

God E12 Final

God, Abraham, Demons, & Giants Q+R

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Jon: This is The Bible Project podcast, and this is Jon and Tim Mackie.

Tim: Here we are.

Jon: Here we are. Today on this episode, we are going to do a question or response. We've been going through a long series on the complexity of God in the Bible. We've done something like 12 episodes, and it's spun out a lot of really cool discussion, and some great questions. So that's what we're going to do today, is answer some questions.

Tim: This is our third point in the series, stopping to respond to questions, I think. So awesome. You guys have sent in wonderful, thoughtful questions. Let's go for it.

Jon: Here we go. Jumping right in, what do you get for us?

Tim: We've got a question from Bryce Stun who lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Bryce: Hey, Jon and Tim. My name is Bryce Stun from Lawrence, Kansas but I'm currently in Chicago, Illinois, studying at Moody Bible Institute. A bunch of the guys from my floor we're watching the Season 5 premiere, and we had a specific question for the God series. The question is, how does God's interaction with the world that is wanting to co-rule with celestial and terrestrial creatures, relate to God's transcendence and sovereignty? And to all of you at The Bible Project, your work is inspiring and helpful each and every day—thanks you so much!

Jon: Great question, Bryce. Thanks for watching the live Q&R. That was a fun experience.

Tim: Yeah, totally. I hope you had some popcorn or something to snack on.

Jon: I wonder if they noticed the room where we did the live Q&R, the people that joined for that event weren't necessarily people following the podcast.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: People in the room were totally lost. I think they were going like, "What is happening? What are you guys talking about?"

Tim: Like out of the starting gate, we're talking about stars and divine beings and the resurrection body.

Jon: And I'm looking out, and everyone's just like, "What? Deer in the headlights."

Tim: Totally, yeah. But for faithful podcast listeners, you guys knew why we were talking about stars and resurrection bodies. So Bryce, you and your friends' question is really good, and it's naturally the question that arises I think out of a thoughtful reading of Genesis 1. About 2 billion thoughtful questions should arise out of reading Genesis 1.

Jon: A lot of questions.

Tim: One reasonable question is, there's an Elohim introduced to us on page 1. We'll discover on page 2 this Elohim's personal name is Yahweh. What kind of Elohim is being described? Well, one that can generate a universe out of his creative thoughts and words and purposes. That's remarkable. It's a remarkable being. That's a being that has a lot of power.

Jon: Yeah, the most power in the universe.

Tim: Apparently. What other powerful thing could there be than one that can generate reality? So, what does that being do? How does that being operate with such responsibility? We've talked about this before, but it's good to focus it in, in relation to the question of God's power and sovereignty, and so on. Is that after bringing order to the chaos in days one through three, he brings form to the chaos by creating time, by separating the chaos waters from the chaos waters to create space, then day three for dry land to emerge.

Jon: Because you could have stopped there.

Tim: An Elohim could have. Let's think about an Elohim that just wants to master chaos and then be lord of all and master of all.

Jon: It's just kind of like painting.

Tim: Yes, yeah.

Jon: It's just kind of like, "Oh, cool. I'm going to do this really beautiful project. Oh, look how beautiful that is," and then there's no other beings to share with.

Tim: There's no other beings involved. It's just a solo work.

Jon: A painting that no one else gets to see.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That was a possibility, of course.

Jon: But then why are we here?

Tim: What days four through six goes through back all three of the elements that were ordered on days one through three, and then God starts sharing His world. And specifically on day four, He delegates authority/rule to these heavenly beings. He tells them to rule the day and night so they become responsible for guarding the order of time.

Jon: Whatever that means.

Tim: Well, but think. Remember, as our friend Mike says, get your inner Israelite in your head.

Jon: Well, people listening won't know that phrase.

Tim: No, that's right.

Jon: We're just hanging out with Mike Heiser, and he has the phrase.

Tim: That's right. In an interview with my Heiser that we did, we've referred to this work before - will come out later in the series.

Jon: But he talked about having the inner Israelite in your head.

Tim: Getting an ancient Israelite in your head. Channeling your inner ancient Israelite when you're reading the Bible. It's a great image. So put the ancient Israelite in your head, especially if you're a priest or Levite running the temple in Jerusalem, and God's given you the sacred feasts to order the year by so that every week and every month is a ritual retelling of the story of Israel and of creation.

Jon: And how do you know when those days are coming? You look at the stars.

Tim: The stars. So the stars become the guardian of day and night of their calendar. Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, all that stuff. And so, they're told to rule. That's a responsibility God has given. And some of the stars, really faithfully, they're just on point. They're just always in the same place at the same time. But there are these other ones that wander.

Jon: The planets.

Tim: Do you know the Greek word for "wander"?

Jon: I don't.

Tim: Planáō

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: It's where we get the word "planet".

Jon: It's a wanderer.

Tim: It's the lights up there that wander. They don't behave, they are odd ones. Anyhow, there's a whole bunch of stuff. This all gets into how the ancients perceived the stars. All that to say is the depiction of God's sovereignty is that He shares it with the creatures - the heavenly beings. And then even more remarkable is over the sky land and sea, He shares authority yet again with his images - his earthly images - and he tells them to rule and have authority.

So the fundamental depiction of this all-powerful sovereign God on page one is that He loves to share and that He wants His rule to be expressed through a family of partners, heavenly and earthly. So that's page 1.

Jon: And you used the "family" on purpose there?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: It sounded just like a clue.

Tim: Oh, that's true, because family language, the sons of Elohim will refer to the heavenly partners. Actually, the word "son" will come to refer to God's earthly partners as well. The people of Israel are called the son of God, and then the family of Jesus will be called the sons of God.

So God wants His power to be expressed in the world, in the story, through a covenant family of partners. He doesn't want to do it alone; he wants to do it through partners.

Jon: Is He limiting his power in some way then?

Tim: Clearly, because He's surrendering His creation to other wills that may not do things the way He would want them to be done. And that's what creates the plot conflict of the whole Bible.

Let's just pause. Throughout, especially Christian history, especially in the last 500 years, all kinds of debates and divisions and splintering has happened in Christian tradition, based off debates about God's sovereignty.

I mean, the big systems of like Calvinism or Arminianism. What all those traditions are doing is they're wrestling with this fundamental, biblical portrait of the complexity of God's sovereignty. I'm actually much less interested in the systems. What those systems are is just different people's way of organizing how the biblical story works and how God's sovereignty is portrayed. But what everybody has to begin with is this - God's not a solitary - what do you call him? The painter? Whatever.

Jon: This this artist. This hermit artist.

Tim: Yeah. God's being is being in family, being in community, a being that wants to share. Once you get it, especially this is expressing the gospel of John, you realize the very nature of this God is a community.

Jon: Before He even starts creating.

Tim: Before creation, God's a community of eternal love. The word to describe that eventually will be the Trinity in Christian tradition, but for John, he just calls it love. God is love.

Jon: So one way to think about this is that if the nature of the Creator God is a community of love, it seems like a natural extension of that would be this kind of delegated authority.

Tim: Would be creation, like abundance share. It's the same thing like when we talked with our kids about "How can you love mom and me and my brother." I have two sons; you have two sons. And explain our concept, like, "Just because you have love for someone doesn't mean you don't have any left for the other person. Love is this kind of thing that—

Jon: Not a scarce resource.

Tim: Yeah, it's not a zero-sum thing. It's like exponential thing. The more of us there are that are committed to each other in this family, the more love there is that there wasn't there before. And something like that is the image. It's beautiful. Creation is the overflow of God's creative love, and so, God ruling the world, God's power expressed through love and sharing isn't like an invention of the gospel of John. It's right there in Genesis 1 if you have eyes to see it there.

So that's what I think is going on there. God's sovereignty has to be qualified with that set of concepts from Genesis 1.

Jon: Bryce also asked about his transcendence. Any sort of perspective that this brings on the idea of transcendence, the otherness of God?

Tim: Well, I guess it's similar in that any being that can generate a universe has to—

Jon: Is not like us.

Tim: Is not like us. Other. Where you can use spatial metaphors is above or outside of. But very clearly, the fact that the heavenly and earthly rulers are symbols or images of that being means that a being wants to exist also in and in relationship with these ones He's created. I'm not sure I had enough coffee to really ponder that thought.

Jon: Well, is there any amount of coffee that gets you prepared to talk about God's transcendence?

Tim: I don't think so. I don't think if Isaiah had an extra cup of coffee, he would have been able to hold it together in his vision in Isaiah 6. I think he would have fallen on his face either way.

Jon: All right. We've got a question next from Linda Gibson. She is here in Portland.

Tim: Right here in Portland. Linda, come visit the studio sometime.

Linda: I've heard in Tim Keller podcast sermon about Abraham's conversion with the three visitors that he entertains in his tent before they go down to bring judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah as being an intercession like the one you discussed between Moses and God a couple of weeks ago. Can you comment on how this early Abraham story contributes to the intercession paradigm you talk about from the example of Moses?

Tim: All right. First, shout out to Timothy Keller. That guy is awesome. I've learned so much from that, from him. He's great.

The story about Abraham and the three visitors, one of whom turns out to be Yahweh himself in the story of Abraham, so yeah, you've raised a key question. In Jon and I's conversation, we talked about Moses as the key intercessor who's invited into the heart of God to tell God to change by being consistent. I highlight that story because it's given so much space. And his face shines afterwards. It's a really important story.

You're raising the point there is another story of someone interceding in a similar way. That's before Moses. And that's true. I had thought about that story, but actually, again, that conversation was like a year or so ago, and I thought a lot more about the Abraham stories, put a lot more work into the stories since then. So yes, your instinct is right, Linda.

Actually, Abraham is the first prophetic intercessor. Actually, no, he's the second. The first is Noah who gets off the ark and offers the sacrifice, the burnt offering, and God looks at humanity who's just as depraved and corrupt as they were before the flood. And after the flood, after Noah sacrifice, God says, "You know what I'm never going to do again because humans are terribly wicked? I'm never going to do the thing that I just did."

So Noah's intercession takes the form of a sacrifice, not prayer. But it does compel God to change his mind by staying the same, so to speak.

Jon: Why? Because he was going to wipe out Noah's family?

Tim: No, no. Point is, is that this creator has the prerogative to destroy humanity for being faithless covenant partners. That's within God's prerogative. But He has mercy and delivers one. Noah and his family, He's called righteous and blameless. That's going to be important. Righteous and blameless.

He's saved, he gets off the boat, and then offers a sacrifice, which he's not commanded to do, necessarily, he does it, and then all of a sudden, God notices humans are no different. They are exactly the same. Humans are not going to be any different.

Jon: So that clues you in to like God's going to—

Tim: It clues you in like, "Oh, God could do this again. " But it's Noah's sacrifice that compels God to continue his covenant promises to be consistent by changing His approach towards corrupt humans. Not to destroy them, but rather to begin to put up with them to move forward the story.

Jon: So Noah's the first human's intercessor?

Tim: The first, and it takes place through sacrifice. Abraham is the first prophetic interceptor through prayer and intercession as such. He's second in this sequence of figures.

Jon: This is Genesis 20?

Tim: Actually, Genesis 18 and 19, is the stories of what happens. So 18 is Yahweh and two spiritual beings shows up, but they are simply called the men.

Jon: The men.

Tim: The men. There's so much we could spend hours on Genesis 18 and 19. There's so much cool stuff I can show you. We don't have time. The key is that after these figures tell Abraham and Sarah that they're finally going to have the promised son, Isaac, down in Genesis 18:16, it says, "The men arose and looked down toward Sodom. Abraham was walking there with them to send them off and Yahweh said - Yahweh has a little internal conversation that we're privy to - "Should I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?"

Jon: He's talking with angels here?

Tim: Yes, the ideas is Yahweh and these two men. And Yahweh is just having this internal conversation. "Should I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? Which is to bring divine justice on Sodom and Gomorrah. "Abraham is going to become great and mighty nation and in Him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. You know why I chose Abraham?" God says, "that he may command his children, teach his children and his house after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what He's spoken to him."

So this is new information that Yahweh has chosen Abraham to become a blessing to the nations. We knew that, but now we hear that Abraham's obedience to the way of Yahweh is necessary for that blessing to go out. He has to be a man of righteousness and justice so that Yahweh can bring upon Abraham what he's spoken - the promises. So that's the portrait here.

And then what do we see Abraham doing? God says, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great." That's a design pattern. Remember the blood of Abel crying out from the ground? Now it's the blood of the innocent in Sodom and Gomorrah crying out, just like later in Egypt, the cry of the innocent blood of the enslaved Israelites will cry out and the cry will go up to God. This motif - the cries of innocent going up.

So God says, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah great." And the word "outcry" means the cry of the innocent. "So I'm going to go down and see whether everything done there is true according to its outcry." God's going to go investigate. He's going to do justice. "I'm not going to pull the trigger before I do a full investigation." That's what a righteous, and just person would do.

Jon: Right. But if you're God you—

Tim: The story is the story.

Jon: The story is the story. He's going to go down and check it out.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. And this isn't the first time God's gone down to a wicked city. This is what He did with Babylon.

Jon: He went down to Babylon?

Tim: God says, "Let's go down to see."

Jon: Oh.

Tim: So this is a new Babylon. Design pattern still. It's so cool. Here's the thing. Abraham gets privy to this idea. "Oh, my gosh, God's about to wipe out the city. My nephew lives there. My nephew lives here." So everyone Abraham just been brought into this conversation and the whole thing is contingent on Abraham doing righteousness and justice. Then Abraham learns that God's going to wipe out a whole city—

Jon: Wait. Abraham's listened to this whole conversation?

Tim: Well, something prompts Abraham to step up to the play.

Jon: Yeah, he knows what's up now.

Tim: Because he goes up to Yahweh and says, "Listen. Hold on. Are you going to sweep away the righteous along with the wicked in Sodom?"

Jon: This is where he started negotiating.

Tim: Well, what we perceive as negotiating.

Jon: It feels like negotiation.

Tim: Totally. Let's pause real-quick because the keyword righteousness is really important. God just said, "I've chosen Abraham and he needs to do and teach his household to do righteousness and justice." And that's called the way of Yahweh. Now, here's Abraham getting in Yahweh's face saying, "Hold on. You're about to do something that isn't your way."

Jon: "There's righteous people there."

Tim: "My nephew's there? He's not a bad guy." He's not the most upstanding guy as we are going to find, he's human, but he's not—

Jon: He's dedicated the way?

Tim: Yeah, totally. "And he's among the chosen family. He's my nephew." So what Abraham's asking God to do is to keep the way of the Lord, to be righteous and just, in how He deals with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jon: But arguably, he could have wiped out. It would have been just to wipe out.

Tim: Oh, but here we're to the same thing as the golden calf story, about the tension in God's himself. Do you remember this?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In one sense, it would be just to bring judgment on...right?

Jon: Yeah, on Israelite for doing idolatry.

Tim: On Israelites for idolatry, and on Sodom and Gomorrah for especially the abuse of the poor. When Ezekiel brings up the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah in Ezekiel 16, what he mentions is abuse of the poor. So it would be just for God to bring judgment, but in another sense, it would not be just because God's whole point is that He's going to bring blessing and to save the nations. It's that tension of which one's going to... God's mercy and God's judgment are both parts of God's covenant character.

And so, here's what Abraham does. He says, "Listen, are you going to sweep away the righteous with a wicked? Let's say there's fifty righteous in the city. You're going to sweep it away and destroy the fifty righteous?" Look at what Abraham says, "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous and the wicked. Far be it from you. Listen, you're the judge of all the earth. Won't you do justice? Won't you keep your own way?" So good.

So he's asking Yahweh to keep the way of Yahweh. And Yahweh says, "Yeah, good point. I'll spare the city if there's fifty."

Jon: So this is as stark as the Moses' God exchange?

Tim: Yeah, just straight up God says, "I'm going to destroy this." Abraham says, "That's not your way." And God says, "Oh, yeah, good point. All right. I won't do it." The story begins with the same thing. When God told Moses, he says, "Leave me alone." Which is the subtle invitation to not leave me alone. That was the whole thing we read about in that story. What Moses does is not leave Yahweh alone and Yahweh doesn't seem to mind. It's almost like that was the whole point.

In the same way here, "Should I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do" Well, clearly not because you're speaking in his presence, and Abraham hears, and now he's going to get in your business and tell Yahweh to keep the way of Yahweh. It's the same dynamic. The story is part of the design pattern of the intercessor.

So we perceive this as negotiating. God says, "Yeah, I'll do it for fifty." Then Abraham says, "How about forty-five? Do I hear forty-five?" And God's like, "Yeah." If Abraham were negotiating, Abraham would say, "fifty, and Yahweh would be like, "Yeah, fifty-five."

Jon: He's like, "I'll get off the couch for forty."

Tim: Totally. That's what a negotiation would look like. Back and forth, and getting down to something in the middle. That's not what the story is.

Jon: That's good point.

Tim: Yahweh gave Abraham everything Abraham asks for. "You want forty-five? Fine." Then Abraham says, "Oh, what about forty?" Yahweh says, "Yes." "What about thirty?" "Yes." "What about 20?" I mean, it's belaboring the point that Yahweh's not stingy. He's willing to give away the moon here. "What about ten?" "Yes, on the count of ten."

And then the conversation ends at ten. But given the pace of the conversation at least you're wondering like, "How far could we have gone?" Yahweh is not negotiating; he's willing to keep the way of Yahweh.

Jon: "Two guys? One guy?"

Tim: Yeah, totally. So, it turns out that they stopped at 10 and there's only one. There's only one.

Jon: Lot.

Tim: It's Lot. And actually, it's after this story in the next story after this in Genesis 20 Abraham is called a prophet for the first time. Abraham is the first prophet, the first person to receive the title prophet. And it's in the story after this scene right here. So Abraham is the first prophetic intercessor. Moses, the story is developing that role. And it develops it in the important way.

Jon: Noah's the first.

Tim: Noah's the first, Abraham is second, Moses is the third. And each one kind of heightens the intensity of the interaction. Moses walks away glowing like a star, with star glory after the encounter—

Jon: He came down from the heavens and he shines like a star.

Tim: Totally, that's right. Linda, it's a great point.

Jon: Great point. Thanks, Linda.

Tim: That Abraham story should get backloaded into our conversation about Moses.

Jon: Here's a question from Brian Metzger in Cleveland, Ohio.

Brian: Hello Bible Project. My name is Brian Metzger certain I'm contacting you from Cleveland, Ohio. In God E7, you mentioned Christopher Wright's commentary and explanation of Moses' intercession and the purpose of the narrative. Moses is counting God's consistency despite God's threat. When God relents or changes His mind, He's actually showing Himself to be consistent. My question is this: Is something similar happening in Genesis 22 when Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac? There's no explicit mention of Abraham praying or interceding, but his faith in God's consistency is evident. Thanks!

Tim: Brian, yes, dude. Yes, Genesis 22. Oh, my gosh. Genesis 22 is so remarkable. We could spend days on Genesis 22 and the whole thing, but I can't.

Jon: I'm worried for the class you teach on Genesis.

Tim: You know what I was just thinking this morning? Actually, was that when we do a classroom to maybe just to Genesis in sections per class.

Jon: How many sections would you do?

Tim: Maybe like four or five. Oh, my gosh. Genesis 22. I'll ask Jon to help me be succinct. So, Brian, you're asking, does Moses' action compel God to stay the same by changing in this story too.

Jon: Abraham's

Tim: Oh, what did I just say?

Jon: You said, Moses.

Tim: Oh, forget that I said that.

Jon: We're talking about Moses in the golden calf story and the intercession. Then the question is about Abraham.

Tim: So the story is related, but it's also different in that this story is about God putting Abraham to the test by giving up the promised son. Now, the reason why this is important when you just read Genesis 22 by itself, it's really bothersome.

Jon: God's asking Abraham to kill his son.

Tim: You're like, "Everything in the Hebrew Bible tells me that that's the opposite of God's will." I mean, in Jeremiah, God says, "Such a thing would never even enter my mind."

Jon: Clearly it did in some sense.

Tim: So the key thing is all about the whole story of Isaac's birth in the stories leading up to this. To be very succinct, Abraham and Sarah, once they were given the promise of a son, the desire to have a son became the tree of knowing good and evil for them. They were willing to do anything to get that son. They end up sexually abusing an Egyptian slave, Hagar to produce a desired son. And it harms both Hagar, it creates a disaster of pain and fracture in the family.

But that story of Hagar, after they get the promise that they're going to have a son, what they do is try and create a son by their own wisdom. And what they do is they see the Egyptian, they take her, he sleeps with her, and then...

Jon: It's the same design patterns.

Tim: ...Sarah doesn't like Hagar anymore, and so Abraham says, "Do to her what is good in your eyes?" It's all the vocabulary in the fall narrative, except Hagar is now—

Jon: Is that why you use such stark language - sexually abuse?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Because it's in that design pattern?

Tim: Yeah. In that story, it says what Abraham and Sarah do is oppress Hagar. And that's exactly the verb used of what Pharaoh does to the Israelites in the story the Exodus in slavery.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: So they have an Egyptian slave, they sexually abuse her, for their own purposes and then oppress her. The story gives a very negative portrait of Abraham and Sarah in their quest to get the promised son on their own wisdom. That's a disaster. By the time that Isaac does come along, there's a whole other episode in Genesis 18 of Sarah lying. So they finally get Isaac, he's born, but what they've done to other people and to each other to acquire this son is not awesome.

And so, what Genesis 22 is, is it's God putting Abraham to the test. "You were willing to hurt other people to get a son." The word "test" in the Bible is about proving someone's character - putting someone in circumstance so that their true character is shown. And so, the question is, will God give up even the very thing that God promised? Will he give up God's promise? Will Abraham give up the very thing that God's promised him?

Jon: He took it with his own wisdom, it falls in this design pattern of the fall—

Tim: God gives humans a gift and a promise and what they do is take with their own wisdom, use it for their own advantage.

Jon: And so, if Abraham's follow the same pattern, God has to step in and go, "I'm going to give you another shot to do this the right way."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. I think that's exactly right. In other words, what does Abraham really want? Does he just want God's blessing or does he want God Himself? What does he love? Does he love the reward that God gives him, the promised son, or is he willing to sheer insanity - do something that sounds contrary to God's own character? This is the book of Job. This is what the whole book of Job is about.

Jon: How is that?

Tim: Oh, it's about, is Job righteous and blameless just because of the benefits God gives him in children, or because of his love for God Himself? The whole Job story's been out of riffing off of Genesis 22.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Oh, yeah. There's so much design pattern. Anyway. But that's the question, why is God testing Abraham? Because he was willing to hurt everyone around him to get this child. So the question is, is he going to be faithful to God or just faithful to the benefits God gives him?

Jon: Is God going to put me through this test?

Tim: I don't know.

Jon: That sounds gnarly.

Tim: Dude, this is the test. When God leads Israel into the wilderness, he puts them to the test, whether they're going to trust Him for bread and water in the wilderness. And when Jesus goes into the garden of Gethsemane, it's the test. It's Jesus' test.

Jon: Yeah, but that test isn't "kill your kid."

Tim: No, it kills you. That's true. That's a good point. Genesis 22.

Jon: There's something just really 'ugh' about the story.

Tim: I hear that. I hear that. And I'm not trying to, like create an apologetic to smooth the story for us. I'm just trying to put it in narrative content. Why would God put Abraham to this particular test? He's been willing to do everything short of murder, to get this son. And so it makes perfect sense why this would be Abraham's test. And so, the numerous little details in the story show that he knows that God's going to deliver him from the test. Like when he tells the servants—

Jon: "We'll come back down."

Tim: Yeah. Like, "You servants stay here, the boy and I will go up to the mountain to worship and we will return." Though it is ambiguous, he could just be trying to trick them.

Jon: Sure. "Don't worry."

Tim: Or it could be a sign of faith. That's how the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 11 takes it. And so, really, this question is less about God's character as such, it's about Abraham's character.

Jon: Because God's character is such that He doesn't have him do it.

Tim: No. At the end, He stops him.

Jon: It seems kind of coy.

Tim: Well, from one perspective, you can make it seem like God's just toying with Abraham. This is why the narrative context is crucial. Abraham's not innocent. He's hurt a lot of people to get this son.

Jon: You know, there's this children's book that I read to Paxton. It's this Japanese story about this Emperor, and he wants to have an heir. He doesn't have any kids. So he has this contest and he gives all these kids a seed, and he says, "Hey, whoever can grow the most beautiful, healthy plant out of the seed will be my heir." So he gives, every kid who wants to join a seed.

This one kid, he gets the seed and he's a really good gardener kid, but he can't get it to grow. He tries everything he can and he can't get it to grow. And he's like, "What do I do?" And he's so distraught. So it's time to go, and everyone's going to show, and every other kid has these amazing flowers and just all this beautiful stuff and he has this empty pot.

So all the kids are showing all these amazing things they grew. And then finally, he gets to go up and he just like, "Guys, I got this empty pot." And it turns out that the Emperor gave them all dead seeds, and it was a test. And so he gave his kingdom to that guy.

Tim: Wow. Oh, dude. That's it. That's kind of inversion but that's the same idea. He was the only one who was willing to not do something underhanded.

Jon: Right. To not lie and cheat to try to get what the Emperor wanted to give.

Tim: That's right. But Abraham was one of the kids who brought the flower in a way and said like, "Look what I did."

Tim: He's brought to the end of himself and his wisdom in the story. And it's that. It's that surrender that moves God to say something that's quite startling. So at the moment that God tells Abraham, "Don't stretch out your hand against the lad, against the boy, don't do anything to him." Look at this. "Now I know, that you fear Elohim since you haven't withheld your one and only son from me. Now I know." Didn't God already know?

Jon: Doesn't God know everything?

Tim: Yeah, the story raises that question. That's not the point.

Jon: The point was it was opportunity for Abraham to enter into this covenant relationship in the right way by not seizing, what God wanted to give him, but not seizing it on his own terms.

Tim: It's Genesis 2 and 3.

Jon: Genesis 3. God wants to give you life, don't seize it on your own terms.

Tim: Don't seize it. And what do humans do? We inevitably. So this is the first—

Jon: So Abraham is passing the big Test - Capital T, Test - that Adam failed.

Tim: Capital T-Test, man. He is right here. And what it releases is blessing. So look at what God says, "By myself I have sworn because you have done this thing, not withholding your son, I will bless you, multiply your seed to be as the stars. To be like the stars of the heavens."

Jon: Oh, like the stars?

Tim: Yeah, to be like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the sea - which is rich with multiple layers of meaning there - and in your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Jon: The star thing, I get. What's the sea thing?

Tim: Stars and sand on one level is numerical growth. Like lots.

Jon: Just lots.

Tim: But the stars from page 1 is all connected back to the destiny of humanity to rule over the stars. And then God says, "In your seed, all the nations will be blessed because you obeyed my voice." So in other words, God's covenant blessings through his partners will be unleashed into the world when they listen and obey, when they pass the test.

Dude, the Lord's Prayer: "Don't lead us into the time of the test."

Jon: Don't lead us into the test.

Tim: It's translated temptation. It's referring to Genesis 22.

Jon: Don't make me climb this mountain.

Tim: Yeah. I don't want to have to go through the test.

Jon: That's what the prayer is?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: That's funny. Just a few minutes ago I was like praying that essentially – I hope God doesn't do that to me.

Tim: And that's what the Lord's Prayer is like, "Don't lead us into the test, and deliver us from the evil one." First of all, God, I don't want to go through the test. Don't put me through the test, please. But if you do—

Jon: But isn't that just natural? That's what existence is. It's the test.

Tim: Dude, there's many mysteries the story invites us into. But Genesis 3 is the first test. Then every character in the story afterwards, put to the test, and this becomes a real key culminating moment in the test.

Jon: Do you ever feel that way that life is just a test?

Tim: Yeah. This is a rich theme in movies and literature. This is all just the simulation test. That's actually one way to think about the biblical story is that God's just waiting for a partner who will pass the test. And Jesus himself prayed that he didn't want to go through the test. But it's this inversion of Genesis 22, because Jesus is the one and only Son.

Jon: Is this connected to Jesus' parable about the guys given the money, and he buries it, and the guys and don't.

Tim: Oh, I see. Passing the test.

Jon: In a way, it's kind of a passing of the test.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. This is a really key motif about the king giving responsibility and opportunity and whether or not people pass the test.

Tim: It says, "Delegation of power. Here, I'm gonna give you my resources. I'm going to give you my authority. What are you going to do with it?"

Tim: Correct. Abraham is the first human in the story to pass the test and it unleashes divine blessing to the nation.

Jon: So you've talked at length about how Abraham is screwed up guy like everyone, but this is a pretty—

Tim: No, this is his redemptive moment.

Jon: Yeah, he's a standout dude here,

Tim: Yeah. Which means portrait of Abraham overall is that he's complex, but lots of failure leading up to it. Actually, it's his failures that create the necessity of going through the test. But then he passes the test. This is how the Jacob story works. It builds up to these tests that he failed some, succeed at others. This is the biblical narrative. It's all these cycles of tests.

Tests and English doesn't quite work because we think of just like exams. Do you pass or fail? In Hebrew, Nissa, to test something means to demonstrate what it actually is. You test metal. When you test metal—

Jon: Taking the temperature of something is testing it?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: You're trying to see what's actually happening.

Tim: You're exposing what it really is. What's actually is the case with this person. And so, Abraham succeeds after a bunch of failures, and that's how all the humans are up until Jesus.

Jon: That's interesting because you can try to figure how you can repeat the test, if you're thinking ahead, like, "How am I going to get tested and how can I make sure I come out the right way?"

Tim: But in the Bible, the purpose of these divine tests is to tell the truth, to expose the truth.

Jon: The truth is, is we're all going to fail the test.

Tim: Correct. That's right. That's why what you need is a human who won't fail the test. Like all these stories keep pushing you forward to the next human.

Jon: And you got to Abraham, why doesn't it end there? He didn't fail the test.

Tim: But he failed it many times.

Jon: But then he conquered the test. I guess just once.

Tim: Yeah, he passed the test once but after a ton of failure. And those failures all create messes that go to live on to create the next generations tests. That's how the story works.

Jon: So in my life, I'm going to pass some tests, I'm not going to pass some tests. Ultimately, I need the ultimate test taker.

Tim: Exactly. And because I'm inheriting both my own failures. And I'm inheriting the failures of my ancestors who passed the test, creating an environment that makes it even more difficult for me to pass the test. That's how the biblical narrative works, it's just these accumulated generations of failure make it so hard to pass the test. And so, Jesus inherits the whole history of Israel failure.

Jon: Is there another phrase we could use that doesn't sound so...

Tim: Of the test?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The trial. I like that. In fact, that's the way that I pray the Lord's Prayer, is don't lead us into the time of trial. That's what Jesus is praying for as he knows the cross is coming. He doesn't want to go through it.

Jon: That's crazy. Wait. The prayer he teaches his disciples is...

Tim: In your mercy don't lead me into the trial.

Jon: ...is to pray for the thing he knows he's going to have to do.

Tim: And the next line of the prayer is "But deliver us." So, save me from the time of trial, don't lead me into the time of trial - implied - but if you do, next line, please deliver me from the evil one who...the snake is connected to the failure. So deliver me from the evil one that I may pass the test. And that's what Jesus does.

Jon: "In your mercy, give me a few tests as possible, and when they come help me—

Tim: "When they come, deliver me. Help me to be faithful." And that's exactly what Jesus is praying in the garden. "Father, take this cup from me."

Jon: "But not my will."

Tim: And then he quotes from his own prayer. "But not my will, your will be done. Your will be done on earth as is in heaven." He's quoting from his own prayer.

Jon: Oh, wow.

Tim: It's all connected, dude.

Jon: He's praying his own prayer.

Tim: It's really remarkable. Genesis 22 is like a key, literally, like a key that opens many doors in the biblical story.

Jon: Figuratively a key.

Tim: Oh, yeah. Did I say literally?

Jon: I love it.

Tim: Anyhow. Why I like your question Brian and this conversation is it's about God's truly partnering with the humans in the story. And God, like Abraham, He puts it on the line about it with Abraham here. There's seems to be real risk in the story that is emblematic of God's greater risk he takes in creating anything and anyone with another will, and partnering with them. And it's the drama of the biblical story.

Jon: That was awesome. Thank you, Brian.

Tim: This is a question from Maggie...I'm going to butcher your last name but I'll try. Maggie Raushal from Wisconsin.

Jon: This is going to be our last question.

Tim: Yeah.

Maggie: This question is on behalf of Maggie Raushal from Onalaska, Wisconsin. Tim said that people that are interested in the spiritual realm today usually disconnect it from the political power structures, even though the biblical authors saw the two as intertwined, or mirrors. However, it seems that the majority of the demons that Jesus was casting out within the New Testament were in individuals that were not politically powerful people.

Tim: That's a great question. So you're asking about the portrait of spiritual evil. In the Old Testament, there's multiple types of bad guys. There's the evil one, an individual figure. We have lots of names and titles. There's the snake, there's the Satan, the adversary, just called the evil one, the Dragon and Leviathan. Lots of images given to that figure. Then there's a whole discussion we've been having about the heavenly host rebels called the sons of God, the Elohim that are given authority over the nations, and then they miss handle that opportunity.

Jon: They have the nations start worshiping them, and sacrificing to them, and they're like—

Tim: In the book of Daniel, we meet them. They're called the Prince of Persia or the Prince of Greece.

Jon: And these are the powers and authorities?

Tim: Yeah, the powers and authorities. So your question Maggie is, this portrait of spiritual evil on that corporate national level—

Jon: Yeah, that national level that God in the Divine Council, He delegated authority to the nations and He said, "You guys take care of these nations. I'm going to focus on Israel, those are my dudes."

Tim: The other sons of Elohim take responsibility for the other nations.

Jon: "And do it well because my plan is to bring the nations all back."

Tim: That's right. But they don't do it well.

Jon: They don't do it well, and the nations start to worship them. And so you get this sense of what went wrong? There was some sort of rebellion or at least—

Tim: Well, in the narrative, that goes on is that the nations begin to worship nature: the sun, moon, and stars, as well as trees and rocks and sex. Psalm 82 comes along and names that and says, "The sons of Elohim have abused that position God gave them over the nations, and He's going to hold them to account."

Jon: And that's what when Paul talks about the powers and authorities, he's referring to that because there is the sense of his corporate power over the nations, that when nations are corrupt, it's connected to this deeper problem.

Tim: Let's do Old Testament portrait and New Testament portrait.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We have categories for the snake, the Satan, the evil one, that carries forward into the New Testament.

Jon: The big bad guy.

Tim: The singular bad guy. And that still goes by lots of titles in the New Testament.

Jon: Yeah. The dragon, the evil one.

Tim: He's called the dragon, the evil one, the Satan, the devil—

Jon: Father of lies.

Tim: Which means slanderer. Again, there's never one name or title. There is no name. There's just lots of titles for this one.

Jon: What if this name's like Frank or something? It's just not menacing enough so we just don't use it.

Tim: Let's go to the sons of Elohim over the nations from Genesis 11 and Deuteronomy 32 that we talked about. Those are also called in the Hebrew Bible the powers and authorities or the rulers. And that goes right into the New Testament. That's Paul's whole language of the powers and authorities.

Jon: It's all over the place. He talks about it all the time.

Tim: It's everywhere. And Jesus has been exalted over them in his resurrection and ascension. These are the powers from which the church needs to be protected in

Ephesians 6, by wearing the armor of God. It's precisely those religious, ethnic national boundaries, tribal boundary lines, that are going to introduce division into the multi-ethnic, multinational people of God. That's why he says, "Put on the armor."

But in the New Testament, we have one other crews of bad guys that we haven't accounted for and they're also given a number of names. They're called evil spirits.

Jon: Unclean spirits?

Tim: More often they're called impure spirits. It's a word from Leviticus. Impure spirits or sometimes given a Greek word daimonian, which just means lessor spiritual being.

Jon: And that's where we get the word "demon"?

Tim: Where we get the word demon, totally unconnected all the horns and tail and guard rails comes later in later Christian tradition. So where are they in Old Testament? This is a new rabbit hole for me, but I've discovered it's there, and it's deep. They are there in the Old Testament. They are there. I still haven't reconciled myself to how crazy this sounds. But they're there.

Jon: I say, we don't get into it right now. That's a whole podcast in and of itself.

Tim: It is. I mean you have raised the issue, though.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: They're there.

Jon: It's a teaser.

Tim: It's a teaser. I have to say what they're related to. Why are they called impure spirits? There's a scholar of Jewish Studies called Clinton Wahlen, another scholar called Archie Wright. They've written extensively on this. And there's lots of literature on this other than just these two scholars. How do things become ritually impure in Leviticus?

Jon: I don't really know.

Tim: It's just a few ways.

Jon: I mean, I know of a couple. There's only a couple.

Tim: There's only a couple and the primary one is touching dead bodies.

Jon: Right. That's the one I knew.

Tim: So these are spirits that are impure because they've been in contact with dead bodies.

Jon: Perhaps.

Tim: That's these guys case in high level scholarly works.

Jon: What's another way you can become impure?

Tim: Touching blood, or semen, or skin disease. Basically contacting anything that puts you into the contact with the forces of life and death. But corpse impurity is what it's

called. Here's the thing. There is a live tradition going all the way back to Genesis 6, has to do with the crazy story of the sons of Elohim sleeping with women. And that's connected to the presence of giants in the biblical world.

The giants are called by many titles in the Old Testament. They are called the Nephilim. They're also sometimes called the Rephaim. And the Rephaim, was both a name for ancient giants and for the spirits, the deceased life presence of these beings in the underworld, in the grave.

Jon: So Rephaim is just a synonymous term to the Nephilim?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Why is there two terms?

Tim: Each one has its own background and history.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We're told in the book of Deuteronomy, that then Nephilim are also called the sons of Anak by the people on the east of the Jordan: The Moabites and the Ammonites. Those people on the other side of the Jordan off called them the Rephaim. We conquered one of them. Moses did. His name was Og. And he had this gigantic bed, big iron. It's Deuteronomy 2. Go read it. He says, "Big iron bed." Moses says, "You can still go see it to this day." Dude, this is so crazy.

Jon: It's in a museum somewhere.

Tim: Yes, it's in an ancient museum. You can go see this gigantic bed of Og, the king that Moses in Israel, Joshua killed. There's this whole thing about giants.

Jon: Just to back up, sorry—

Tim: It's all right. We said we weren't going to talk about it. Now, we're talking about it.

Jon: Genesis 6, the sons of God, the Divine Council crew come and have relations with human women in the story—

Tim: It's another fall story. They see, of what's good and they take. It's now the heavenly beings having a rebellion.

Jon: The story is in the Bible.

Tim: Yes, it is.

Jon: And it's one of those stories that is like, "Okay, that's weird." But then you actually see these characters, then Nephilim, the half breeds.

Tim: They live on the story. They're half divine half human.

Jon: And they're connected to these warrior giants, which isn't just a Hebrew concept.

Tim: No, no, no. That's right.

Jon: This idea is all over the ancient world.

Tim: Totally. The half god half man warrior giants that founded the kingdoms of old. Babylon's founding legends are about them being founded by these half god half human warrior giants.

Jon: Gilgamesh was a giant.

Tim: Gilgamesh was a warrior giant. Nimrod in Genesis 10, is a warrior giant. Totally.

Jon: So these guys are all over the place, and then Joshua has to fight him.

Tim: Let's just stop right there. The presence of Genesis 6 then in Genesis is trash talk story against Babylon founding mythology.

Jon: You think it's cool to have these warrior giants—

Tim: You think they are your heroes, and build your cultures. No, dude.

Jon: It's bad news.

Tim: They're evil. They founded empires that have done great evil in the world and God's going to bring them down. That's Genesis 6 and the trail that it starts.

Jon: Genesis 6 is ancient trash talk.

Tim: It's ancient trash talk against Babylonian foundation stories. Then these characters live on in the biblical story as these reminders of that divine-human rebellion in Genesis 6.

Jon: So this is like a third type of rebellious?

Tim: It's another type of spiritual bad guy.

Jon: So we've got the spiritual rebellion of the Satan - the snake - we've got the rebellion of the sons of God who are supposed to lead the nations, and now we're talking about a third type of rebellion that creates these have these half breeds.

Tim: These mutant giants that in the biblical story represent an unfortunate rebellion of other spiritual being, other hosts of heaven that did this thing.

Jon: They're called the Rephaim.

Tim: Eventually, one of their titles is called the Rephaim. And the Giants exist in the Bible to be killed off by just three sets of heroes: by God and the flood, by Joshua in the conquest. I have a lot of homework to do here. Michael Heiser has done a lot of this in "Unseen Realm". But the whole conquest story in Joshua, if you do your homework, they're targeting the giant clans in Joshua.

Jon: Sheesh.

Tim: It's a giant purge. Which makes perfect sense, because it's God bringing another flood but through Joshua. And then the giants are finally done away with by David and his servants. And Goliath is the final ultimate giant. That story is the Messianic prototype David fighting an ultimate spiritual bad guy, Goliath. It's an archetypal showdown.

Here's the thing is that if, however, their divine and human...I know this sounds crazy, but this is the logic. If they're fully divine and human, then just killing them

dead and in the ground, they still live on in some way. And so the Rephaim becomes a title for evil spiritual presences that live on to terrorize people. These are the beings Jesus is encountering in the Gospels.

Jon: Just to be completely transparent, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Rephaim are described as evil spirits.

Tim: Yes, they are,

Jon: It's in Isaiah somewhere.

Tim: It's in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 32. They are spiritual beings that are the remnant existence of these warrior mutants of old—

Jon: And then you get to Jesus and his encounter with these demons, and you're like, "What are these guys?"

Tim: "Where did they come from?" Maybe you've ever asked yourself that "Where did these guys come from?"

Jon: "What is the deal with these?"

Tim: "Who are they?"

Jon: I just figured it was like the angels that rebelled with the Satan, but they seem different in some way.

Tim: That's right. They are lurking in graveyards. They're lurking out in the wilderness. They get people to destroy their own bodies. It's very complex. This opens up a million questions, I understand. But why are they called impure spirits? Where did that term come from - because that the main name in the gospels in the New Testament?

Again, there's two scholars that I mentioned, they've made the case that it's a clue to the fact that they emerged from the dead corpses of the giant warriors.

Jon: Demons or the leftover spirit remains of the half breed giants. Welcome to your Bible.

Tim: In the one story in the gospels where these beings are given a title, they call themselves legion. It's in the graveyard. Jesus meets that guy in the graveyard, it's a crew of these.

Jon: It's a battle.

Tim: And they give themselves a military title, legion.

Jon: Which is also clue you into—

Tim: Clue you back into Goliath and Og and the Nephilim and all that. I know that sounds crazy, but for the biblical authors, this was how they saw things. And this isn't just the New Testament. If you look at Jewish literature in the same time period, everybody's linking the presence of these spirits back to the Nephilim and the sons of God.

So this is a new rabbit hole for me. There's a lot of questions I still have but—

Jon: So the short answer to the question is the demons that Jesus confronts aren't connected to this idea of corporate power and authority.

Tim: They are distinct type of bad guy.

Jon: They are distinct type of bad guy. They have a different type of bad guy ammo.

Tim: That's right. Three types of bad guys in Genesis 1 through 11. There's the evil one, there's the mutant giants who will live on past their death to terrorize individualism, then there's the national sons of Elohim that become the powers and the authorities.

Jon: So when Jesus is confronting the demons, he's not confronting the corporate national powers and authorities, he's confronting this other strange thing that's happening that's also influencing humanity.

Tim: Yeah, people on individual level. And then when he goes to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke, he says, "I'm on the showdown." He calls it "with the power of darkness." And then he goes to Jerusalem and faces the rulers and authority.

Jon: So he takes on all of them.

Tim: Jesus takes on all three. We're meant to see Jesus taking on the Genesis 3 bad guy, the Genesis 6 bad guys, and the Genesis 11 bad guys in the Gospel narrative.

Jon: Genesis 3 being the evil one, Genesis 6 being—

Tim: The Rephaim and Genesis 11 being the Elohim rulers and authorities. Once you see that that's how the apostles think, and how almost all their Jewish contemporaries think and write, it all locks into place. The story becomes so much more coherent. And it sounds even more crazy for moderns to get into this way of seeing the world.

I've said this before, I just I'm tired of trying to rewrite the Bible to make it more rational.

Jon: Yeah. Make it a little more tame. I mean, evil as a spiritual reality is hard enough in a materialistic secular world to wrestle through. And now you're saying, "Oh, it's not as simple. There's these three layers of evil in the biblical story and Jesus confronts them all."

Tim: And Jesus, confront them all, which opens up many more cans of worms that we'll continue to unpack.

Jon: I hope that didn't discourage everyone from...

Tim: What else can I do but laugh? I never thought I would hear myself talking about these things. Anyway, the Bible, you got to go where it takes you.

Jon: Okay, that's all the time we have for this Q+R. Thanks for all the questions that you sent in. When we get a lot of questions, we can get to, we really appreciate them. It's just encouraging to know that some people are listening along and wrestling through this with us. We're going to jump in next week talking about...well, we're not entirely sure.

Tim: To be decided.

Jon: To be decided.

Tim: It will be in the God series.

Jon: We are a nonprofit animation studio. We also make this podcast and other resources. It's all for free because of a lot of people who are joining us to pitch and to make it free, which is awesome.

Tim: You guys are amazing.

Jon: Thank you.

Tim: Thanks for your support.

Jon: Thanks for being part of this with us.

Jack: Hi, this is Jack Simons. I'm from Lake Oswego, Oregon, and what I like best about The Bible Project is all the drawings. And my favorite project is Genesis. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We are a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, and more at thebibleproject.com.