today?

**Jon** I probably have done it today.

**Tim** Me too.

**Carissa** Well, I don't know, Jon. I think there are other things, there are other literary clues in the text that this is really bad and egregious because what they say, "this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt,"

the whole book up until this point is all about Yahweh saying, "I'm going to bring them up, I'm going to dwell among them so that they will know that I'm Yahweh." So it just seems like part of the plot that what Yahweh really wants is for His people to know Him. And then they do the very opposite thing and use the same words for it. I don't know. It seems like a reflection on that and also a reflection. I thought this was really interesting.

When Aaron says, "Tear off the gold rings in the ears of your wives and bring them to me," that same word "gold rings in the ears of your wives" are what is used for the tabernacle construction. So these are the things that the people are supposed to be using to build the place where God dwells. And instead, they're building this other thing.

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**Tim** Yeah, that's a good one.

**Carissa** So yeah, I think there's more. Oh, and the feast, burnt offerings and peace offerings are three things that God says right after the Ten Commandments to do for Him and to build an altar for Him. So these are like intentional repetitions showing they're doing the opposite. So it seems like there's more.

**Jon** They're going to build an altar but in front of the calf.

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. It's a contrast between the real Yahweh who's unpredictable, and scary, an other, and He reveals Himself to us in the wilderness. There's all these things are kind of stacking up. And He requires that we trust Him.

**Carissa** Yeah, maybe that's the biggest thing.

**Tim** You can't pin Him down, this is Yahweh. And He trumped on Egypt, all right and protected us, but they don't have a handle on this Yahweh. And this is the first time people make an idol in the Bible it's of people wanting to replace who God really is with some version of Yahweh that is more manageable. "Okay, now I can work with this Yahweh. And let this be the Yahweh that will lead us out of here."

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**Jon** Show me one spiritual community that hasn't domesticated God in some way.

**Tim** Oh, totally. I mean, that's surely the point here. The point of the golden calf narrative is to say God's purposes have always been to work out His plan in the world through a covenant people. Problem. That covenant people from the moment He married them have not wanted to be married to the real Him.

**Jon** Mid ceremony.

**Tim** Mid ceremony. This is important strategy in the storyline of the Torah and the Prophets to say that all this is is the Adam and Eve story design pattern.

The people through whom God wants to rule the world are unfaithful from the beginning, which then creates a plot tension. Whatever God's going to have to do, He's going to have to now not just fix the world, but fix His own covenant people. And this is like the plot tension driving the Bible here. 00:28:00

**Carissa** So maybe then, Jon you're right, that when we look at this it's supposed to be a reflection on us. It's like the human situation. This is what humans do. So then we have to keep reading to see how God responds.

**Jon** Yeah. Well, it's funny because when I read it as terms of their creating another god, I kind of felt a little removed from in a way. Now that I'm reading through that lens, I'm like, "Oh, man."

**Tim** In Jewish tradition, in Jewish interpretation, Jewish scholars view the golden calf story as Israel's Genesis 3 kind of fall narrative. Listen to this. This is a line that developed about the golden calf that I thought was fascinating. This is in the Babylonian Talmud. "There is no punishment that comes upon the world that doesn't have at least one twenty fourth of a part of the punishment for the golden calf." 00:29:00

**Jon** I'm confused. What does that mean?

**Tim** Okay. Let me read a parallel saying. This is from a book called Midrash Rabba on Exodus. "There is not a generation of Israel that doesn't suffer at least a particle of punishment for the sin of the golden calf. In other words, in Jewish tradition, what happened here...

**Jon** It's like original sin.

**Tim** Yes, exactly. Exactly right. So any generation of Israel, or in the Talmud, any generation of humanity that something terrible happens, at least one little tiny bit of that is because of what happened at the golden calf.

**Jon** Yeah. It's the way we think of the fall narrative in Genesis 3. Behind everything is that first inclination. 00:30:00

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. To replace the real God with a God that I can handle and that ultimately is made in my own image. It's my own fabrication. Actually, there is a meaningful interplay here with Genesis 1 and 2 because the creature that they make is not an even a human. It's an animal. Something less than human. So they are making the thing that they say is superior to them and will lead them and what it is, is something that actually should be ruled by them according to the image of God. Right? The animals.

**Jon** Yeah.

**Tim** Meanwhile, the one human that is faithful to God is up there, and he's going to come down glowing when he comes down. Anyway.

**Jon** Well, speaking of which...

**Tim** Speaking of which camera shift in verse seven and it goes up to Moses. And really what it is, is Yahweh. The camera goes back up the mountain, and it is Yahweh who says to Moses, "Go down the mountain at once?" This is good. He says, "For your people have corrupted themselves, your people that you brought up out of the land of Egypt, they have quickly turned away from the way that I've commanded them. They have made for themselves the golden calf and bowed down to it, they've offered sacrifices to it, and they have said, "This is your God of Israel who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." Yahweh said to Moses, "I have seen these people, they are people that have a stiff neck. So then..." This verse 10. "... give me nuah." It's no as name as a verb. "Give me rest, that my anger may burn, and I will destroy them and I will make you a great nation." 00:31:00

**Jon** "You" referring to Moses?

**Tim** Yes. You, Moses, singular, I will make you into a great nation. We'll start over. You'll become a new Abraham. This thing about Noah's name is the wordplay. Because when you give somebody rest, if you're giving them rest from distress, that's a good thing. But give me rest like I need a break from you. Go away. In fact, that's how most English translations translate it, don't they? 00:32:00

**Jon** I need some alone time.

**Tim** I need some alone time. New American Standard has "Leave me alone." What Moses goes on to do is not leave God alone. He starts to intercede for the people. What he ends up doing is bringing rests to God but by interceding for the people. It's very, very interesting. Carissa, you brought up, I think in this episode, that Moses objected five times to...

**Jon** Oh, that's the last episode.

**Carissa** It might have been the last. But yeah, that he resisted five times. When God first spoke to him and called him to bring the people out of Egypt, yeah, five times he says, "No, I can't do that."

**Tim** Where was he standing? He's up on this mountain. So Moses, last time he bargained with God on this mountain, it was five excuses to get out of having to lead the people. Now he finds himself standing in the same spot and he engages in five acts of intercession. In chapter 32, all of 33, and then 34 he intercedes five times. This is so cool. We don't have time to go into it. But he kind of incrementally gets God to 00:33:00

forgive the people. And he works in steps towards the ultimate goal. The two verses that we're looking at Exodus 34:6-7 come right in between the fourth and the fifth acts of intercession. Isn't that interesting?

**Carissa** Yeah. Do you think that they're part of God's response to Moses that when Moses is asking...he's interceding but he's asking to know God, that this is God's response?

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. The fourth act of intercession is "Show me your glory." Because what God just said is, "Listen..." Earlier, he said, "I'm not going to go with you. I will forgive the people. I will continue my covenant with them." He finally gets God to say that after his third act of intercession. But what he says is "But I'm not going to go with you. I'm just going to send an angel. An angel will lead you up." And Moses says, "No, your glory has to go with us or else the whole plan falls apart because your presence is the only thing that makes us different than the other nations." And then he says to God, "Show me your glory."

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### **Section Break**

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**Jon** So can we pause? I mean, it is strange, and we've talked about this interaction with Moses and God before, but just to put on the table again, Moses is trying to convince God to be faithful. Well, God is saying, "I'll start over with you, Moses." So in that way, it's kind of him being faithful to His promise to Abraham.

**Carissa** Yeah, He uses the words from that promise. "I'll make you a great nation" from Genesis 12.

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**Tim** Yeah, that's right. Well, that would involve, in this case, destroying all of the tribes of Israel. Which, you know, I guess if God only made His promise to Abraham, you'd be cool. But He then also said Isaac and to Jacob, who's the father of these 12 tribes, "This is the seed through which I'm going to do my thing."

**Jon** So it's just weird that Moses has to be...five times he has to do this with God.

**Tim** Yeah, that's right.

**Jon** There's something really important here that I don't fully appreciate, which is to be the intercessor did Moses' role.

**Tim** Well, in this first act of intercession is the foundational one. The first thing Moses says is, "First of all, don't do this, God. Don't destroy the people and cancel the covenant. First of all, the Egyptians will hear about it and your reputation among the nations will really...your ratings will go down big time because they're going to think that you're inconsistent."

**Carissa** He knows that that's something that God's concerned about. Because even through the whole Exodus, he says, "So that the Egyptians would know that I'm God." So now He's bringing it back up. 00:37:00

**Tim** Yeah. You showed yourself to be a certain way to rescue these people. And now you're just going to destroy them? I haven't thought of this until our last conversation. He wants to prevent Yahweh from being viewed as inconsistent. Don't you think that's what's underneath it?

**Carissa** Yeah, that's interesting. He doesn't want the Egyptians to say, "With evil, with ra intent He brought them out."

**Tim** In other words, he doesn't want people to think, "Well, Yahweh nice in some moments, but then He will destroy you in the next moment and for no good reason," or "Yeah, He changes how He deals with you." That's one reason. The second reason he says is, "Remember, Abraham, Isaac in Israel that you made a promise to, you swore an oath, saying..." and then he quotes the promise that He made to them. A multiplied descendants, give them the land. 00:38:00

**Carissa** You know what's interesting about that promise, though, is that you know how God had said to Moses, "I'll make you a great nation" from Genesis 12, He made that promise just to Abraham individual when he was telling him, "Leave your people and your country." And now when Moses is saying back to him, "No, remember your promise was to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Jacob's other name, and it's all about the descendants." So he's highlighting a different part of that promise.

He is highlighting not just the context of when God says, I'll make you a great nation, Moses is just when Abraham's leaving his family and his people, which is kind of what God's asking him to do. But then Moses is saying, "No, the promise is for all of the descendants. You said you would give them the land and they would inherit it forever." That's from Genesis 15 and 20. Or maybe more 22. So it's like a different aspect of that promise that it's made to all the descendants, not just me.

**Tim** That's right. Jon, we have talked about this part before. That what Moses is doing is he's asking Yahweh to change what he said he's going to do in this moment by remaining faithful to what He said He would do and in the past. 00:39:00

**Jon** Right.

**Tim** That's an important part of this here is that he's actually not getting God to do something that God didn't want to do already. He's asking God to change in relation to judgment or punishment in order to fulfill what He said He was going to do earlier. That there's something really important in the tension between those two in this

very moment. It's as if God's purpose to work in the world through humans signs God up automatically for these kinds of situations.

**Jon** Yes, I get that. And I think I've even said a bit irreverently, like, what a dumb move for God to partner with humans. But let's run with that. My expectation would be then God would say to Moses like, "Yeah, I'm used to this. This happens all the time, Moses. I'll tell you what I'm going to do." And just cut to the chase. Why this back and forth and intercession?

**Tim** Yeah. Well, maybe we're to this portrait of Yahweh as a being with complex emotions. I don't know. I mean, He's hurt, He's angry. This is the same Yahweh that comes out, especially in the Prophet Hosea, where he talks about being like a wounded husband and a wounded father, who's just like an emotional wreck over his kids. I mean, it's very passionate, emotional language that God uses to describe Himself.

But also actually, we're leading up to the moment when God's going to say...Exodus 34:6-7, and the first two words in that that Carissa and I are both doing it individually, compassion is a deep emotional word. Carissa, you've done more work on it than I have up to this point.

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**Carissa** Yeah. It's like the compassion of a mother or father for their tiny child.

**Jon** This is the story really portrays a very emotive God.

**Tim** So here's what's interesting. God responds to Moses' first act of intercession by saying, "Okay, I won't destroy them." That's what Moses accomplished in the moment. "I won't destroy them." Actually, this was a scholar Harman (*unintelligible*) who pointed this out. God doesn't tell Moses what the people have done yet. Moses is up there interceding for the people not actually knowing what they've done yet. All he knows is something terrible has happened.

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So Moses goes down, and then he gets angry. So God was angry, Moses intercedes but Moses still doesn't know. When he goes down, and he sees what they did, he gets angry, and he shatters the tablets. He grinds the statue into powder and makes the people drink it. Which I think I actually understand now what's going on there. We won't go down that rabbit hole.

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Then what he does is he calls the Levi it's to himself and tells them to arm themselves with swords. And then he sends them to go out in the camp and execute, presumably, all the people who were the instigators of the idol, which is three thousand. So some people feel a contradiction there. Wait, I thought God just said he was not going to do that but then Moses goes down and a bunch of people die. And then after those three thousand die, Moses says, "Oh, man, you guys have committed a great sin. I'm going to go back up to Yahweh, and maybe I can atone for you, guys, sin." It's as



if he has a sense that this isn't over yet. There's still more interceding that needs to be done. Isn't that interesting. It's not a one and done thing.

And then what Moses goes on to intercede for I think then what goes on is then on behalf of all of the people who weren't the instigators, but they were the ones...you could call them they were accomplices to the crime. I think it's the three thousand criminals as it were that die. And then an acts of intercession, two, three, four and five, he's interceding now for the accomplices who looked on and didn't do anything to stop it or something like that. And this is the moment where Moses offers his own life for the sins of the people. That's intercession number two.

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After that, God says, "It's okay, Moses, I'm not going to kill you in place of the people, but I'm going to send an angel because I can't be around these people." And then acts of intercession three and four, are Moses saying, "No, you have to come with us. We won't leave the mountain if you don't come with us." And then that's when God says, "Okay, I'll go with you. My glory will go with you." So then Moses says, "Show me your glory." And then we're finally to Exodus 34 verses 6 and 7. How did Moses get into that cave on the mountain with God saying these words? That's how we got there. This is a complex story.

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**Carissa** Those five acts of intercession, though, they're all for different things. They're not the exact same thing. Which kind of response to your question earlier, Jon, I think that it wasn't just a back and forth of Moses asking the same thing over and over and there was one thing God said yes, another thing God said yes, and another God said yes. Five times.

**Tim** It also shows Moses as a savvy diplomat. The story is creating him under a role, is creating a need for a certain kind of person. If God is going to be married to people who faithfully represent Him, they're going to blow it. So what we're going to need now in this covenant relationship is some kind of prophet intercessor figure who will mediate this relationship between God and His people. And Moses is kind of like the prototype of that role.

**Jon** Does that mean that that's kind of what we want in a pastor, a good diplomat with God, who can intercede in that way?

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**Tim** Oh, got it. No. Actually no. I don't think so at least. I think this is a part of a bigger strategy in the Torah and Prophets to show what kind of deliverer and messianic deliver that God's covenant people need. It's essentially a part of the Messianic message of the Hebrew Bible is creating a need for...seed of the woman, the prophet like Moses, the true king from the line of David, the ultimate priest who will mediate the covenant between God and His people.

**Carissa** Yeah, an intercessor who gives his life like Moses does.

**Tim** That's right. The role of a pastor and a shepherd is to imitate Christ. That's how Paul puts it. So in that sense, they are to be a kind of mediator, but they are mediators that imitate the mediating work of the ultimate mediator, so to speak. So maybe I should go back on that no and just say kind of. That's kind of what a pastor is. But at this moment in the story that we're in, what a pastor is doing is imitating what the ultimate intercessor Jesus did—continuing that work. 00:46:00

**Jon** And what's ringing in my ears right now is Jesus' statement of "Father forgive them".

**Tim** Yeah, that's right. I think the reason why all of this matters for understanding these two verses that we're going to study is that all of a sudden, Exodus 34:6 and 7 actually becomes a commentary on Yahweh's behavior in this very story. This whole story is revealing that Yahweh is a certain kind of God with certain kinds of character traits. And what these two verses do is boil down the character traits that you've just seen operate in the story of the golden calf, which is He will deal justly and fairly, and with people who abandon Him and hate Him to his face, He will deal with them it for however many generations continue that behavior. But His ultimate baseline and His deepest heart and purpose is mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, which He demonstrates. He demonstrates both verse 6 and 7 in this story. 00:47:00

**Section Break** 00:48:19

**Jon** There's a couple loose threads maybe you can speak to real quick. In the last part of the verse...

**Tim** The generations thing?

**Jon** Yeah, the generations thing. What's the word? Something the iniquity. He will deliver the iniquity.

**Tim** He'll visit...

**Jon** Okay. He'll visit the iniquity on the third and the fourth. We haven't talked about this, but the word "generations" isn't there in...

**Tim** Hebrew.

**Jon** ...in Hebrew. But kind of we put it there because that's what it's talking about. And to us, the third and the fourth just sounds weird. Maybe in Hebrew it doesn't. But what is this thing with the third and the fourth? I think in the last episode, I asked, why not the fifth and the sixth?

**Tim** Totally. Yeah, that's right.

**Jon** What is this about?

**Tim** This is cool. To say three, even four is actually a Hebrew turn of a phrase. It's a figure of speech. In the beginning chapters of the Prophet Amos, he starts rattling off all these nations around Israel and the terrible things that they'll do. And he'll say, "For three sins of the Moabites, even for four I'm going to do this. For the sins of the Israelites, three, even for four, I'll do this." There's a couple of times this happens in the book of Proverbs where there's a riddle that uses this three, even four. You guys know what I'm talking about? 00:49:00

**Carissa** Yeah. Proverbs 30. Yes, it's used three times.

**Tim** Oh, yeah, this is great. Proverbs 30:18. "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I don't understand The way of an eagle in the sky..."

**Jon** Oh, yeah, I remember talking about this. Years ago we talked about this.

**Tim** Yeah. "...the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman."

**Jon** Three things, even four. 00:50:00

**Tim** Three things, even four is a poetic figure speech meaning however many or many. Which makes perfect sense here. However many generations repeat the sins of their ancestors, I will deal justly with them and bring them what they deserve. Contrast that with the opening line of verse 7. "He keeps loyal love for thousands." So it's a contrast. For thousands of generations, He will maintain covenant loyalty. And for however many generations to the third, even the fourth, He will deal justly." But His ultimate purpose is for that eternal loyal love, but not at the expense of justice. I think is what the three, even the four are doing here.

**Carissa** I have a question about this verse, the contrast between three and four or the third and the fourth and then to a thousand. I understand the point is that the scales tipped for God toward His graciousness, that we can count on that as a part of His character. Even for an unfaithful generation or person, we can always appeal to His graciousness. And that's kind of what is happening in this narrative. I also wonder if the extending of the love to thousands of generations also has something to do with intercession. Like the third and the fourth, it's like however, many generations continue to sin. But extending to the thousands sometimes it doesn't seem to have to do with the people's righteousness. Like the Israelite people down below who just made the golden calf, we don't really know if they have turned back to Yahweh, right? 00:51:00

**Tim** Yeah.

**Carissa** But we do know that Moses has been an intercessor for them. And the reason that God forgives the people and goes with them isn't

because of the people. He makes it really clear that it's because I favor you, Moses, so I'll go with the people. It just seems like another piece of the puzzle or maybe of the plotline or the pattern, that there's this one person who will be favored, and that will extend this chesed or this grace or lovingkindness to everyone knows. 00:52:00

**Tim** Good. In other words, God can work with at least one faithful representative. And if there's one of those, their righteousness or their covenant faithfulness can cover for the sins of the many. Because what else is the story except one righteous intercessor up on the mountain whose faithfulness covers for the sins of the many? Carissa, thank you. That's a really good way of putting that. Jon, that is significant for you.

**Jon** Well, yeah. I mean, I was sitting there struggling with this whole narrative of Moses interceding and how it makes God look, I don't know, wishy-washy or unsure of Himself, or whatever, that makes me feel uncomfortable. But when you look at it through the lens of God needs an intercessor, a righteous intercessor...

**Tim** Or more humanity needs an intercessor. At least God requires one. He'll only work with a faithful intercessor.

**Carissa** Or He'll show His love to others based on His love or His favor for one. 00:53:00

**Tim** That's a better way of putting it. Well said.

**Jon** Yeah.

**Carissa** He does this with Abraham.

**Jon** He just needs one.

**Carissa** Yeah, a real good one.

**Tim** They need to be really good.

**Jon** And that's what you learn. You learn how important this one is. And Moses becomes such a great image of that one. In this story, man, he would shine, literally.

**Tim** Jon, that's really important. After his last act of intercession is when he goes down the mountain and he's glowing with the divine glory. And he has to now cover himself with a veil just like God's glory will be covered with a veil in the tabernacle.

**Carissa** Is that the same word?

**Tim** It's a different word for "veil".

**Carissa** Okay. Same idea though.

**Tim** But the same theme. Moses in this act of intercession actually comes to be almost indistinguishable from God in certain moments. I think this is a design pattern actually linking all the way back to the image of God. When humans are fully charged and operating at full covenant capacity the way they're designed to be, they become true images of God, which for sure is contrast with this golden calf. What a pitiful replacement?

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**Jon** Of being the cool statue of Yahweh yourself to making one.

**Tim** As opposed to the image that God has made already of Himself, which Moses is at his best, which is a superhuman. So, yeah, if God has one faithful intercessor to work with, He will allow them to stand in the place of the many. Carissa, that's right. That's how He can keep covenant faithfulness to the many even when they are not all faithful to Him. That's what the story is telling us.

**Carissa** Yeah.

**Tim** What kind of God would relate to a group of people that way? Well, a God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and faithfulness.

### **Section Break**

00:55:42

**Jon** So we're going to get into each of those five words: Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger...Is that one word?

**Tim** Slow to anger. It's two but still compound phrase in Hebrew.

**Jon** Compound phrase. Slow to anger, abounding in loyal love, and faithfulness or...

**Carissa** Truth or faith.

**Jon** Truthfulness, faithfulness...we'll get into it. We're going to do a deep dive into each. Both you Tim and you Carissa have kind of taken your own to research and write. So the first one, that God is compassionate, Carissa, you've been looking at that. So that's what you'll lead us through this attribute of God of being compassionate and really we'll look through the entire story of the Bible through that lens.

**Carissa** Yeah, right. Looking forward to it.

**Tim** It's exciting. It's good stuff. It's great how you can see now why this story is foundational for the whole rest of the Old Testament story. Oh, Exodus 34:6-7 gets quoted one time in the New Testament too. It's a good closer. In the opening movement of chapter 1 of the gospel of John, come on now. John knows what he's doing. In John 1:14. He says, "The word..." referring

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to Jesus before He was named Jesus. The word pre-incarnate Messiah. "The Word became flesh and set up a tent among us, or dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the one and only from the Father."

So these two words here, "setting up a tent" and "seeing his glory" they're specifically of Moses up on the mountain with Yahweh getting blueprints for the tabernacle seeing God's glory. So we saying the one that Moses met on Mount Sinai became human. That's his claim right here. Then look at the rest of verses 14. He says, "Of that one and only from the Father, he's full of grace and truth. For from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace, for the Torah was given through Moses, grace and truth were through Jesus Messiah."

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So this little phrase "grace and truth" is actually, in Greek, one of the most common ways the Greek Septuagint translated the phrase from Exodus 34:6. Covenant love and truth. Full of covenant love or loyal love and truth. Grace and truth.

**Jon** Truth being the faithful attribute?

**Tim** Yes, truth being trustworthy, truthful and grace, meaning generous in His covenant love. The words that John has chosen are connected to two of the five attributes of God in Genesis 3:4-6. Isn't that cool?

**Carissa** Yeah.

**Tim** It's like Jesus is the incarnation of the God of Exodus 34:6-7.

**Carissa** The connection to the God's glory dwelling in the tabernacle at the...we're just kind of like the culmination of the whole Exodus story that the people build the tabernacle and Yahweh's glory dwells there. It's just interesting that that's exactly what John's saying is happening in Jesus. With all these attributes, He just embodies Yahweh. He is the glory of Yahweh.

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**Tim** In other words, if John were to talk with somebody who said, "I don't understand how Jesus of grace and love what He has to do with the God of the Old Testament, whose like wrath and anger," I think he would just be dumbfounded because like, "What?" He wouldn't know what to say. His point is the full-orbed portrait of Yahweh is the same God is revealed in the person of Jesus. So either I've misunderstood God of the Old Testament, or I've misunderstood Jesus, or I've just misunderstood both if I think that there's some big disconnect between them. All right.

**Jon** All right.

**Carissa** That's awesome.

**Jon** Thanks for listening to this episode of the BibleProject podcast. We've got a lot of ground to cover in this series. We're going to go through each of these character attributes of God. But we want to let you know that we're going to begin to collect questions right away for the upcoming question and response episodes during this series.

01:00:00

So if you have a question and you'd like us to consider it, please record yourself asking the question, keep it to around 20 or 30 seconds, give us your name, where you're from and email it to [info@bibleproject.com](mailto:info@bibleproject.com). And extra credit, if you transcribe the question for us, it saves us a ton of time. Again, email is [info@bibleproject.com](mailto:info@bibleproject.com). Next week we're back with more in this series.

**Carissa** God is actually depicted as a nursing mother, which I think the image is really, really powerful. A mother holds her baby eight inches from her face and looks into their big baby eyes and sustains them with her own life. So this is what God says He is like, but even better.

**Tim** This brings up a bigger issue that God's self introduces here with a word describing a deep emotion. It has been challenging throughout Jewish and Christian tradition and people trying to understand the nature of God because emotions are so much a part of the changing physical mental state of a human, and thinking of God as an adaptive, changing emotional being. If you're really trying to fill out a robust, comprehensive view of God's nature, in as much as we can know it, people have had to wrestle with what seem like two opposite ways of thinking about God being the unchanging and unmoved or is He genuinely moved by emotion, and how those two go together.

01:01:00

**Jon** We also want to let you know that we've recently launched a prayer list on our website. So if you'd like to partner with us in prayer, each month, you'll receive an email update with prayer items of things going on at the BibleProject that we'd love for you to lift up to God for us on our behalf, and be connected to you in that way. As BibleProject continues to grow, we're expanding our vision to reach a global audience, and the need for prayer is ever more apparent. You can learn more about joining the prayer team at [Bibleproject.com/prayer](https://Bibleproject.com/prayer).

01:02:00

Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel, our show notes are from Camden McAfee, and the theme music is from the band Tents. BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit. We're in Portland, Oregon, and we make free resources to experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Our resources are free because of the support of many people just like you all over the world. We're so thankful. Thanks for being a part of this with us.