



BibleProject Podcast

Our Collective Identity Family of God E2

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Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins, Tim Mackie

- Jon** On the second page of the Bible, we get a wonderful little story about Adam. He's the first character in the Bible, and his name in Hebrew, adam, means humanity. 00:00:00
- Tim** When it says in the middle line "in the image of God, He created him," in English, we have to use the masculine singular term to go back to that humanity of the first line. God created humanity in His image. In the image of God He created him. That "him" doesn't mean male human. It's referring to the generic humanity.
- Jon** Adam is in God's good world, he sees all the other animals have male and female counterparts, but he realizes he's alone.
- Tim** So verse 21, "He causes a tardemah to fall upon the human." Divine stupor. This is not normal sleep. This kind of sleep happens about half a dozen times in the Bible. And it's always God causing it. And he took one from his sides.
- Jon** Now all English translations have the word "rib." God took Adam's rib. 00:01:00
- Tim** It is certainly not what the word means. It's an architectural word that refers...most often it's used to describe the side of a building.
- Jon** So God took a side of Adam. Like he split him in half.
- Tim** So it's the human becomes man and woman.
- Jon** God turns one into two. And then at the end of the story, the author steps in and gives us his reflection.
- Tim** "Dear reader, for this reason, I want you to realize this isn't just an interesting story about people in the past." He's telling this story as an archetypal here. For this reason, a man, an ish will leave his father and mother and he will cling to his isha.
- Jon** "Isha" being Hebrew for a "woman."
- Tim** And they will become one flesh.

Jon So humanity starts as one and then becomes two, yet it's supposed to unite back as one.

Tim This is the way the Hebrew Bible works. It's advancing an idea, a philosophical idea about the nature of humanity. Humanity is a unique kind of species that its oneness consists of it's more than oneness. 00:02:00

Jon I'm Jon Collins. This is BibleProject podcast. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Here we are. We're going to continue a discussion on a new theme on the family God.

Tim On the family of God.

Jon We began last episode just setting the table. You brought to my attention, to all of our attention, that Christianity is a very diverse global movement. In fact, the most diverse religious movement on the planet. And that's no accident, in that at the core of the story is that God wants to use one nation. And through that nation, all nations will get in on the party, as you said. 00:03:00

Tim Yeah. Or even let me just develop it one step further at this moment. You could say the story of the Bible begins with a global focus.

Jon Oh.

Tim All humanity focus. However, by Genesis 11, a crisis takes place that God responds to by focusing in on one family among all of the human nations. So you start with the many...

Jon It's like a triage. It's like things go crazy and he's like, "I'm just going to focus here to stop the bleeding."

Tim So it begins with the nations, focuses in on the story of one nation with the story of Abraham. And then for the rest of the Old Testament, it's really zeroed in on that one family. But all nations and the one family, one nation, it's intertwined. What God is doing through the one is for the many that the story began with. So that in the story of Jesus, it's both the story of Israel, the one, being worked out so that we can fulfill the calling of that one among the many that started back on page 12 of Genesis. So it goes from the many to the one, back off to the many. 00:04:00

Jon When you use the shorthands, the one to the many to the one, my brain just kind of shifts into like idle. It's kind of like stops...

(crosstalk) 00:04:26

Tim I know. If I had a whiteboard, this would just make so much sense. But I think the many...

Jon The many, meaning all nations.

Tim All the nations.

Jon All the nations.

Tim That's how the story begins. A global focus.

Jon Okay.

Tim So Genesis 1 through 11, God and the nations.

Jon That's what we're going to look at today?

Tim Yep. Focus in on Abraham to the story of one nation.

Jon One nation.

Tim Whole Old Testament. The story of Jesus begins with making his focus on a mission to that one so that post-resurrection and even a little bit before then we go back out to the mission to the nations. 00:05:00
It's a simple way to think about the storyline of the Bible from the many nations to one nation back out to the many nations.

Jon In terms of where the story is focusing?

Tim Where the story is focused. Yeah, that's right. Because it does raise the question: if Christianity is the most global, multiethnic movement...

Jon ...then why is four-fifths of the Bible all about one people.

Tim One people group. Exactly. That's it right there. So if it's a story about all nations, why is the majority of the Christian scriptures about one nation? That's the question. So then there's nothing for it. You got to tell the story.

Jon You got to tell the story. We talked, in the last episode, about how the story ends with this picture of new creation with a new humanity ruling over the earth. But there's actually still kings and kingdoms...

Tim Nations.

Jon ...and nations who are participating in this. It's not some new homogenous group. 00:06:00

Tim Yeah, yeah. And the focus on the nations in Revelation 21 and 22 is about all of their unique difference, because each one is bringing their honor, the glory, the unique thing...the unique value that they generate in the

world is all brought together and unified in bringing honor to the Creator, to the Lamb. So that was the flowering of the theme in full bloom—the nations unified and allegiance to the Creator. So obviously, if that's the solution, then the problem is the nation's not unified and using their honor and splendor not to beautify or honor but to pull power plays and be in conflict with each other. So how did we get there? How did we get to a whole bunch of human families that can't stand each other and think of each other as more important than their neighbor?

00:07:00

Jon Well, I don't think you need a Bible to answer that question, right?

Tim No. But the Bible is offering us an angle on that question. It has its own story to tell on why the human family is so divided. And we call this Genesis chapters 1 through 11.

Section Break

00:07:59

Tim So let's do two quick stops, that will not be quick I'm guessing, on how the story the Bible depicts the ideal humanity in Genesis 1 and 2.

Jon Okay.

Tim Genesis 1 and 2 depicts an ideal, which then in Genesis 3 is distorted, corrupted, and forfeited, which leads you to Babylon in Genesis 11. So let's stop one with ideal is a picture of the ideal humanity in Genesis 1. We've spent many hours of conversation on the image of God in Genesis 1.

Jon We have. And I love to do it.

Tim Let's see. Especially in a series that was on the image of God, that's in the podcast, but also in our series on the Son of Man, we did a long a deep dive.

Jon I've realized that this theme more than any other has stood out and been influential in the way I think about the story of the Bible. It's very exciting and empowering. I almost feel like any theme we're talking about it's always humming in the background.

00:09:00

Tim It's true. Yeah, that's right. It's the reason why it's on page one.

Jon Yeah. There's a lot on page one.

Tim There's a lot on page one. That's true.

Jon It is a bit of a Jewel on page one.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Or you could say it's like a beam of light that goes on through all of the different themes throughout the Bible to get refracted and reflected in different hues and colors. But underneath all the different themes later on in the Bible, usually the image of God is common to most of them in some way.

There's a little poem. After God says, "Let us make human in our image and in our likeness," Genesis 1:26, Genesis 1:27 gives us a little three-line poem that tells us something very important about the nature of the image and human identity. So three lines are, one, "God created adam (humanity) in His own image." Line two: "In the image of God, He created him." 00:10:00

Jon Which is just like an inverse of the first line.

Tim Correct. Yeah, it's exactly right. It takes the four key words and swaps up their order. The reason it's doing it is to create a transition for the last line. So God created human in His image. That's line one. Line two: in the image of God, He created him. Third line: male and female, he created them. This is going to be hard to just listen to. It might help if you get out your phone and turn on a Bible and look at Genesis 1:27.

Jon I love how you said "turn on a Bible." That makes perfect sense.

Tim Yes, it does.

Jon But it's the strangest thing to say. Turn on your Bible.

Tim Just get it open. Anyway.

Jon Turn on your Bible.

Tim Turn on your Bible. So it's a three-line poem. The middle line takes the words of...it happens in Hebrew and then reflect them in English here. It takes the words of the first line and turns them into a different order so that the third line can come along and actually match the word order of that middle line. The last line. I'm talking about theoretically, but just look at the text here. It's okay. 00:11:00

Jon My brain hurts.

Tim Sorry. Here. So God created human in His image. General statement.

Jon Which by the way is in Revelation. It's is a very amazing statement.

Tim That's right.

Jon Humans in the ancient world be made the image of God.

Tim That's right.

Jon God created human in His own image.

Tim Yes, every human. Humanity as a whole. And each individual human is a physical representation of the divine.

Jon Wow.

Tim It's remarkable still today. It's even more remarkable to imagine a world where the only place you would hear this type of language would be and royal rhetoric where kings are making this claim about themselves in their office. 00:12:00

Jon Just important people.

Tim Yeah. So that's the first claim. The second line takes the words of that first line and it puts them in a different order. In the image of God He created him.

Jon It's like a Yoda said the second line.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Correct. The third line of the poem then mirrors precisely the word order of the previous line, but it swaps out some words. Instead of "in the image of God," you have "male and female." Then you have "he created." But instead of "He created him" as the middle line, you have "He created them" plural. So in Hebrew poetry, again, alluding back to podcast series we did on how to read Hebrew poetry, one of the main tools of communication is short lines that match each other in word order, but never identical. So that the similarity makes you observe the differences between the two lines. And that's exactly what's happening here. 00:13:00

Jon It creates a bit of a friction and chemistry when you see how these lines interact with each other.

Tim Yeah, that's right. So in the poetic structure, the phrase "image of God" in the middle line is in identical slot as "male and female" in third line.

Jon So what does it mean to be the image of God? It is not just a male thing. It's not just a female thing. It's both of those things.

Tim Both. And both together are the image. Male and female are together the image, which is why that...when it says in the middle line "in the image of God He created him," in English, we have to use a masculine singular term to go back to that humanity of the first line. God created humanity in His image. In the image of God He created him. But that "him" doesn't mean male human. It's referring to the generic humanity. 00:14:00

Jon Which is a noun or something?

Tim Yeah, yeah, it's a masculine noun. That's right. So the third line comes along and clarifies. The image of God...

Jon Is not masculine.

Tim ...is not own any one gender. It's male and female he created them. It's having to point out painfully obvious things. But they actually aren't painfully obvious I guess if you don't know how Hebrew poetry works.

Jon Or if you've lived in human history.

Tim Oh, yeah, that's right. Totally. Yeah, that's right. So what's important is that when we say male and female together reflect the image, the next line is God blessing this His image and saying to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land, subdue it and rule over the creatures on the land." So all of a sudden that male and female gets a real specific application here, which is make more humans. 00:15:00

Jon Make humans and subdue and rule.

Tim Subdue and rule. So the application in the context is one layer of what it means for humans to image God is to be a being that is one and yet more than one at the same time. In other words, the image of God can be called adam, which is the Hebrew word for humanity. But that one humanity consists of many, more than one, male and female. And the male and female don't have to be the same. In fact, it's crucial for humanity to be what it is. That they are different than each other. So even though it's working with gender, this is the way Hebrew Bible works. It's making a...

Jon Framework?

Tim Yeah, it's advancing of an idea, a philosophical idea about the nature of humanity. Humanity is a unique kind of species that its oneness consists of it's more than oneness. Which means that the humanity of any one is only realized in relationship to an other who is different than me. 00:16:00

Jon So here it's talking about gender, and there's two genders. But these two genders together make the image of God, which is a singular thing. To be the image of God.

Tim Yeah. It's something that's true of each individual human. But here...

Jon How do we know it's true of each individual human?

Tim Yeah, that's not the point here.

Jon That's not the point here.

Tim Later in chapter 9 it clarifies that point.

Jon Okay.

Tim The point here is that it's a collective identity.

Jon Collective identity.

Tim Together as one working out the commission given, which is to be more than one, and through that multiplication, to fill the land, harness its potential, and to exercise God's rule over it.

Jon That's the role of the image. 00:17:00

Tim Yeah. And an image is meant to be a physical embodiment that points to its originator.

Jon So we talked about this at length. But just to state it again, in the ancient world, these were idle images. These were statues...

Tim Yeah, this is word for "statue."

Jon ...that would represent God—Divine being defined on earth.

Tim Correct.

Jon The Hebrew Bible is saying on page one, "You are that."

Tim Humanity.

Jon Humanity. Here is this collective male and female.

Jon Not some king, not some statue

Tim That's right. But then the moment that they are fruitful and multiply means there's going to be...

Jon Yeah, a bunch of them.

Tim ...many males and many females who are together the image of God. Not every male will multiply with every female. In other words, even though the focus here is male and female, and be fruitful and multiply, it's a collective idea, meaning that together as a species consisting of many who are different from each other, but that difference as one unified whole is precisely how they image God. That's the narrative argument being made here. 00:18:00

Jon Arguably, you're going a little far from where this leaves off. In that, I see the argument go that male and female together make the image of God. And then it says, "Go be fruitful multiply." So you can infer now there's lots of males, lots of females. But it never comes back and says, "And now all of you as a collective are the image of God." That's an inference.

Tim No, that's right. I'm taking my lead there just from the opening statement. "God created human."

Jon Ahh, human. And human there, that word means all humanity.

Tim It's a collective term meaning species of humanity.

Jon Got it. Okay.

Tim So it's species consists on an abstract level of male and female. But then as they're being fruitful and multiply. They'll create many males and females who will together exist as one 'adam.

Jon Now, God created adam in His own image. You're saying human. Could you say humanity here? Would that be a good translation? 00:19:00

Tim Yes.

Jon And that really is the word adam can refer to humanity.

Tim Yeah, that's its primary meaning.

Jon That's its primary meaning.

Tim Yeah, that's right.

Jon Mankind.

Tim Yeah. Then as Genesis 2 moves on to talk about one particular figure who eventually becomes...the word "adam" becomes a proper name. But it's never separated from that collective identity. Which is why Adam and Eve or in Hebrew, Adam and Chavvah are archetypal characters because also their individual characters represent the whole family of humanity. Because their names mean humanity and life. So that's Genesis 1. The one and the many. It's already there, right there in Genesis 1. So Genesis 1, humanity is the capstone of creation of God's cosmic ordering—His ordering of heaven and earth. Genesis 2 is a narrative begins in 2 verse 4 that focus in, not on God's cosmic ordering but on His ordering of the dry land to plant a sacred space at the center of the cosmos. 00:20:00

Jon Garden of Eden.

Tim Garden of Eden. We call it garden of Eden. And there's an adam. God takes from the dust and animates it with divine breath. And then He does this outside of Eden. Then He takes the human, He plants a garden, and then He rests (he noahs). It's Noah's name as a verb. He noahs the human in the garden.

Jon Oh, I thought He planted the human in the garden.

Tim But then the humans came up out of the ground and then he plants a garden and the trees come up out of the ground.

Jon Okay. That's the connection. Okay.

Tim So you have an adam. And it's actually has the word "the" in front of it in Hebrew.

Jon Oh, interesting.

Tim The human.

Jon The human.

Tim God makes the human and rests the human in the garden.

Jon Why doesn't any translation just say the human then?

Tim I don't know. Mine does.

Jon Yours does?

Tim Yeah. Here. Yeah.

Jon What's yours? 00:21:00

Tim It's right here. Just the translation that I've made. What's interesting, Genesis 2:18, it's the first thing in the narrative. God says seven times in Genesis 1...man, this is good. It's good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Genesis 2:18 is the first "not good" in the story.

Jon And it's that the human...

Tim It's not good for ha'adam, the human...

Jon To be alone.

Tim ...to be a lone entity.

Jon All by himself.

Tim So God says, "I will make an ezer counterpart for him." I'm not translating the word ezer. It's a Hebrew word.

Jon To make an ezer.

Tim Yeah. We're stuck with, in the history of English translations, the English word "help." So yes, in a previous series on the books of Solomon, the wisdom literature...

Jon We talked a lot about ezer

Tim ...we talked about this little scene right here. So you can go back and reference that conversation. I just want to highlight a couple of other elements about it here. Actually, I've done a little more study on this phrase. Two things. One, the word "ezer", a better English interpretation would be something like "deliver." 00:22:00

Jon You used the word salvation at one point.

Tim Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Jon Rescuer.

Tim The words use rescue as a noun to describe a person about 20 different times. And the only person who's ever given that title as a noun is Yahweh, and most often in military contexts. Really. Just do a concordance search on "ezer." It's not hard to do. It just becomes immediately clear that the help that's being talked about is deliverance from usually danger or at least from a non-ideal situation.

Jon There's no story where it's just some kid doing an errand for someone?

Tim No, no. It's like David being chased by enemies and he calls for Yahweh as his ezer. Or the Philistines are breathing down the Israelites and they call up God. 00:23:00

Jon "Helper" is a very weak word for that.

Tim "Helper" is I think a mistranslation.

Jon We'll call it a mistranslation.

Tim The word "help" kind of gets us there. The key is this next phrase, which is sometimes in most English translations, it's a helper corresponding to him or something similar to him. So it's the word "kenegdo." It's a preposition. And then the word "neged" means "in front of" or...

Jon Neged?

Tim Neged. Yeah, neged. It's the basic preposition that means "opposite you". Physically opposite you—what is facing you.

Jon Okay.

Tim Something facing you, mirroring you. The things standing apart from you, but facing you. That's what the word means.

Jon Neged.

Tim So I will make an ezer that is apart from but facing him. I think the English phrase counterpart works really well here. It's one that I look at and say, "That's a mirror of me." It's not identical to me, but it's a mirror of me. 00:24:00

Jon So the phrase is ezer neged?

Tim Well, in Hebrew it's kenegdo.

Jon Kenegdo.

Tim The "k" is as or according to and then "o" is him. Okay, so I will make a deliverer as one opposite him. As one facing him.

Jon As one facing him.

Tim Yeah.

Jon Yeah. Facing almost makes it feel like it's a standoff.

Tim Oh, interesting.

Jon Versus like...

Tim A correspondence?

Jon Yeah.

Tim Corresponding to actually is another phrase I've toyed with here. But the point was it's a human who has an other that faces. And they are mirrors of one another, so to speak. That's it. So then what happens in the narrative where God's going to provide the ezer kenegdo... but it happens in two steps. We've talked about this before. You asked me a question once. I think I have an answer to that. So what Yahweh forms is not another human. He forms a bunch of animals. 00:25:00

Jon Oh, yeah, I remember talking about this with you.

Tim And he brings and animal...

Jon I thought it was a silly little...

Tim ...to the human to see where they call him. And he calls the names of the animals. What? This is the story in the Eden narrative that gets you the image of humans chillin' with animals because he's just like...

Jon And naming things, which is powerful, divine thing to do.

Tim Totally. Yeah, that's right. Sharing and God's creative work. Because to name is to create. Then verse 20. 'But for the human, there was no ezer corresponding to him.'

Jon No, duh. I mean, that's what...

Tim Okay. All right.

Jon Silly exercise. That was the...

Tim So the question is, what was the point here?

Jon What was the point?

Tim So if this little narrative about the human naming the animals was in a different narrative outside of this, God providing a deliver, it would be like, "Oh, what a noble task. God's sharing creative act." But here, it seems like, well, of course not. Like, what? 00:26:00

Jon "How about this penguin?" "No, that's not going to work."

Tim "It doesn't correspond to me. I can't..." So the question is, what's the point here? Why is God bringing the animals of all these different types? What does this have to do with a human becoming more than one? Here's what I think. This begins a design pattern that kind of carries through with the Son of Man theme, which is human relationships to the animals. The next story that's going to riff off of the human with the animal's theme. A human at peace with the animals in the safe place is Noah and his wife on the ark. And do you remember when God says to Noah in chapter 7 that all the animals are going to come to them, He says, "They're going to come to you in the same categories. Every beast, every bird, every living creature..." 00:27:00

Jon Male and female.

Tim "And they're going to come male and female, two by two." It's literally the phrase "each and its wife."

Jon Oh, yeah.

Tim Yeah, yeah.

Jon That's cute.

Tim This is back to meditation literature. The Bible is a meditation literature. There'll be little puzzles or ambiguities in earlier narratives that are there on purpose to keep you reading. And when you get to a later repetition of that pattern or motif, there'll be some little Easter egg in there buried that gives you a retro commentary back on earlier story. I think if God is bringing all of these categories of animals to the human, when I look at the same list of animals in the next story about humans and animals together, what I notice is it really highlights, in the Noah story, that the animals come two by two, male and female. So you have a lone human here.

Jon He doesn't have his...

Tim ...who spends all day noticing animal have one corresponding to them. But for the human, verse 20, there is no ezer corresponding. 00:28:00
I think it's as if the name of the animals it's like an educative experience for the human. He comes to realize...

Jon That he is not yet really the image. There's something something missing.

Tim There's something something more. Yeah, that's right. At least I think so. So verse 21, "He causes a tardemah to fall upon the human." Divine stupor. This is not normal sleep.

Jon It's like hypnotism.

Tim Yeah. This kind of sleep happens about half a dozen times in the Hebrew Bible. And it's always God causing it to do for someone what

they cannot do for themselves. It's like He incapacitates someone so that He can do the thing they're not able to do. And He took one from his sides. It's what it says in Hebrew. One from his side.

Jon One what?

Tim Exactly. Almost all English translations going back to the first one, the Wycliffe have inserted the word "rib" here. 00:29:00

Jon Where did that come from?

Tim I know. It is certainly not what the word means.

Jon Did they just have a dictionary and they're just like, "Well, one what? I don't know."

Tim It's the interpretive tradition that they were familiar with. And it's all the interpretation of rib as a concept. It goes back even in Jewish tradition. But there are many other options, especially in early Jewish interpretation history for what the word means. It's the standard word for "side".

Jon We talked about this as well I think during that same conversation.

Tim Correct.

Jon And the takeaway was, it's his side.

Tim It's his half.

Jon Yeah. So it's the word for half.

Tim Yes.

Jon So he took one from his half.

Tim Yeah, it's an architectural word that refers to...most often it's used to describe the side of a building.

Jon So this would make perfect sense if he said "he took one of the halves."

Tim Yeah, one from his side. Oh, how many sides does a human have?

Jon But that's awkward in English. In English, you would say "one of the sides."" 00:30:00

Tim What I'm mirroring in...

Jon In Hebrew, it's "one from his side."

Tim He took one from his side.

Jon That makes you think that one something from his side.

Tim But singular, in English, you would take one something from his side. That's how you'd say it in English. It's a way of saying in Hebrew he took one of his sides.

Jon That's the way in Hebrew to say "one of his sides"?

Tim Correct. He has two sides.

Jon That makes perfect sense. Because you want to make two from one, split them in half, and make the two.

Tim This creature's name is the human (ha'adam). And from ha'adam he takes one of the sides and he built the side, which he took from the human into...and then it uses a specific term "woman". He built woman, and he brought her to ha'adam, the human, and the human said, "Ah, this time, bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh, this one will be called isha because she was taken from not 'adam but from ish. So it's the human becomes man and woman. 00:31:00

Jon 'Adam means humanity. "Ish" means a singular man.

Tim A male.

Jon A male.

Tim And isha. The wordplay works in English and Hebrew. Woman, man. Ish, isha. So here you go. Now you have one who mirrors him.

Jon One who counterparts?

Tim Yeah. From one you now have more than one here. And they are not identical, they are different, which is what makes the ezer able to deliver the one. It's part of the commission is being fruitful and multiply. You need two different genders to do that. So the narrator closes the story. "Dear reader, for this reason, I want you to realize this isn't just an interesting story about people in the past." He's telling the story as archetypal here. For the species. "For this reason, a man, an ish will leave his father and mother and he will cling to his isha, and they will become one flesh. And the two of them were naked... 00:32:00

Jon One body?

Tim Yeah, totally. Remember he took one of the sides and close the flesh, and he just said, "This is my flesh. My flesh just went out of me." Because that one is flesh. Look at them. The flesh like I am. So we have two. But then the whole thing is verse 24 is going into the reader's presence, so to speak, and saying, "Here's what's crazy. This is a world full of males and females. And you've got a male and female that you've literally came from. Their bodies. You are of their flesh." And that's why bone and flesh is the kinship language here. 00:33:00

So you go out there and there's someone that is a biological stranger to me, biologically or kinship wise. And yet, through marriage, we become one and then only together create a new one human. And so it's that mystery, that from two who have become one produce a biological one. But that close relationship has to be severed, so to speak, to go be joined to a biological stranger to repeat the process again.

Jon The relationship with your mother and father?

Tim Correct. It's pondering there's a oneness between a child and their parents. But there's also a oneness between a husband and wife. Wife and a husband. But there are different kinds of oneness.

Jon Right.

Tim Somewhere in there is a mystery the narrator wants us to ponder about the nature and identity of humans. He's getting philosophical here. The narrator is.

00:34:00

Jon You think the narrator is really thinking about this idea of what it means to have an identity?

Tim Yeah, to be an 'adam.

Jon To be a human. That yes, I am a human, I am me apart from anyone else. But to be fully human is actually being connected to others. And there are two examples here. Is one is being connected to your mother and father.

Tim Yes, that's right. There's a oneness.

Jon So oneness there. But then you actually go out, and then you can find a new oneness, which is then this oneness is in male, female together, which is calling back to the image of God being both male and female, which allows you to multiply and to fill the earth.

00:35:00

Tim It's the same idea advanced through a different narrative. In other words, this little scene here is parallel to the ideas of that little poem in Genesis 1. That humanity images God in its unified state. But that unified state doesn't erase the diversity of the many that that humanity represents. In fact, it's going to be precisely through innumerable cycles of dividing and being reunited as one that humanity images God. It's the dividing and multiplying and then unifying again. The whole thing is an image of the divine life. It's an image of God as a unified plurality that is eternally generating life. I mean, I think that's the mystery we're invited to here. Humans image God. When I see my humanity only as it participates in others around me and as I become unified with them.

00:36:00

Jon But it doesn't mean that you're less human if you're an orphan or you stay single.

Tim That's why I'm saying it's important that it's abstract and it's important that there's two types of oneness talked about here. One is the one that you share in a family. But then another is a oneness in how I relate to others around me. And here the example is marriage. But it's not the only example. The Book of Genesis is going to go on to explore all kinds of other examples of how you can unify as a common humanity with others. But the two categories are here. Family or marriage. This is the family of God video. So God's purpose is to have a whole family of families that in their diversity reflect the image and all of their uniqueness. But not their uniqueness at the expense of their humanity.

Section Break

00:37:55

Tim Let's go back to that example in the Church of the Annunciation from our previous conversation. It's one Jesus being represented visually, but it's precisely the hundred some odd different ethnic portrayals of Jesus is the differences between those. But the fact that they are representing one Jesus, that makes it such a powerful experience to go there. It's the many and the one simultaneously, if this makes any sense. This is the biblical authors getting philosophical here about human identity. But they're doing it through poetry and narrative. I don't know if I'm making any sense.

Jon You are making sense, but I am also feeling like it's not completely landing for me. I love this image of 100 different portraits of the same thing allows you to really begin to appreciate the essence of that thing. Because if I drew a picture of...let's just use another example other than Jesus. I drew a picture of my family, we put that up and there's 100 other pictures of my family. I just looked at my picture with family, I would get a concept for what family is. If I looked at 100 different pictures of families from 100 different cultures, then I get this more true picture of what a family actually is in its most universal sense.

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Tim That's great. And all of a sudden, you realize, like, "Oh, I thought I knew what it meant to be a part of a family, but I realize that's just my experience of being a family," which is genuine, I'm human, but there's all of these other ways that people have experienced being in a family. And they're experiencing the same thing. But it's also...

Jon But it looks all different.

Tim It's different.

Jon ...in its own unique ways.

Tim That's right.

Jon Now let's talk about human identity. I experience being a human, because I have my own identity and I have this body and this brain, and I experienced the world through my five senses. This is my paradigm of what it means to be human. You have yours. 00:40:00

Tim Yes.

Jon If I just think, well, being a human is just what I experience, then I'm limited to my experience. But if somehow I get connected to you in such an intimate way that now I understand what it means for you to be human, and I do that with 100 other people, I have this much more fuller sense of what it really means to be human.

Tim Yeah, it's so much bigger than what you've first experienced. But then after you get to know these hundred other humans, your experience of your own individual humanity is...

Jon Is not lost.

Tim ...is not lost, but it's not the same anymore because it has now been enriched by being connected to all these other people's experience of what it means to be human.

Jon And there's this sense of that we are called to not just live individually, but we come from a collective, our family, and we're also called to then unite with others. One specific way is marriage. 00:41:00
But you're saying there's other applications of unity for the sake of realizing what it really means to be human and to be human as a collective in a way that doesn't make you lose your...

Tim Yeah, that's exactly right.

Jon You think all those ideas are here?

Tim Yes. Oh, absolutely. Those are the ideas that are narrative trying to put in front of us. And through the two examples of male and female because they're kind of the most iconic examples of unity and difference, but as we're going to go on and see, all these design patterns, all this vocabulary of one and the two, and flesh and bone are going to get repeated in all kinds of different relationships of uncles and nephews and cousins and brothers. So this is kind of the core motif being introduced here.

Jon So all this is about creating families?

Tim Family. It's about the human family. The biblical story works off the premise and a claim that human identity, in a healthy way, it's formed only when it's connected and enriched by lots of other humans, and 00:42:00

in unity, recognizing that we are one. This is working in the abstract. Let's think about historical context. These texts are being generated by family living in the hill country of what today we call Israel Palestine. It was a fairly small nation-state connected to an ethnic group that was a fairly insignificant player on the international scene.

Jon Yeah. I mean, you got Babylon and Assyria and Egypt. And these guys are big players.

Tim Big players. And they all have family mythologies about how their family is the real family. Whether it's Babylon or Egypt. And then here in the Canaanite hill country, I think we've got all these tribes, the Hittites and the Arkites and the Jebusites. And they're all families. They got the Philistines down on the coast, and they came from somewhere else in the Mediterranean Sea, the Mycenaeans. So it's all tribe and family. So you grew up in a world where you're a small, insulated people group that's looking out at a world of families and conflict.

00:43:00

Jon Because most of the time if you run into another clan or tribe, they're a threat.

Tim They're a threat, or you need to find a way to make peace with them so that you can peacefully coexist and maybe benefit from each other. So it's that right there. It's saying, for any of us to exist and live here, we're all these families' intention, but yet, we recognize that to move forward, we have to work together. And when we work together, when we unify, things go great. There's all this potential unleashed that wasn't there if we just stay insulated. So that's a universal human experience. That my humanity can actually only become what it's meant to be when I unify with other humans.

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These two narratives are inviting us to ponder that mystery almost in the abstract as it were, and it creates a core need in the biblical story. Whatever humanity is going to be in the story, its ideal state is when it's at one, when it's unified and it's one. They have to diversify and they have to multiply, but we're going to need for the ideal state for God and these creatures to rule the world together as partners. They are going to have to become one.

Jon And where do you see that in Genesis 1 and 2?

Tim In Genesis 1, it would be that male and female as they are fruitful and multiply, yet they are one species. They are ha'adam (humanity). And it's as one, it's as ha'adam that they image God together.

Jon It all goes back to that God created humanity in His image.

00:45:00

Tim That's right.

Jon So there's a collective humanity all together...

Tim Solidarity.

Jon Solidarity. Where do we get humanity? Well, it's all of this reproduction of male and females, which creates these families. Which has its own unity, which has its own kind of magic of being one, but two, or one but many that then all of these disparate families become humanity, which together image God.

Tim Yeah. It's through their difference, joining together as one that they are the image. Just as a different male and a female together through their different unifying as one, now we've got the image of God.

Jon So in Genesis 1:27, God created humanity in His own image. Is that reflecting on a future state of humanity with many families? Or is this very abstract of like the potential of humanity? 00:46:00

Tim Well, I think from the perspective of the narrator, from the person who wrote it, there's families all over the world. Where did we all come from? Well, here's one thing. We are all one humanity that together reflects the divine image.

Jon I totally missed that when the translation is "God created man in His own image."

Tim Oh, totally.

Jon I totally miss that.

Tim I agree.

Jon So a lot of my confusion is coming from the fact that I've read this verse many times and I never thought about that he's reflecting on humanity as a whole being God's image.

Tim As a whole single species. And it may be, one, the translation man, because of the English word "man," I think of a male human.

Jon Yeah, I think a male human.

Tim First of all. Then second is we are also in a culture that shaped how we think about human identity, that it's primarily something I...

Jon Very individual.

Tim ...as an individual possess. This is a completely different view of reality, that humans primarily have a collective identity, and that my humanity, as an individual is only fulfilled and complete when I realize my unity with that whole. And it gives us all the groundwork for stuff the apostles and Jesus just take for granted when they start talking about the body of the Messiah. 00:47:00

Jon That's where we're heading?

Tim The new humanity.

Jon That's where we're heading.

Tim But this is all the necessary groundwork to get there.

Jon Going back to just the people who wrote this, the hill country...

Tim Israelites

Jon ...the Israelites living in the Near East, everyone's got their own origin stories that explain why they're important. It's so fascinating that the origin story that they embrace...I guess, well, it's a minority report, like you said...

Tim Yeah.

Jon ...but the prophets put forward is that all the nations are the image of God.

Tim Totally. That's exactly right.

Jon Because you would say, "Well, our nation is the image of God." 00:48:00

Tim Our nation is the image of God.

Jon And that's even a big step. Because usually it's the king. The king of our nation is the image of God. And we serve the king and he is God's representation.

Tim That's right.

Jon But here they're saying, "All nations are the image of God."

Tim In other words, most people groups tell their foundation story in a way that privileges their group as having a superiority over another family. Our family was founded by the gods, our kingdom, our family, that kind of thing. And as of the other nations, they're subhuman. This is how the language of family mythology works is you paint your origins as superior and other families as inferior, and therefore deserving to be your slaves or wiped out. So this is a remarkably universal and global, international way of thinking about human identity at the beginning of the story. 00:49:00

Section Break 00:49:40

Tim So the point here is in Genesis 1 and 2, summarize, we're thinking about humanity as a collective, unified whole. And that only as a collective unified whole do our humans, the image of God, partners with God, to do the thing that God called them to do. Genesis 2 zeroes in and gives us that idea from another narrative angle of a lone human.

Jon I can't do it.

Tim I can't do it. And then you dramatize it with the animals. Like, oh, they come in pairs but there's no human pair. God splits the human. So the humanity becomes male and female.

Jon Have you ever tried to preach this during a marriage ceremony?

Tim No. No. No one goes to a wedding to hear a sermon.

Jon No.

Tim No.

Jon But isn't it kind of like your obligation as a pastor to be like, "Well, they're not here to hear a sermon but I got them."

Tim No way.

Jon "I'm giving them a sermon." I've been to those weddings.

Tim Oh, I've been there too. Different philosophies. There's different philosophies of how to do wedding. There are many human expressions of how to do a wedding.

Jon Totally. If we put 100 on the wall, we would see the fullness of them.

Tim That's right.

Jon No, you are there to celebrate marriage. And to celebrate marriage, appreciate the mystery of what it is and how deep it goes. 00:51:00

Tim That's right. There are many ways to appreciate it. And one of them is to just watch it happening.

Jon That's true.

Tim Anyway, the point is in Genesis 2, you go from the one to the many. The one becomes more than one so that they can reunite so that the many can become one again. So now we can get the story moving and they can be what God called them to be. That's the narrative arc of Genesis 2. So it's making the same basic point as the poem in Genesis 1. So you walk out of the garden of Eden and you're like, "Wow, man, if humans can be many and one through a commitment to each other at the same time, that would be a pretty sweet setup." And, of course, it's precisely the unity between the two that is broken in Genesis 3.

Jon Yeah.

Tim The first casualty is not between God and humans. The first casualty after the humans eat from the forbidden tree is they knew that they were naked, and then they hide their bodies from each other. Then they hide from God. They hide first from each other, their bodies, their oneness. 00:52:00

Jon Their unity is broken.

Tim Their oneness. They're now estranged from each other. Because the two of them were naked. And it's cool. Total vulnerability. And there's no shame the moment...

Jon It's like being naked with yourself, which I guess has its own shame sometimes.

Tim Yeah, totally. Yes. Yeah, totally.

Jon Okay. Where are we going from here?

Tim Well, from here it's going to be how the narrative arc is going to focus on how humanity is becoming many and that's a problem because of violence outside the garden. So there's going to be a human attempt to all become one again or to retain the oneness of humanity, but not in a good sense. And this is called Babylon.

Jon This comes back to the insight we made last episode, which is unity is going to happen 00:53:00

Tim Ah, I see. Yes.

Jon That's just kind of like gravity happens. It's like almost like a law of nature of like there is going to be this more and more cooperation. But you said it's the story by which you are unifying, and that one leads to Babylon and one leads to the new humanity. So that's what we're going to chase down.

Tim Yeah. The difference is going to be, are we going to unify in such a way that you have to lose your unique identity to become one with me? Or is there a way to become one where our unique identities are retained, but transformed and enriched together by becoming one? The unity where one culture assimilates everything into itself to make it its own version of one, this is called Babylon. But the version that both retains and enriches everyone's different humanity, this is called the family of God or the new Jerusalem. 00:54:00

Jon Thanks for listening to this episode of the BibleProject podcast. We are in the beginning of this series on the family of God. Next week, we will continue the third episode, looking at the table of nations.

Tim It's a genealogy kind of. Really more it's an ethnographic map of the biblical world. And notice the categories here. These are the nations, each in their language, by their family, by their nation. We're building out the biblical world right here. These are all the characters that are going to play a role in the rest of the biblical story.

Jon

This episode was produced by Dan Gummel, show notes by Lindsey Ponder, and the theme music is by the band Tents. BibleProject is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to experience the Bible as one unified story that leads to Jesus. So that's the goal of this podcast. We also create videos that come out of these conversations. We put those videos on YouTube and our own website, bibleproject.com. They're quick visual summaries of biblical themes, and other biblical books, and word studies, and all sorts of other good stuff. We have other resources. It's all for free because of the generous support of people like you. Find it all at bibleproject.com. Thanks for being a part of this with us.

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