



BibleProject Podcast

The Most Quoted Verse in the Bible Character of God E1

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

- Jon** The Bible is written by many different authors over hundreds of years. 00:00:00
One way that it stays connected as one unified story is through repetition. Biblical authors love to quote each other and to adapt these quotes into new contexts, building on them, and giving them continued life. This happens constantly. But there are two verses in the Hebrew Scriptures that get quoted and adapted more than any other.
- Tim** You know how John 3:16, "God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son," it's like the most quotable verse, at least in American Christianity, some forms, it says if these two verses Exodus 34:6-7 were the John 3:16 of ancient Israel. They come up so much as you read throughout the rest of the Bible.
- Jon** The most quoted verse by biblical authors in the Bible is Exodus 34:6-7. It reads, "Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and faithfulness; maintaining love for thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet, he does not leave the guilty and punished, he punishes the children and their children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generation." 00:01:00

We're going to start an entire series walking through these verses, and looking at the key vocabulary. But in this episode, we want to lay some groundwork. In particular, we want to look at this tension that pops in this verse, how it starts with such a lovely and caring picture of God. Gracious, slow to anger, abounding with loyal love. But then it seemingly ends with a vindictive picture of God. He wants to punish kids for the sins of their fathers?
- Tim** We see them as these two parts of God's character that we perceive somehow in tension with one another. And I think that's because the biblical authors are putting them out there as genuine tensions. But the question is, are these tensions that God feels within Himself? The tension comes with how does God relate to people who constantly fail as His partners? 00:02:00
- Jon** I'm John Collins. This is the BibleProject podcast. Today on the show, we're going to dig into these beautiful, important lines in Scripture. Joining me

is Tim Mackie, and another member of our team, Dr. Carissa Quinn. We're discussing the character of God. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Okay, we're going to start a new series in Exodus 34. It's two verses, 6 and 7. Here on the podcast, of course, is Tim.

Tim Hello.

Jon Hello, Tim. Also, with us is Carissa Quinn.

Carissa Hello.

Jon You might remember Carissa from a podcast episode maybe even a year ago, where she walked us through the word "witness" in the Bible for word study that she wrote. That is up on YouTube channel. Carissa has been part of our team for a while now. She does a lot of work for us. But Carissa, people might not remember you. Quickly, just the quick bio of yourself and what you've been doing on the team? 00:03:00

Carissa Sure. I'm a Bible scholar and educator. My main areas of research or the things that I'm really fascinated with all have to do with the literary artistry of Scripture. I work here at the BibleProject doing biblical research and developing educational resources. So right now I'm writing some of the upcoming videos like this topic we're talking about today. So we're talking about Exodus 34, and Tim and I are writing videos on some of the words used to describe God there. So I'm doing some of that. And then developing the curriculum for Classroom where we're starting to provide free online classes for all of you.

Tim Awesome. Carissa, you're creating in between sessions video of Classroom sessions. So you're creating interactive exercises, questions, all this interactive scripture study stuff that goes along to make it a whole class. And it's awesome. It's really cool stuff. 00:04:00

Carissa Right. So Tim teaches through multiple sessions on a topic or we'll have another instructor in and then students will get to interact with questions and hear other students' answers and do some projects and that sort of thing.

Tim That's great. Though you said Biblical Studies as a whole. Of course, you know which part of the Bible is near and dear to your heart.

Carissa The better part...I'm just kidding. The Hebrew Bible is my area of study. I have my PhD in Hebrew Bible and focus on the Psalms and the shape or the story that the Psalms tell.

Tim There you go.

Jon Cool. Carissa will be with us this whole series as we walk through Exodus 34:6-7 slowly. And it's going to be awesome. This is recorded during quarantine. 00:05:00

Tim Yes, it is. So early April 2020. It'll be interesting. Because when these episodes go live on our podcast, who knows?

Carissa I was just thinking about that—what quarantine will sound like at that time? Or what the feel will be of it.

Jon So these are coming out in the fall. What we're going to do is these two verses in Exodus, and we're going to talk about those. Then we're going to actually dig in deep to five attributes of God that we find in those. And those will be in subsequent podcast. But to tee this off, Tim, one thing that you told me is that this is the most referenced verse in the Bible by biblical authors?

Tim Yeah. So big picture, we're going to do five-word studies that all come from one verse in the book of Exodus, Exodus 34:6. But what we wanted to do was actually make a video that introduces people to these verses and where they appear in context, because they are the most requested and cross-referenced verses within the Old Testament. You know, how John 3:16, "For God so loved that He gave His one only Son" is like the most quotable verse, at least in American Christianity, some forms, it says if these two verses Exodus 34:6-7 were the John 3:16 of ancient Israel. 00:06:00

Carissa Oh, yeah.

Tim They just they come up so much as you read throughout the rest of the Bible. So we thought, let's make a video about these key words because it's a description of God's attributes. But the sense that they make is the sense when they're first introduced in a story in the book of Exodus. So we thought, "Let's make an intro video to a word study series." And that's this conversation that we're having right now. 00:07:00

So Carissa, why don't you introduce us...just actually just read these two verses aloud? And maybe we can just kind of make some initial observations about it.

Carissa Okay, good. This is Exodus 34:6-7. "Yahweh, Yahweh, a compassionate God and gracious, slow to anger and abundant of loyal love and faithfulness; keeper of loyal love for thousands, forgiver of iniquity, transgression and sin; yet, he will surely not clear the guilty, visitor of iniquity of fathers upon sons and upon the sons of sons, upon the third and fourth generation." And that's your translation in your notes, Tim?

Tim Mm hmm. Yeah. I'm guessing our listeners have probably heard at least some of these lines before. But Jon, can you remember back

when we first started talking about this and before we took a deep dive into these verses and what they mean, what your perception was? 00:08:00

Jon Yeah. The first verse is really wonderful. Compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in loyal love and faithfulness. That's what you would want in any friend. Those attributes are really lovely. No wonder it's requoted so much by biblical authors in different ways. Then the second half of the verse, it starts out really lovely too. It reinforces that God's keeper of loyal love for thousands and forgiver of iniquities and transgressions and sins. Then it just all of a sudden takes a turn. "Yet he will not clear the guilty, He will visit the iniquity upon the fathers and the sons and on their sons and their son, like the grandkids to the third and fourth generation.

So just kind of ends with this like, "Whoa, I guess God is vengeful after all. What is this deal with punishing grandkids for...?" When you're writing something out...and when I think of writing a memorable paragraph, I'm going to end with the thing that I want the listener to really go away with. And just like the last thought is the thought I want them...it becomes a central thought. The last thought here is about visiting iniquity generationally. Which is intense. 00:09:00

Tim Yeah, totally.

Jon And all those other thoughts like of being faithful and all those things all center in the background.

Carissa Yeah, I think when I've quoted this verse, or said, "Oh, I love this verse," I stopped after "forgiver of iniquity, transgression, and sin."

Tim Because then you got the goodies, all the God's goodies before that point. So you're saying it's kind of like a bait and switch almost. It feels like, I love you, I love you. He's wonderful, and He's going to punish your family. 00:10:00

Carissa Intense.

Tim Yeah, totally. But that's interesting to think about it from that angle, Jon, where from a modern communication standpoint, you end with the thing that you really want to make sure they take away for long term. It seems to be a different communication strategy here, where there's a balance. It's almost like the first half of the statement is about God's compassion and generosity. But then the second half is about how God's generosity is not licensed for people to go do whatever they want. There's judgment and accountability. I guess the balancing act is more important than the final word. I just think that's interesting differing communication strategy.

Jon Well, yeah. And you showed, Tim... we really dissected these two verses in terms of their literary structure. Our first video here on this is going 00:11:00

to be highlighting there's two chasms happening here. There's all the symmetry. And it's in the symmetry, that I'm supposed to kind of walk away with appreciating the tension, but also appreciating how much more highlighted God's attributes of faithfulness and slow to anger and gracious, how much more these good attributes, what we would call good attributes are supposed to stick with us in terms of being more important, even though there is attention. But you only get there when you appreciate all that literary design. Where, as just a Western modern reader, I'm just like, "Whoa." It feels like it ends big punch in there.

Tim We'll come back to that literary design of these couple verses. It was my main theology mentor and seminary Prof. Gerry Breshears, who really put these two verses on my radar in a significant way. I don't even remember. I think it was a theology class. But he's the one who first showed me that this is, first of all, it's the first description of God's character that you come across as you're reading through the Bible from page one. So you watch God say and do a lot of things, but it's the first time that God's own character is described in some kind of summary. But then second, he was the one who told me that it's the most requested verse of the Old Testament within the Old Testament itself. So I have Gerry to thanks for putting me on to this. This is many, many years ago. Carissa, was he still working there when you had classes with him?

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Carissa Probably. I can't remember. But I'm sure because it is a really important...I mean, these verses are super important for understanding who Yahweh is because it's all about God revealing Himself and all His goodness to Moses. So I'm sure. And it is interesting that this self-revealing of God is portrayed a something new, and that God says explicitly to Moses that even though he's revealed Himself in the past, He hasn't made Himself known by his name, which is exactly what he's doing here.

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Tim Yeah, by repeating the divine name twice. Yahweh, Yahweh. We'll actually get more into the narrative context, I think, a little bit later. But for the moment, Carissa, you're just naming this is the moment that Moses is in a cave up on Mount Sinai, and there's a divine storm cloud passing by because Moses asked to see God's glory. And God passes by in a storm, and then what Moses hears is this announcement. And it's verses 6 and 7. That's a pretty intense. Thunderstorm.

So what we're putting our finger on for the moment is that this is the first character description of God. It's one of the most important statements in the Old Testament itself. And what we found was this tension—this is what you were feeling, Jon—of like, what is God like if I just look at this first description of God in the Bible? Well, it's a

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balance of mercy and compassion and patience, but also a very firm sense of justice, and accountability, and recompense.

The first three, like mercy and compassion, make our hearts warm and fuzzy. And then we hear judgment or justice and recompense. I don't know. For many of us—I feel it too—we start to get a little uncomfortable. I think there's cultural reasons for that, our cultural setting, for why we start to squirm a little bit. But it's just interesting to pay attention to.

Jon And that I can adjust to this idea of justice. Yeah, okay. So there's justice for when you do wrong. God's going to hold you accountable to that iniquity, to use the biblical word there. But then when it says, "...to the sons and their sons to third and fourth generation," on a plain reading, that just looks like God's holding a grudge.

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Tim Totally.

Carissa Yeah, that's the challenging part.

Tim Actually, Exodus 34:7 has given rise to a pretty widespread idea. I know in the Christian tradition, different strands of the tradition—I don't know in Judaism—but the idea of a generational curse, where there can be some kind of divine judgment that lingers over a family so the bad stuff happens to them for generations and so on. I've totally heard people talk about this before as if it's something that the Bible teaches. So yeah, that does sound intense if in fact, that's what it means. So we'll come back around to that I think by the end of this first conversation.

So first, however, I think it's good to just sample this. Again, the language of Exodus 34:6 and 7 gets repeated or re-quoted or reused...I used to say, over 20 times in the Bible. So I've got 27 and I'm pretty sure that I'm missing about half a dozen more that might just be little snippets of one or two other words together.

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Jon Now, if they're re quoting it, why would it be so difficult to find how many times it's done?

Tim Oh, it's not that hard. It's more just I've sat down a couple of different times, and then I get interrupted or something.

Carissa But sometimes they only quote part of it, or maybe the words in a different order. So it just takes some reflection.

Tim What's valuable about these, at least 27, but I know there's some more reuses of these verses is you get to actually see how the biblical authors themselves understood it. By the way that they requote it, you get to see what they think it means, which is why they're recording it in the first place. So I think that can give us a clue as to how the biblical authors

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| | themselves understood the significance of this description of God's character. So should (<i>inaudible</i>) Some of them are really interesting. | 00:17:00 00:17:05 |
| Carissa | Yeah. | |
| | Section Break | 00:17:21 |
| Tim | The first time that it gets requoted in the book of Numbers 14. It's actually Moses is the one who requests them. And that makes sense because he was the one who first heard them. So Numbers 14, this is the story of the rebel spies who go into the land and then come back. You guys know the story. It's pretty famous story. So 10 of the spies give a report that "hey, the promised land, it's awesome. Look at the grapes. They're huge." But then they say, "But we also saw huge cities and huge people." The Nephilim, they say, are there, the group called the Anakites or the Anakim who are descendants of the Nephilim from the flood story. So that's intense. That's not a place you want to go hang out. | 00:18:00 |
| Jon | The giant? | |
| Tim | Totally. So the ten spies says, "No way, we're not going in there. Yahweh can't deliver us from those giants. We're going to die." But two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb say, "Oh, it's no problem. God can take care of giants. He's done it before." They don't say that. But that's the way the design pattern works. So the ten rebel spies get the whole people into a riot, and the people want to actually appoint a new leader, and go back to Egypt. That's the scene right here. So what God says is exactly what He says in the lead up to God saying this about Himself in the book of Exodus. He says, "I'm done with these people. I'm going to destroy them and start over with a new people. So what Moses says, what he responds is these verses in Numbers 14:17. One of you should read it. | 00:19:00 |
| Carissa | Okay, starting in verse 17. "But now I pray, let the power of the Lord be great just as you have declared. The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations. Forgive, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your loving kindness, just as you also have forgiven these people from Egypt even until now." | |
| Jon | So when we quote it, you really is focusing on the second half of the quote. But he throws in first, "Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness." Two of the five attributes that we had previously. | |

Tim Correct.

Carissa And forgiving. It's really interesting that he quotes the second half, this part that we think is really more harsh. But because of that quoting, he's asking that God would forgive the iniquity of the people. It seems like he would have just left off the second half and just quoted the first. I think that also shows us that we're maybe missing what that second half means if we're reading as a fully negative statement. 00:20:00

Tim Totally. That's a great observation. In other words, he condenses the first half, Exodus 34:6, and he just quotes two out of the five. And then he condenses Exodus 34:7. But his takeaway, even after quoting that God won't clear the guilty and visit iniquity of fathers on the children, his takeaway is "so forgive the people." Because that's what you say you do. You're a forgiver. So you've forgiven us up till now, so do it again.

Jon Can we stop there, Tim? Because it is really odd. He quotes God's own proclamation of Himself, by the way, right? We haven't said that. 00:21:00

Tim Oh, that's true. In Exodus 34.

Jon In Exodus, this is Yahweh Himself saying this about himself.

Tim Correct.

Jon That he will not clear the guilty. And not only will he not clear the guilty, but generations to come. Then right after that. Moses says, "So forgive the guilty."

Tim Yeah, totally.

Jon Did he not just listen to his own statement?

Tim Totally.

Carissa It's really interesting that right before that it says, "Forgiving iniquity." And now it says, "But he will visit the iniquity on the father's and the children." So yeah, there's definitely an interesting relationship.

Tim In other words, Moses' takeaway is not "Oh, therefore, there's like no hope for somebody who blows it."

Jon Because this is a moment of iniquity, right?

Tim Totally. That's right.

Jon Where they're saying, "We're not going to go to where God wants us to go."

Tim Correct. Yeah, that's right. Now, this is the...hold on. There's two in 11, one in 12. This is the fourth rebellion story in the wilderness of the Book of Numbers. As the people leave Mount Sinai in Numbers 00:22:00

10, going from Numbers 11 to Numbers 20, there are seven rebellion stories where the people rebel against God or Moses. This is the fourth. It's the center one, which I think is significant.

Then in the center, we find Moses is doing the same thing he had to do on Mount Sinai in the story of the golden calf, which is intercede. And he quotes the same words. Essentially he's asking God to be consistent by changing His decision to destroy the people and to forgive them. He doesn't see God's justice and His mercy as contradictory. It's like somehow he knows if I press on the mercy side of the scales, God will yield. Because he knows that at his core, that verse 6 describes some kind of baseline. And the stuff about clearing the guilty is important. And God will do that. But what else does he mean to say, "You won't clear the guilty, so forgive these guilty people?"

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Carissa I was thinking about this. Is there any time in the Hebrew Bible where someone intercedes or asks God for something and He doesn't respond with compassion or mercy or lovingkindness?

Tim Man. Well, that's really interesting. There's not for the most part. When you get in to the book of Jeremiah, he actually tells Jeremiah not to pray or intercede. He forbids him. The logic is exactly that. Because when you have a righteous intercessor, God listens. So God tells him not to pray on behalf of the people. He orders Jeremiah not to intercede. Isn't that interesting?

Carissa That's really interesting.

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Jon That's weird. It gives me this picture of like that God knows He's a pushover. He's like protecting Himself.

Tim Yes, it is. It's interesting. We see them as these two parts of God's character that we perceive somehow in tension with one another. And I think that's because the biblical authors are putting them out there as genuine tensions. But the question is, are these tensions that God feels within Himself? The tension comes with how does God relate to people who constantly fail as His partners.

Jon Well, and he does get angry.

Tim Totally.

Jon If we go back to the original story, we haven't talked about the narrative yet, but He's angry.

Tim Totally. That's right.

Carissa He is, but it also takes him...with Moses, it's not until the fifth time that Moses resists and that He gets angry.

Tim That's true.

Jon He's slow to anger.

Tim Slow to anger. Yeah, that's right. Okay, this is one example of a real quotation, and it's illuminating one, I think. Should we look at some others? 00:25:00

Section Break 00:25:39

Tim Ooh, this is important. Let's go to another Moses' one. This is in the book of Deuteronomy 5. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses is retelling to the children of the people who rebelled in the wilderness. So that story we just read from Numbers, God's actually says to the rebels, spies, and to the people who rebelled, he says, "Oh, you don't want to go into the promised land? Well, then you won't. You'll die in the wilderness, and your kids will be the ones who get to go in."

So in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is now readdressing, this new generation before they go into the land. So Deuteronomy 5 actually it's a re-quotation of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments appear twice in the Old Testament. We've talked about this before. So when he gets to the first commandments about having no other gods, he inserts a quotation of these lines. Super interesting. And maybe, Jon, Deuteronomy 5:9. He's talking about don't have any other gods before me.

Jon Yes. "You should not worship or serve them, for I the LORD your God, am I a passionate God." Then he quotes visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third in the fourth generations of those who heed, but showing loving kindness to thousands to those who love me and keep my commandments." So there he flips it. It's like more digestible when he flips it. 00:27:00

Tim Oh, this what you were talking about earlier?

Jon And with the good news?

Tim Yeah, sure. Yeah, sure.

Jon It's like, "Oh, okay, He's going to be just when he has to be just great. Oh, but he's loving." It settles a little better.

Carissa This one is also quoting directly from Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. So not Exodus 34. Exodus 34, when Moses is on the mountain, is almost recapping Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments, but changing it up a little bit.

Tim Actually, that's a great observation, Carissa. In other words, this idea of God being both compassionate and patient, just and visiting iniquity of fathers on the children and so on, that basic idea occurs for the first time in the Ten Commandments of Exodus. Then what God is doing in Exodus 34 is picking that up and developing it. And then that's

what's getting recorded here. Do you notice there's also two small differences to each of these lines that's not present in Exodus 34? 00:28:00

Carissa Yeah, there's the clarification of the disposition of the people. So he visits the iniquity on those who hate him but shows lovingkindness to those who love Him.

Tim Yes, and keep my commandments. This actually, I think, is hugely significant. It's as if when you're reading and just Exodus 34, and you read, "He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and upon the grandsons to the third and the fourth generation." What you're not told in that little kind of recap there is, "well, did the children do?" This is what bothered you, Jon? Right?

Jon Right. Yeah.

Tim It's like, "Oh, is it..."

Jon Just because your dad did something bad, why do you have to suffer?

Tim Correct. And the question is, is that in fact what it means, that God will visit the consequences of my grandfather's sin but I'll be the one to suffer for it? Is that what Exodus 34:7 means? 00:29:00

Jon And why not the fifth generation?

Tim Yeah, totally. So what this rephrasing of it in Deuteronomy 5 tells us is when we're talking about these further generations, their behavior is crucial to how God responds to them. In other words, when God says in Deuteronomy 5 "visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me," it's clarifying that what we're talking about is if later generations repeat or persist in the covenant rebellion of their ancestors, they're going to get the same consequence.

But when we talk about these thousands that get loyal love, we're talking about thousands of generations who stays faithful to the covenant. No generation gets a free pass or no generation will be treated unjustly. Their own behavior matters for how God responds to them. It seems to me that's the implication here. 00:30:00

Jon What you're saying then is the whole bit about generations is just God clarifying, "This isn't just for you guys. This is also for your kids and your kids' kids. I'm not making some special thing for this generation. This is how it's always going to be. You hate me, and you do evil, then I'm going to have to hold you accountable to that. But my disposition is lovingkindness."

Tim I think that's what it means. And also this is the bigger context. This is God's revelation of His character to the specific people group that He's made a generational covenant with. So the point is as the generations go by, as

we go down the line in this long history of relationship, you can count on me being this way. And this is how I will interact with every generation. So it's really it's a statement about the stability of God's character.

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Jon That's interesting. Because I take that for granted maybe. Having grown up in western Christianity, we talk a lot about God is immutable, or the theological term of He doesn't change. He's always the same. So I think I come to a verse and I just take that for granted. Where if I put myself in the psyche of an ancient Israelite forming this covenant, you might wonder, "Yeah, okay, is this just for us? Or is this going to be for kids? And is this going to continue?"

Carissa I think what's harder for us in our modern context, is the responsiveness of God. That He's consistent to respond according to His character and according to how people respond to Him. I think that might be the harder part.

Tim You're saying. Just the fact that He is genuinely relational and interactive?

Carissa Yeah.

Tim Yeah, I agree. I think that is hard for some people maybe in some traditions. It's hard to tell. Do you have a sense of why from your own experience, Carissa?

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Carissa I think that for a lot of people, it does conflict with that immutability or unchangeable nature of God. But I think like Jeremiah 18, you were talking about Jeremiah earlier, explains the consistency of God. That if a nation turns from their evil, then I'll relent. And if they do evil, then I'll bring calamity on them. And like it's like a consistent thing you can depend on with God. But I think what's interesting about this statement is that the scales are tipped toward grace and compassion, which I don't think means more people are doing good. You know what I mean?

Tim Yeah, yeah. That's interesting.

Carissa It means God just chooses to be gracious above and beyond what people deserve, which I guess is the meaning of grace in the first place.

Tim Yeah, it's good. Like somehow, when we, the three of us, and I'm guessing "we" represent how people in general in our culture might hear this, we see the statement about God having this nice side and then a more just or stern side. And for us, we hear those as somehow they're in conflict or intention. But when the biblical authors heard this, they heard the whole thing as a statement of stability and assurance. And that God will deal with us justly and fairly, always tending towards mercy. But any generation will get what's coming to it if that's how they act. And

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it may be that I didn't grow up as a polytheist. So I don't know what it's like to believe in or be loyal to a God who you hope will favor you.

Jon But you have no idea.

Tim You don't have any idea. Yeah.

Jon Did you make the right sacrifice? Did you say the right prayer?

Tim Say the right prayers. Especially then if you interpret the quality of your life as a form of blessing or judgment. If I have bad crops, or all my chickens die in a plague, which God is punishing me, and for what reason? This is like a real crisis for a lot of ancient cultures, and some cultures still today that still relate. If they believe in divine powers, they relate to divine powers in this way. 00:34:00

Jon Well, no, Tim, to be fair, there's a lot in the Torah about how if you obey me, your crops are going to be good.

Tim Totally. But the whole point of a statement like this is to say, if your crops are going bad, you know why. You know exactly why. It takes the mystery out of it. At least I think that the whole point of God giving Israel the terms of the covenant, and then here saying, this is how God will relate to you based on the covenant.

Jon So you think the big takeaway is, okay, now I know the attributes of God that He wants me to care about, and they're His patience and His mercy and His faithfulness. But He also wants me to know that He has a consistency for how He's going to deal with us and that I can know that. So there's not some unpredictability to Him. So those are the kind of two main takeaways. 00:35:00

Tim I think that's right.

Carissa I also think it's significant in this verse in Deuteronomy 5 and in Exodus 20, where it's quoting from that it gives the context for what iniquity means. It starts with "You shall not worship other gods or serve them." I think sometimes when we think of iniquity or sin, we think of just doing something bad. But I think this seems like a whole heart thing about which God you worship.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Allegiance.

Jon Can I ask you, Tim? In Deuteronomy 5, He says, "I'm a passionate God?"

Tim Yes. Yeah. That's my translation.

Jon Oh. What's the word there?

Tim Kanna. It's usually translated "jealous". "I am a jealous God." I've become convinced that the English word jealousy

communicates only part of what kanna is communicating. Also, the word “jealousy” introduces a layer of meaning that’s not fully present with kanna. So I like the word passionate more. 00:36:00

Jon In English jealousy and envy become kind of synonymous.

Carissa Maybe like uncontrolled rage or something.

Jon Yeah, actually, Tristen and I had to deal with this as we’ve written about emotions and this idea of if you look up the way jealousy has been used traditionally, it means like when something that you deserve, or should have is taken from you, then you’re jealous. Where envy is when you want something that you don’t have. I understand why you’d move away from jealousy. But why the word passion?

Tim Mainly because jealousy, I think in English, at least, what it means to me, and I’ve asked lots of other people about this too before because I gave a sermon on this once and I really wanted to figure it out. I think jealousy in English for most English speakers has a self-oriented focus. It’s about what I deserve and what I want. And so I’m jealous. I want something usually that I don’t have and I’m jealous of somebody else. 00:37:00

Jon Well, that’s where we conflate it with envy. And that has become the typical way that that word is used now.

Tim So kanna is a covenant term and it has to do with the passion that arises within you when you see somebody that you’re covenantally connected to giving their allegiance and their well-being over to someone who will hurt them. One of the important other times kanna is used is that of a husband and a wife, where a husband hears or is suspicious that his wife is sleeping with another man. In Numbers 5, it says, “If a spirit of kanna comes over him...” So it’s passion for his covenantal partner, his wife.

Jon Well, that’s the traditional meaning of the word jealous...

Tim Correct.

Jon ...which it just doesn’t really mean that anymore.

Tim But what’s underneath it with other gods isn’t just that will because I deserve your praise, not the other gods. That’s because the consistent depiction of allegiance to other gods is that it will degrade your humanity and lead Israel to death, specifically towards injustice and neglect of the poor. 00:38:00

Carissa There’s almost an element of compassion and passion.

Tim Yeah, that’s right. It’s not actually very different than the passion. This hasn’t happened too much with my kids yet, but I can already start to see as they’re in our neighborhood school. There’s some little

neighborhood buddy friends that are awesome. And I'm so stoked to take one of my kids over to play at someone's house for an afternoon. But then there have been other times where one of my sons has come home from a couple hours at a friend's house, just the vibe he's giving off, and the words he's using, and it's like I realize like, "Oh, he was exposed to a different value system just now, and he's treating his brother a lot more poorly now." And so we have to deal with that."

00:39:00

The feeling inside of me is a kind of protective jealousy I think of like, "Oh, no, dude. He's going to be exposed to something that's going to, I think, chip away his character, and actually make him a less generous person." That's the kind of passion. It's not about me as such. Like, "He must be raised in my home and have my values." It's that I think the values we're trying to give him are the ones that are actually going to help him flourish the best. Anyway. That's kind of a side trail on kanna. Maybe we should make a word study video about that.

Carissa Yeah, that'd be cool.

Jon Thank you for going down that rabbit hole. "Passionate" is still hard.

Tim "Passionate" doesn't do the whole job. But I think it at least does a better job than jealousy because it will raise the question of like, "What does that mean?" Just like it did with you.

Jon Yeah.

Tim Can you think of another English word that captures that idea?

Jon Well, it's funny as I just wanted to reclaim the original meaning of jealous was my strategy, and I was voted down. It's just become our vernacular. Just you say jealous to mean desire and need to have something that you don't have.

00:40:00

Carissa Did you guys land on something better? You and Tristen?

Jon No, we just ended up using the word jealous in the way that's used today.

Tim I think it could have a more negative selfish meaning or it could have a more positive, other-centered meaning. That I'm jealous for this, meaning I'm passionate to see...

Jon No one uses it that way anymore.

Tim But I think it used to.

Jon Yeah. It probably had kind of this like slow morphing into it was very positive. And then it became a mixed bag. And now being jealous is not a good thing.

Section Break

00:41:10

Tim Here, let me show you guys a couple of other times that these verses get requoted. Let's look at how it gets used in the Prophets. Let's go to Joel 2. In the book of Joel, he's watching a drought, which causes a famine in the land of Israel. And then there's a locust swarm. And if you know key covenant passages in the Torah, like Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, you know those things are a result of God removing his kind of protective hand a blessing on Israel as a result of Covenant violation. This is what He calls the people to do in response. Joel 2:13. This actually a famous first. I don't know. Is this another bumper sticker verse from the Bible?

Carissa It's a good one.

Tim It is a good one. I'll just go ahead and read it. He says to the people, "Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God because He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and relenting of doing harm or doing catastrophe."

00:42:00

Jon Ra.

Tim Yeah, ra. Notice he's just quoted from what we call verse 6 of Exodus 34. He's already quoting from the positive half, which is interesting.

Jon The God goodies.

Tim Yeah, the God's goodness. It's as if what He sees around them is the results of verse 7, right? Because what he sees that locusts plague and a famine and he thinks this is all a result of covenant rebellion. So here it is. God is not clearing the guilty, and He's visiting the iniquity on us. But even in the midst of God's judgment, he knows that God has a soft spot for people who turned to him in humility. I think this is why He told Jeremiah not to pray for the people. It's the same idea.

00:43:00

So he says, "Listen, if we turn back to God, we can count on the fact that He will respond in some way, at least." This is a very common way that the verses get used. There's people in trouble and they say, "Let's turn to God, cry out to God, because he's like this."

Carissa Yeah. A lot of the quotations you have here just quote from the first half.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Ooh, this is a good one about God's soft spot, Jon. It's from the repurposing of these words in Jonah.

Carissa Oh, yeah.

Tim In Jonah? I'll let you read it. This is from Jonah chapter 4.

Jon Yes. The forgotten chapter of the Bible.

Tim That's right. This is right after the people of Nineveh turn to God, and God forgives the city and the people on the king of Nineveh.

Jon And that's where the storybooks end. But there's another chapter. "But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this...'" Is this your translation? 00:44:00

Tim No, this is New American Standard, I think.

Jon "Therefore in order to prevent this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loyal love, and one who relents concerning ra, concerning..."

Tim Doing calamity, yeah. This is sarcastic.

Jon Yeah. Is that the right word for it? Sarcastic?

Tim Yes.

Jon Yeah. He's like, "I know this of you and so I didn't want to go to Nineveh because I don't like those guys. And they don't deserve your patient mercy."

Tim He's angry that God is this way towards other people that he doesn't like. But of course, what was it that moved God to have the fish vomit him out so that he would live and not die? The narrative doesn't say it, but the implication is because God was gracious and compassionate with him. But then somehow, the moment God is compassionate...we're back to God's consistency. He says, "This is why I didn't want to go to the city of Nineveh because I know you have the soft spot for people, no matter who they are to turn to you, and you always forgive them." 00:45:00

Carissa Like there is nothing that Jonah could do to stop this consistency of God.

Tim Yeah, that's right. We're back to that consistency theme, that God doesn't play favorites. And with every generation and apparently with any people group, He will always operate according to Exodus 34:6-7, so much so that Jonah can throw these words in God's face as an accusation almost.

Jon Oh, yeah. And he could take those words to the bank. He doesn't like the Ninevites so much and he believes in God's character so much that He decides to take off.

Carissa Yeah, that's interesting.

Tim Yeah, it is. Okay. So, that usage from Joel gave us people sitting in hardship, but they know that God will be gracious. Let's humble ourselves (*unintelligible*). Jonah flips this over. The Prophet Nahum does something interesting. What he does is turn up the volume on verse 00:46:00

00:46:09

7 on the intense parts. So this is a whole book that is a prophet who's commenting on the downfall of the Assyrians, the Assyrian Empire, and the downfall of the city of Nineveh. That features in the book of Jonah.

So we're talking about an empire that ruled the ancient Near East for centuries with iron fist. I mean, they would peel off people's skin in public, gets public shame and punishment, and put heads on spikes of cities they conquered. It was gnarly. So the whole ancient world was rejoicing when Nineveh fell to the Babylonians. So Nahum writes this poem to talk about how he believes Yahweh is the one behind the downfall of Nineveh. This is from chapter 1. Carissa, you want to read it?

00:47:00

Carissa Sure. Chapter 1, verses 2, and 3. Is that the same word for jealous there?

Tim Yes, it is.

Carissa "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. And then the quotation. "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

Tim That's intense.

Carissa What's interesting, though, is that these verses are written about an oppressor to God's people. It also kind of makes me wonder about the Exodus passage, if that not clearing the guilty. I mean, I think it's multifaceted. But Pharaoh is one of the ones who sinned the most in the narrative, and he was oppressing the people. I don't know. I wonder if there's some connection to taking vengeance on those who are oppressing the weaker.

00:48:00

Tim For sure. The most intense forms of divine anger in the Bible are aimed at leaders of people, Israelite or non-Israelite, who abuse their positions of power. Without a doubt. That's a great observation. That's really worth observing. What's interesting here is that the way that the language of Exodus 34:6-7 is quoted...So Nahum 1:3, "The Lord is slow to anger and he's great." And what should come is "in loyal love." Covenant love. But what he says is "great in power". And then he adds from verse 7 of Exodus 34. "The Lord won't declare innocent the guilty or he won't leave guilty unpunished."

What's interesting about that is to say that He's great in loyal love, that's a covenant term. He's going to stick by his covenant. Well, Yahweh is not in the covenant with the nation of Assyria.

Carissa Oh, yeah.

Tim So he doesn't use that word loyal love because He's never made a covenant promise to Assyria, but he is great and powerful, which means that he oversees the nations and Assyria's time is up. It's a really intense language of divine anger and recompense on one of the great tyrants of the ancient Near East.

So verse 3 says He's slow to anger, but He still gets angry. You know, God's reached the limit of His patience. And that's what this poem is emphasizing. So I don't know if this makes you squirm. It should. But then it's also crucially important to remember it's aimed at a king of one of the most oppressive empires of the ancient world.

Carissa Yeah, I was going to say if you're part of the oppressed, then it's good news.

Tim Correct.

Jon Is this after or before Jonah?

Tim This is after Jonah. The story of Jonah is taking place when Nineveh is at its peak in its heyday, as the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Nahum is writing right after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. So big picture, just kind of some observations here. If you look through these 27 that I have, and I think there's a few more, the vast majority quote from verse 6, from like the goodie parts that we like. The most consistent way these verses are quoted as people in trouble, people sitting in a mess of their own making, and they turn back to God and say, "Let's go back to God because Exodus 34:6, He's this way."

And that kind of makes sense because that's a big part of what they mean and that's a part of the original context of the story that these verses appear in. But verse 7 is just as important of a statement about God's character. But I think we've touched on it. It's a promise of stability, of a predictability in God's response. He's merciful and He's just which even verse 7 which is intense brings a degree of assurance, that I always know where I stand with Yahweh based on my own behavior and choices. I don't have to wonder. And that He's going to be like this always for every generation, not like change from generation to generation. I think those are significant takeaways.

Carissa Yeah.

Jon I agree. We're going to talk about each attribute, and we're going to get to slow to anger. And during that conversation, we will talk about the idea of God being angry. So a lot of this language in Joel of being a wrathful God...

Tim Or Nahum. The Nahum example.

Jon Oh, sorry, Nahum. I want to dig into that more, but I'm just kind of knowing that we will interact, right?

Tim Correct. Divine anger is really important that we get our understanding of divine anger. Especially because there's something about our cultural context. Angry authority figures and violence, this is a huge theme in our culture, I think especially in my generation, our generation, and maybe the one before because there's been such. I don't know, a public kind of whistleblowing on abuse of power, and angry authority figures, and abuse. 00:52:00

So people have become really sensitive to this in the Old Testament in a way that when I talk to people from the older generation, they don't feel the problem here. They're like, "Yeah, God gets angry, and He can punish people. What's the big deal?" I've had to work through some kind of squirming is about that. Do you guys resonate with that?

Carissa Yeah.

Jon Mm hmm.

Tim So for me, this has forced me to go back in and really understand divine anger in context, which is why we're going to dedicate a whole video to it.

Jon Cool. So we'll put the rest of these scripture references that requotes Exodus 3:6-7 from the show notes, if you want to geek out further. What we'll do then is in the next episode, we'll talk about the narrative context of these verses and situate ourselves in what was going on in the biblical story. 00:53:00

Tim What prompted God to say this about Himself to Moses in the first place?

Jon Thanks for listening to this episode of the BibleProject podcast. This is the first episode in the new series on the Character of God. Our overview video on these two verses is already completed, and it's up on our website, and on our YouTube channel. It's called the Character of God. Go check it out.

Next week, we're going to continue looking at these verses, and we're going to dig into the backstory, the context for when this statement was first proclaimed.

Tim So Exodus 24 ends with Moses going up the mountain to kind of seal the deal to tell God, like, "Yeah, the people are going to do it, we're going to do this, we're going to be your covenant people." So he goes up, and the whole thing is, the people just said, "We'll accept these vows. We're going to get married. It's going to be awesome." The very next thing that is going to happen in the narrative, in Exodus 32:1 is where the story picks up. And it's where everything starts to go terribly, terribly wrong. 00:54:00

Jon Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel, our theme music comes from the band Tents, and our show notes are produced by Camden McAfee. Speaking of our show notes, you should check them out. There's detailed notes adapted from Tim's original notes that we curated, and it's a wonderful

resource. You can find it on our websites under the “Resource” tab. It’s a great way to study further. Or if you are building a Bible study, or if you’re building a curriculum, I highly recommend checking out these notes.

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