

Tree of Life E6 Final

Moses, Israel, & The S'neh Tree

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Tim: Hey there. This is Tim at The Bible Project, and welcome to The Bible Project podcast. If you've been tracking with this series on the tree of life, you'll know that we are following the theme of trees on high places throughout the storyline of the Bible. Today, we are going to arrive at a really interesting set of stories about Moses. Moses had some really important moments in front of trees, especially by bodies of water or on high places. We're going to look at two of these today.

The first is a story of Moses and what has come in English to be called the story of the burning bush. We're going to explore why that translation doesn't quite capture the whole meaning and significance of what this burning tree bush is all about. The second story we're going to look at is one of these odd short stories in the Bible. It's an Exodus chapter 15. After the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt, they're wandering the wilderness looking for water and they find this pool of water that they can't drink from because it's bitter. And so what happens? Moses saves the people by tossing a tree into the pool. This strange little story is full of meaning when you see it in light of the bigger design pattern of trees in the Bible. We're going to explore all of this and even more on today's episode. So thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Jon: We're talking about trees and we are going to in this episode talk about Moses and how he is connected to this theme of...

Tim: Recurring design pattern motif.

Jon: ...of trees on high places. But actually, more specifically, the high place being where humanity and God dwell together. And the tree being...

Tim: Or two trees...

Jon: Two trees?

Tim: ...that creates a plot tension between them.

Jon: How are you going to live in this high place with God? How are you going to take His life?

Tim: God brought you up here to become His eternal partner and rule in creation.

Jon: Are you going to eat of the tree of life, live by His wisdom in His presence or eat of the tree of knowing good and bad, seize wisdom on your own terms? One tree leads to eternal life, one tree leads to death. And God exiles the humans because if they also eat the tree of life, this death will become the eternal death. Bad news. It's interesting that if you open the Bible thinking the Bible is about how do I get to heaven when I die, it's

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very different. It's saying God created you to rule with me on earth forever, but you're going to die because you want to do it on your own terms. But I want you to rule the earth with me forever. So it's not how do I get to heaven, it's how do I get to this vocational calling of ruling the earth with God forever.

Tim: That's right. And all of a sudden Revelation 21:22 pop into focus.

Jon: Which is?

Tim: Well, the last sentence of the biblical narrative is and they ruled with God forever and ever in the new Eden, which is the New Jerusalem, which is the new creation.

Jon: All those images are connected.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So that was a cosmic narrative.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Because this is humanity in its infancy innocence with a choice. Before any bad choice has been made, everything is good. Now, death enters the picture, relationships are divided.

Tim: Humans are doing what God warned. He said eating from the tree of knowing good bad would result in death. And what the humans start doing outside of the garden is killing each other. God is not the first one to bring about anybody's death. Humans are.

Jon: Yeah, hating each other fighting each other, taking wisdom on our own terms.

Tim: Participating in building human structures that participate in corrupt spiritual powers that are also in rebellion, resulting in widespread violence and the building of Lamech city.

Jon: This isn't just our choice. It was a choice that was connected to this...

Tim: Cosmic rebellion.

Jon: Cosmic rebellion choice, which we haven't really been talking about. So God tells them, "Look, there's going to be a seed of the woman, an offspring, a human who will deal with the mess you've made. He'll do it.

Tim: He'll undo it. He'll overcome the agent of evil at its source.

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- Jon: You won't be able to do that, you're stuck now with that choice, but someone will come and undo it for you. And while doing that, and the act of doing that will suffer the consequences of the choice as well.
- Tim: Yeah. He'll suffer along with Adam and Eve and all their children of coming under the power and death power of the snake - being bitten by it. But paradoxically, that being bit by the snake will be his way of overcoming it, which is something Adam and Eve did not do.
- Jon: So the rest of the biblical narrative you're thinking, "Humans need to get back to the high place."
- Tim: Back to that moment.
- Jon: Back to the presence with God, eating of the tree of life totally in connection with Him, trusting His wisdom for what is good and bad. And to do that, it's going to require some sort of sacrifice. That whole idea as they wait that, there is the practice of sacrificing animals, which we know later is all connected to this of like getting back to the high place, the Holy of Holies, the hotspot where the tree of life is, where God's presence is, to do that, sacrifice an animal to go in. And it's a substitute.
- Tim: That's right. So Noah is given a choice connected to another tree about whether he will build an ark. He's righteous and blameless. God wants to preserve the future of the seed of the woman through him. He makes the right choice at that tree.
- Jon: He doesn't eat of the tree of good and bad.
- Tim: No. He hands off, and in so doing he builds the vehicle of salvation with the tree. That wooden vehicle of salvation, he turns the tree of testing into the vehicle of salvation, which floats on the waters of divine justice and lands the top of a New Eden. And then he takes up the wood of that ark tree and offers not himself, but a sacrifice.
- Jon: He turns the tree into an altar. That's the image we see in the temple moving forward, is you don't walk past the tree of knowing good and bad to get to the Holy of holies. You walk by altar and you make a sacrifice.
- Tim: That's right.
- Jon: And so now parallel image being in a high place of where God and humans lived and rural together. And its original design was the tree of life and the tree of knowing good and bad. Now, you've got this taste of it. Let's get back to that. And to get to the tree of life, you are not eating of the tree to get there, but then you make a sacrifice on the tree to deal with the fact that the mess has already been made. By doing that, you

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actually do get to participate in God's life. You get to start to enjoy God's life. Not in the eternal sense that you would want to...

Tim: But in your own mortal narrative, you experience a fleeting glimpse of the tree of life.

Jon: And somehow, by Abraham doing this, he gets a glimpse of that life in the rescue of his son, and then he ends up becoming this great family. But the whole point of that was because he wants to get humans back to eternal life. And this family is going to participate that in some significant way. There's still going to be a seed from this family who is going to deal with the cosmic evil that's been unleashed and do it through sacrificing himself.

Tim: That's it.

[00:09:19]

Tim: So Moses, the story moves forward. The family multiplies through a whole bunch of episodes we don't have time to explore. The story of Isaac, the story of Jacob, story of Joseph. But the sin of Abraham's family, they replay the sins of their fathers, and that lands them to exile down in Egypt. And that's where the book of Exodus begins. Exodus begins by saying...first sentence is, "Israel in exile, marrying Adam and Eve - humanity in exile. And yet, in their exile, the sons of Israel were fruitful and we're multiplying in the land of their exile."

Jon: The defined test.

Tim: That's how the book of Exodus begins. However, that fruitful multiplication of immigrants looks to Pharaoh like a threat, and so he begins to kill them off. He has three attempts to destroy them. The third attempt is to start throwing all the baby boys into the waters of the Nile. And here we are introduced to a new Noah figure in Exodus 2. Exodus 2 "Now a man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi and the woman conceived and bore a son..."

Jon: This is all before the house of Levi had the input of being priests?

Tim: Correct. Correct. It'll be important that Moses and his brother, Aaron are Levites because they're going to found the priesthood. But yes, this is before the priesthood because it says such. But the reason why the narrator is telling us they're from the house of Levi is this is the origin story of the priestly line. Exodus 2:2 "The woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was good, she hid him for three months."

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- Jon: Usually when someone sees something is good, they're about to do something bad.
- Tim: That's right. Unless this is the inversion story. "But when she could hide him no longer she got in ark of reeds (tava gome).
- Jon: The same word that Noah built?
- Tim: Yeah. The word ark appears two times in the Hebrew Bible. It's the tava of gofer, the wood that he builds, and then the word ark appears right here in the introduction to the Moses.
- Jon: The tava of reeds.
- Tim: Tava gome. Noah builds a tava gofer.
- Jon: What's that in Hebrew, gofer?
- Tim: Gopher. Tava gofer. Moses' mom gets a tava gome. "And she covered it inside and out with tar and pitch. When Noah gets the commands to make the tava gofer, he covers it with pitch inside and out. Then she put the child..."
- Jon: That's another design pattern.
- Tim: Another design pattern. "...she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile." So into the waters of death, there's all these babies drowning because the pharaohs evil but here is one seed placed in an ark into those same waters of death, but he is saved and in him will be the salvation of the whole family. It's the new Noah. So he floats into Pharaoh's house. He grows up and he somehow still knows that he's an Israelite because he goes out one day to look upon his brothers and he sees an Egyptian slave master beating an Israelite slave. So he murders that Egyptian. Pharaoh hears about it, he's angry, he wants to kill Moses, and Moses flees into the wilderness.
- Jon: His own exile.
- Tim: Yeah. Now he's an exile from Israel in place of his family's exiles.
- Jon: Double exile. Exile inception.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, totally. Exodus 3 "Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, who was the priest of Midian - we skip that story but it's a cool story - and he led the flock to the west in the wilderness and came to Horeb - which is the Hebrew word for dry place - the mountain of Elohim. His flock wandered up to a high place. This is the mountain that's going to feature in the rest of the Torah. "Now the angel

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of Yahweh became visible, became seeable to him in blazing fire from the midst of a s'neh.

Jon: Not an etz.

Tim: Not an etz. It's a type of etz. It's a type of tree, but it's a s'neh tree.

Jon: S'neh - Sinai?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This is the only time this pieces of tree (bush) appears in the Hebrew Bible and it's spelled with the same root letters as the word Sinai. So he's at Horeb the mountain of God.

Jon: I thought the mount was called Sinai, but the mountain is called the Horeb.

Tim: The mountain is called by two names in the Hebrew Bible. Horeb and Sinai. Here, both are used, one as explicitly Horeb and then Sinai is here as a word play on the s'neh bush. "And so Moses looked, and behold, the s'neh was burning with fire, but the s'neh was not consumed." So you have a s'neh. What is the fire? The fire is the presence of the holy one in the tree. The holy divine presence sitting in a tree.

Jon: So you're supposed to be thinking, is up on a mountain of God, there's a type of tree, it's not called an etz but probably because it's trying to remind you that this is going to be Sinai, so it's called a s'neh.

Tim: Species of trees that rhymes with the word Sinai.

Jon: It's burning because God's presence is in it.

Tim: Yeah, God's presence appears when the angel Lord...

Jon: The angel of the Lord which...

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Is the human Yahweh figure who appears on a throne.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So it's a type of tree of life?

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Tim: Where this is going to end in the last chapter of the book of Exodus is with this glorious, fiery presence taking up residence in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. The same exact divine presence in the same visible form will take up residence in the Holy of holies.

Jon: Which is a representation of the high place on the mountain.

Tim: On Eden. This is how design patterns work. This becomes like a retro commentary. You're supposed to now go back to the Eden story, and be like, "Wow, the tree of life was where they would meet God and participate in His eternal life. Now there was no fire in the tree of life mentioned, but now that these two moments have joined, we're supposed to kind of merge them together in our imagination and see them as reflect. Just like the two lines of biblical poetry, like an A line and B line. So now you have the A line is the Eden story and now the B line is like Moses here meeting God.

Jon: It's so cool to think about the tree of life on fire but not being consumed. It is a cool image.

Tim: It is a cool image. Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight - why the bush is not burned up. When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called him from the midst of the s'neh saying, 'Moshe, Moshe.' And Moshe said, 'Hineni (Here I am).'" This is how the story of Abraham and Isaac begin. "It came about after these things, that God tested Abraham. God said to Abraham, 'Abraham, Abraham.' And Abraham said, Hineni (Here I am)."

Jon: So you're supposed to connect to that story too?

Tim: Yeah. When's the last time somebody was called to go to a mountain or was up on a mountain and God repeated their name twice and they said, "Hineni." That happens one time. One other time with Abraham called to go up and sacrifice his son for his own sins. Now he has a new Noah going up to a mountain of God and he's talking like Abraham. He's meeting God the way God met Abraham on Mount Moriah. So do you see now all the three narratives of high places with trees, Eden, Mount Ararat, Mount Moriah are all being hyperlinked in this scene. They're all supposed to come together in your imagination.

"Then God said, 'Don't draw near to here - that's priestly language - you're in the Holy of holies or you're approaching it. You just approach the Holy of holies. Don't draw near. Take your sandals off your feet. You got dung and dirt on your feet from outside the holy of holies.'"

Jon: Yeah, he's shepherding.

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Tim: Yeah. "So leave the signs of the world of death out there and come on into here for the place on which you're standing is holy space." So he just walked into the Holy of holies.

Jon: This is the Holy of holies

Tim: He's just walked in to that. And he's the son of Levi.

Jon: Which is what the tree of life is too is being in the Holy of holies.

Tim: Exactly. The tree of life is the Holy of holies. He said, "I'm the God of your father, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob." And what is the normal human response when they wake up or discover that they're standing in the midst of that space? He hid his face for he was afraid to look at God. So a new Noah just walked into an Eden place. But notice we're not in Eden. We're at some other place on dry land. But he discovered this is Eden spot. Just like Jacob was in a field near Bethel and he woke up and that's an Eden spot, here's Moses.

So we have new Adam, new Noah and Abraham called upon here, "Moses, Moses." "Hineni (Here I am)." When God called Abraham, it was to go sacrifice his son at this place, right? At the high place. So we're supposed to then in our minds go back and compare each narrative. What do I anticipate will happen on this Eden spot?

Jon: A test?

Tim: There's going to be some kind of test. It's going to involve somebody having to make a choice related to all those other stories.

Jon: What are you going to do? Hey. you're going to decide what's good and bad...

Tim: God's going to give a command.

Jon: ...and are you going to participate in my desire to use this family to rescue the world?

Tim: That's right. I want to bring people into my presence so that they're transformed to become my representatives and rulers in the world. However, to draw near, you're going to have to make a choice. Will you trust my wisdom and command or are you going to do things your own way? This very spot is going to host that narrative pattern once again. That's what all of these patterns are setting us up to expect.

Jon: I see it.

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- Tim: Look at vs. 10 of chapter 3. "Therefore, come now, I'm going to send you to Pharaoh so that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' And God said, 'I will be with you, and this will be the sign that I'm the one who sent you. When you bring the people out of Egypt, y'all shall worship Elohim right here at the spot where you are.'" In other words, he's going send Moses to liberate the people, and then what Moses just experienced right here, he is now to bring all of the people so that they can experience what he just experienced. It's setting up now this as a design pattern for the people to undergo. Moses just underwent what all the people are supposed to undergo.
- Jon: Everyone supposed to enter the Holy of holies.
- Tim: "The whole nation will come up here and meet me here just like you did."
- Jon: Why is it called the sign?
- Tim: This will be the sign. Oh, because Moses is doubting that He's the one. He brings up the five objections of like, "Who am I? I'm not very good at speaking. Please send somebody else." And so God finally says, "Listen, trust me. Come here and watch. It'll be a replay of what you just experienced." When you have a sign, it's a foretaste of the ultimate real thing.
- Jon: So the sign here is more of a promise?
- Tim: Correct. It's a really interesting sign because usually, signs come in the moment.
- Jon: Yes. This is not a sign in the moment.
- Tim: This is a sign to say, if you trust me and you lead the people here...
- Jon: It's a sign you will see in the future.
- Tim: You'll see a sign in the future that will vindicate your trust.
- Jon: I would call this like a confirmation.
- Tim: It's a unique use of the word "sign." So think. This narrative just told me that what Moses just went through is what all of the people are going to go through. So what happens? You go back into the story and you have Israel enslaved to Pharaoh, and then the ten plagues. And then Israel is brought through the waters of death just like Moses, and then Israel is brought through the wilderness. And then Israel is brought to the

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mountain to meet with God. So it's as if Moses in Exodus 2 and 3 in his own personal narrative just anticipated the narrative of all of the people who are enslaved in Egypt are going to go through the waters of death, through the wilderness and to meet God at the exact same spot. It's like Exodus 1 through 4 is the exodus story in a nutshell in the life of one person who's the...

[crosstalk 00:23:16]

Jon: And it's a design pattern riffing off of the story of the fall.

Tim: Totally. Yeah, the biblical authors did.

Jon: It's packing it in.

Tim: Packing it in. That's just set up for the Sinai story.

Jon: Because when they get to Sinai, they don't go up the mountain.

Tim: Correct. Let's pause real quick here. After the deliverance through the waters of the sea, Israel goes into the desert, just like Moses did. But before they get to the mountain, they have an incident. Exodus 15:22.

Jon: So through Moses, God's rescues Israel. Now they've passed through the waters, they're in the wilderness on the way to the mountain.

Tim: In wilderness on the Sinai and this happens. Exodus 15:22 "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea..." I mean, literally, we're walking away from the shoreline of the sea. It just happened. "...then they went into the wilderness of Shur. And they went three days into the wilderness and there was no water." Three days, and then we face test. "When they came to Marah, which is the Hebrew word for bitter, they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were marah." So they named the place Marah. That's good. "But then the people grumbled at Moses." This is the first of many grumbling narratives. "What are we going to drink?"

Jon: This is an important question. "What are we going to drink?"

Tim: What are we going to drink?

Jon: "We're going to die. Three day without water?"

Tim: "You just said you're going to save us and you brought us...Now, three days..."

Jon: It's how long humans can go without water, right? Three days.

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- Tim: Yeah. Not a week. You'll die within a week. "So Moses cried out to Yahweh and Yahweh showed him a tree."
- Jon: A tree.
- Tim: A tree.
- Jon: An etz.
- Tim: "Moses threw the tree into the waters and the waters became sweet (that is drinkable). There, God made for them a statute and regulation. Their God tested them." This was a test it turns out. This was a test. So they're not at a mountain, they're in the wilderness.
- Jon: They're in the wilderness. They are about to die of thirst.
- Tim: And they find a spring of water. They find a pool, but the pool represents a test. Are they going to trust that God could provide for them even out of these death waters, bitter waters? No, they don't. They grumble and protest and say, "What are we going to do?" But Moses, he trusts. He thinks that God can provide life for them even in this place of death.
- Jon: And he cried out to the Lord.
- Tim: He cries out to Yahweh. That's a classic term for intercession and plea for God's help. So Moses, unlike the people, he cries out to Yahweh.
- Jon: People grumble but Moses intercedes.
- Tim: People don't trust God, they grumble.
- Jon: Now, can I just say I empathize with these people?
- Tim: Of course, totally.
- Jon: But at the same time, we have to remember they just were miraculously rescued.
- Tim: This is the first story after they're rescued through the sea.
- Jon: They just witnessed insane provision from God.
- Tim: And what any person would do after being delivered through the waters of the sea is say, "Yahweh has power over water."
- Jon: But take three days without water and that starts to fade back into the memory a little bit and you start to go...

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- Tim: And that's the point. And that's the point. That's exactly the point. But Moses trusts so he cries out to God. And what does God do? He shows him a tree. And then says, "This tree will become the agent of salvation to turn the waters of death into waters of life."
- Jon: Trees becoming salvation like the ark.
- Tim: Just like the ark went into the waters, this story presents itself to the reader as a riddle.
- Jon: Yeah, it is because I've read the story and I'm just like, "Okay, weird."
- Tim: Yeah, it's a riddle. These stories are usually very short, they're puzzling, it's hard to even understand who's doing or saying what, and they seem bizarre. This is the biblical authors' way of winking at us and saying, "Dear reader, follow the design patterns, do Psalm 1, take a long walk, and you'll start to see what we're inviting you to see."
- Jon: I could have read the story that it wasn't tree, it was branch. Let's see in NIV. I think it's branch.
- Tim: I got you. "A piece of wood," says NIV.
- Jon: A piece of wood. For whatever reason, I have the image of a branch. Like when I've heard the story before, I always had an image of a branch.
- Tim: ESV has "log." New American Standard has "tree." Let's keep going. It gets better. The whole point now is this was a test. Vs. 25 tells us this whole thing was a test. And only Moses passes the test. People grumble. Tree goes into the water becomes the vehicle turning death into life. And there he made for them a statute and regulation, which is covenantal law vocabulary. But the Covenant hasn't even been made yet.
- Jon: So it's foreshadowing that.
- Tim: It's foreshadowing it. So what's the test? Before the covenant has been made, what is the test of their covenant relationship? Vs 26, God said, "If you will listen listen to the voice of always your God and do what is right in His eyes..."
- Jon: Shema shema?
- Tim: Yes. "If you will shema to His commandments and keep all the statutes, I will put none of the diseases that I put on the Egyptians on you, for I Yahweh, I'm your healer."
- Jon: And that's called a statute?

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- Tim: A statute and regulation. Do you remember how...this was in the law series. There's that story of after Abraham passes his test amount Moriah and offers up Isaac and then God gives Isaac back. Later in the book of Genesis, God recalls back to that moment and says, "In that moment, Abraham kept all of my laws and statutes and regulations."
- Jon: That's right.
- Tim: It's using the vocabulary of the laws of the covenant from Mount Sinai, and saying, Abraham kept the laws of the covenant by listening to God's voice and obeying Him.
- Jon: It's a way for the biblical author to show you that this story is connected to these other stories.
- Tim: That's right. What is God really after in the covenant relationship? Just people who listen to His voice. And when you listen to the voice, you're making the right choice when you stand before the tree. So here's Israel before another tree, and Moses passes the test, but the people fail. And so God says, "Listen, this is the test that I'm inviting you into. Will you please just listen listen to my voice? And if you do, that will be listening to the commandments and regulations."
- Jon: So Moses by interceding was listening to the voice?
- Tim: Yeah. He's a contrast to the people. The people grumble to Moses, but Moses cries out to Yahweh for salvation.
- Jon: And this might be just passing too much, but listening to the voice is connected to obeying a command, right?
- Tim: Correct.
- Jon: What's the command here that they're not obeying?
- Tim: Oh, yeah, got it.
- Jon: They're just worried that they're going to die.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. You're right. In this sense, it's about faith and trust. You are right. The command would be to have faith and to trust. Because the narrative is they came into the wilderness, there was no water. They finally found water, but it's water of death. And then they grumble instead of crying out to Yahweh, "Oh, Yahweh, creator of heaven on earth and the seas, provide us water of salvation, the water of life here," what they say is, "What are we going to drink?" They grumble. They get angry. But Moses, in contrast, cries out to Yahweh for salvation.

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- Jon: The narrative would seem cleaner to me if the story went, "They found the water, God said, 'Put the tree in the water,' and they're like, 'Whatever.'"
- Tim: Oh, sure, sure, sure, sure.
- Jon: "We just want to go back."
- Tim: I get it.
- Jon: Because now they're not listening to the voice or listening to the command.
- Tim: Correct. You're right. So the way the narrative is designed, the test becomes back at the moment when they grumbled. They're failing the test when they grumble. The test becomes when we're out here with no resources, are we going to trust that Yahweh can provide for us or not? And they're grumbling. Is failing a test.
- Jon: These tests are hardcore, man.
- Tim: Oh, yeah, they are.
- Jon: Abram's tests: will you sacrifice firstborn son? This test: are you going to trust me after three days with no water? And now you're in front of a pool of water you can't drink. Are you still going to trust me?
- Tim: I would have failed that test.
- Jon: These aren't easy tests.
- Tim: No, they're not. No, they're not. I'm with you. I'm with you. But Moses passes the test on their behalf.
- Jon: Thank you, Moshe.
- Tim: This is setting up the role of Moses in the narrative on the mountain. So he does trust God, and God rescues the people through with tree thrown into the waters. Then he says, "Listen, guys, we're going to do this test again." He tested them. There's going to be more chances. Vs 26 "If you will listen to my voice then I'm going to save you from death and evil. I'm your healer. I'm going to test you again."
- Jon: It's not just going to be about going thirsty.
- Tim: "We're not one and done here. There's going to be multiple tests. I want you to be my representatives to the nations."

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- Jon: Wow.
- Tim: Then after Moses intercedes and saves the people, what's their next stop? Vs 27, they came to oak trees. They come to a whole grove of trees, and there were twelve fountains of water, seventy palm trees, and so they camped under the trees by the waters.
- Jon: Twelve and seventy.
- Tim: Yeah, come now.
- Jon: Come now.
- Tim: This is little Eden spot right here.
- Jon: It's a little Eden spot. Water under trees. The number 12 and 70 are interesting because that's foreshadowing 12 tribes, right?
- Jon: Well, they are the 12 tribes now. They're the 12 tribes. So they find a little spring of life for each tribe.
- Jon: Each tribe gets their own little spring.
- Tim: Yeah, totally. And 70 is how many descendants of Jacob went down into Egypt at the end of the...they went from the 70 with Jacob into the 12 tribes.
- Jon: So it's saying, "There's enough for everyone here. It's Eden for everyone."
- Tim: Yeah. It's the equivalent of Eden and the equivalent of in Solomon's reign, everyone got their own vine and fig tree.
- Jon: It's interesting how God says, "I'm going to be testing you more, but here, let me give you a little Eden anyway."
- Tim: That's right. In this story, who or what passed the test that gave them the gateway into the little Eden? Moses.
- Jon: Yeah, Moses on their behalf.
- Tim: The story is five versus.
- Jon: Oh, yeah. So easy to skip over because you're like, "Weird random story. How did that make it in the Bible? Let's just keep going."
- Tim: Yeah. This story is put here as a riddle, to invite the reader to meditate and to link the story into design patterns through the key repeated

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words. And then all of a sudden, you find yourself in five verses you've replayed the story of the whole Bible in five verses. Humans, life and death choice, tested at a tree, they fail, but one intercedes on their behalf and leads them to a New Eden. And you're just like, "Oh, sweet. Wow, the seed of the woman."

Jon: This is what you mean by literary genius?

Tim: Yes, totally. This is what I'm talking about. The whole Bible is like this. Every paragraph. That's mind-blowing. These are the moments where I'm just like, "Is this brilliant humans who write brilliant literature?" I think this is a human literary art form at its peak. I can't say this is evidence of the inspiration of divine and human partnership of the scriptures. But the more years I spend seeing how intricately every word is crafted in sequence...

Jon: At a minimum is human literary genius.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, totally. And at maximum, it's an inspired gift of God.

Jon: To help us know how to choose wisely and embrace eternal life.

Tim: Yeah. Let's take our next step then into this whole story and watch it get played out on a macro level at Mount Sinai - the whole test.

[00:36:53]

Tim: We can spend a lot more time at what happens at Mount Sinai, but for the purpose of the video, I think we can do the pieces pretty quick. Chapter 19, "Moses leads the people to Mount Sinai." The word Sinai appears for the first time and Exodus 19.

Jon: So now it's not called Mount...

Tim: S'neh.

Jon: Well, Horeb. Mount Horeb. Now they're just like, "Oh, let's call it Sinai."

Tim: Yeah, totally. And then it will go back and forth between Sinai and Horeb throughout the rest of the Torah. But right here in Exodus 19, they come to the place at the s'neh bush where God said, "The people were going to come. And in the third month, after the sons of Israel came out of Egypt, on that day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai where Moses met God at the s'neh." The significance of that is the tree at the top of this mountain is not going to be mentioned in the narrative again.

Jon: But the mount is now called the tree.

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- Tim: The mountain is called by the name of that tree. And I'm meant to imagine that tree at the top of the mountain for every scene when Moses goes up there. The famous thing is God says again to the people, "You're going to be a kingdom of priests of the nations if you listen listen to my voice."
- Jon: Listen, listen. Shema shema.
- Tim: So God shows up in the fire and cloud just like you did to Moses on top of the mountain. He's doing for all the people what he did for Moses...
- Jon: Little grander.
- Tim: ...but more grand. Not just fire in a bush, the Bush is lighting up the whole mountain with the storm clouds. "The people saw the thunder and lightning, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking and the people saw it and they trembled and stood at a distance. And they said to Moses, 'You speak to us and we'll listen. We'll listen to your voice. But don't let God speak to us because he's going to kill us. We'll die.'"
- Jon: It looks dangerous.
- Tim: It's dangerous. So this is the trick. Moses thought he was going to die, he was afraid so he hid his face, I mean, he's freaked out, but he didn't die. He was transformed by that encounter.
- Jon: But even he was scared.
- Tim: But he was scared. Yeah.
- Jon: And rightfully so, right?
- Tim: Yeah.
- Jon: You're in the presence of some power, and we know - and this is interesting, we haven't go too far with this - but eating of the tree of life can be a curse.
- Tim: Well, let's at least say this. Do you remember the tree of life represents God's eternal power in life and glory being eaten by a mortal dirt creature?
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: It's going to change you. For a human to exist as an eternal partner of God, we're going to need some kind of upgrade of the hardware.
- Jon: It look unpleasant.

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Tim: What if it's unpleasant?

Jon: What if it is unpleasant?

Tim: That's what the burning bush represents is like, "Whoa..."

Jon: "It's going to consume me like that bush?"

Tim: "...I'm now here in the presence of my Creator. He's telling me to come close..."

Jon: ...to fire consuming the bush.

Tim: ...but it's going to mean the end of the version of me that I know and that I'm familiar with.

Jon: "Because I can get consumed by this fire. What's it going to do to me?"

Tim: And God's like, "No, no, no. Come here. I've got the next thing for you." And Moses is like, "I'm going to stick with the version of me that I know."

Jon: "I want to upgrade you."

Tim: Totally. And this is what the people are saying right here. They see the divine glory and they say, "We don't want to go near." They say, "Moses, you've been up there so you go on our behalf and we'll listen to you if you tell us what God says. But we don't want to go out there and meet and talk with God." And then look at what Moses says. Moses says, "Don't be afraid, God has come in order to test you. This is your test. It is your test. He's come to test you in order that the fear of him might remain with you so that you don't sin."

So Moses went up to the mountain, he faced the fear and he ended up in the Holy of holies. And it didn't kill him, it transformed him. He brings the people to the foot of the mountain. It's the burning bush times a gazillion in terms of like the light show. And the people are called to go up and they won't go up with Moses. And Moses says, "No, you guys, this is the test. God doesn't want to kill you. He wants you to become His kingdom of priests to the nations." And they say no. They say no. They don't pass the test.

Jon: In order that you may fear him, which is...

Tim: Yeah, that's from garden vocabulary. Garden of Eden.

Jon: And it's just wisdom vocabulary.

Tim: Correct. The fear of the Lord. That's right. So that you don't sin.

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- Jon: So you can know how to live in a truly human way that doesn't lead to violence and destruction and death.
- Tim: When you come to the tree of life, now this is a narrative developed, you realize it's a fearful thing to take from the tree of life.
- Jon: That's what I was just thinking about was, was that in any way for Adam and Eve can you go back and go, "Was the tree of life intense in some way they kind of like...?"
- Tim: "I'll take this other one.?"
- Jon: "This other one looks a little more chill. That one's on fire."
- Tim: I think that's how the design patterns are meant to make our imaginations go back and ponder
- Jon: Yeah, it's interesting. Like, "I can trust in God and His presence, but what will happen to me? Will I be okay?"
- Tim: So now all of a sudden, it's not taking from the tree of knowing good and bad that is the test, it's will you enter into the presence of the tree of life? That's the test. The test is will the Israelites go up like Moses to stand with him in the divine presence by the tree.
- Jon: Which was the first commandment. And now it's God has come in order to test you. What's the test? Are you going to come up and sit before the tree of life and be in God's presence? That's the test now. Does that makes sense?
- Jon: It does. I don't know if I fully appreciate it.
- Tim: Oh, well it's just that when design patterns work, it's never a full repeat. It's the same concepts but in inverted relationships a test
- Jon: The test of Abraham was "don't eat of the tree of knowing good and bad on your own terms but listen to my voice and obey." The test wasn't "eat of the tree of life or be in my presence."
- Tim: Correct. In Eden, it was "eat of the tree of life, don't eat from that tree."
- Jon: So the test is "don't eat of the tree"?
- Tim: The test is don't eat from that other tree.
- Jon: The test here is "be in my presence."

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- Tim: "Come up to the burning tree to be in God's presence." And the test is are you going to come up or are you not going to come up?
- Jon: But this is a unique calling. This isn't a calling for every human.
- Tim: Oh, sure.
- Jon: This was a calling for a people that God wanted to...
- Tim: We're getting pretty cosmic here in terms of that cosmic story. One nation becoming God's royal priests to all of the other nations.
- Jon: The reason why I'm saying that is because before the narrative logic is God's protecting you from that tree.
- Tim: Oh, sure.
- Jon: So what's he doing telling humans to come in and now partake? Is it a trick or is it an actual invitation? And it seems like it's actual invitation. But it's because he's doing something unique here. It's like an exception. This seems like an exception is what I'm saying.
- Tim: Hold on. I guess what I'm saying is the test has switched trees. The burning s'neh bush is the tree of life. It's where you meet God and are transformed. That's the tree that the test now relates to? Are you going to come up to God? So how's that a trick?
- Jon: I would wonder if it was a trick because if I knew the story of Adam and Eve, and I'm realizing what's happening here. I would go, "Hey, God, if I eat of the tree, I will have eternal death."
- Tim: Oh, I understand.
- Jon: "You're protecting us from this tree."
- Tim: I see. Oh, got it. They're not eating from the tree of life.
- Jon: This isn't the tree of life.
- Tim: This is their tree of life.
- Jon: But it's God presence.
- Tim: Oh, I understand. Yes, yes.
- Jon: It is the tree of life.

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Tim: I understand. But I think for them to eat from the tree of life means to take on the job what God wants to give.

Jon: Yes. And I think that's what I'm saying.

Tim: I see. Yeah. yeah.

Jon: That I'm thinking this is a unique calling for unique people.

Tim: Thanks. That's good. I was just trying to understand how you're processing the analogy.

Jon: Because my expectation at this point is like, "No, no, no, no, don't do that. We need the person to first do away with evil. Because you go and be in God's presence eating of the tree of life on the cosmic mountain, and God's protecting us from that until this is all dealt with.

Tim: Got it. And now we've got the story of God saying, "I'm going to deal with it. I'm going to deal with it through you guys. So I'm inviting you back in." This feels like an exception.

Tim: Yes, it's the chosen family.

Jon: It's the chosen family. It's the election idea of "I'm going to do something unique with you."

Tim: "So that you can mediate my purposes out to the nations. You're chosen for the many but this is unique." He's not doing this with any other nation.

Jon: And so maybe the test is "will you listen to me even though everything inside of you is saying that's dangerous? That's dangerous. I'm going to die. Will you trust me that my wisdom is greater?"

Tim: Now the test of trusting God's wisdom is actually eating of the tree. Before, that was the thing that they got to do.

Tim: Yeah, correct. You got it. That's it.

Jon: Okay.

[00:47:12]

Tim: Okay, next step in the story comes the list of covenant commands that got asked them to listen to, and only Moses goes up to receive them. The people say, "We don't want to go up, you go up, Moses." Moses goes up, and he's up there at the s'neh tree and he gets the commands of the covenant and the tablets that represent. He brings them down and says,

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"These are the terms of the covenant," and the people say, "We will listen and we will do them." The first two...

Jon: "Here's God's wisdom for you."

Tim: Yeah, here's God's wisdom. The first two covenants, "I am Yahweh, no other God created in heaven on earth and no other God rescue you out of Egypt. Don't represent me with idols. You didn't see any image up on the mountain in the cloud. I'm not a tree. I'm not an animal. I'm not a star. I'm the maker of all those things. So don't do that." The people say, "Yes, deal." So Moses says, Exodus 24, "Okay, you're on board, I'm going to go tell God that you want to get married. You ready to get married. You said yes and so let's go seal the deal." Moses goes up. 40 days go by. And then comes the story of the golden calf.

Jon: Forty days go by and they're like, "Where's Moses? What are we doing here? Are we protected? Are we safe?"

Tim: Exodus 32, when the people saw that Moses embarrassed them delaying, it's the word caused shame. It gets translated delayed. It's Yitbusash. They were embarrassed about his not coming down from the mountain.

Jon: Leaving us hanging.

Tim: It's also the last time the word was used was "and they were naked and there was no bosh." There was no shame. So they were ashamed by Moses delaying meaning, like, "Where is he? This is ridiculous. We are just about to get married and the 40 day's gone by. He's up there. What's he doing?" The people assemble around Aaron, and they say, "Here, let's make an Elohim that will lead us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we have no idea what happened to him. He's gone. Let's make an Elohim.

Obviously, they're violating the first commands of the covenant. The first idol in the biblical story is happening at the foot of a high place. So the real high place is Moses, a new atom up there at the tree meeting was God's presence. Here at the foot of that real high place, they make like a false Eden. They have this party, they're having rich food and drink and they're playing and singing and dancing, but they're not up in the real Eden. And they're creating a false god down at the...So it's this contrast. You got the real Eden up top, they're creating a false god and false Eden down below. This is important for what the meaning of idolatry and the high places are in the rest of the story of Israel.

Let's just get to that. We'll bring it all together. Moses is up on the mountain, God says, "Look what the people are doing down there. I'm going to destroy them. Leave me alone." We've talked about this. God

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says, "Leave me alone," and Moses proceeded to not leave God alone. He tells God to change His decision about the people by remaining consistent to his promises to Abraham. And God says, "Good, that's what I'll do."

Then look at this down in Exodus 32, the end of the chapter. Vs. 30. On the next day, Moses said to the people, you all have committed a great sin." They failed the test.

Jon: Big time.

Tim: Big time.

Jon: With a flash.

Tim: The whole thing was "this is the test so that you don't sin." They failed the test. "You've committed a great sin." "So now I am going up," - Moses is going to go up the mountain - and perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." He's going to go up and atone for their sins.

Jon: Sacrifice.

Tim: So think of all the design patterns, Noah, Abraham. "Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses returned to Yahweh and said, "Ah, these people has committed a great sin. They've made a God of gold for themselves." So what we're ready for him to do is to get out an animal just like Noah. And then vs. 32. "But now, if you will, please forgive their sin. But if you're not, kill me. Block me out from the book that you have written.

Jon: He offers himself.

Tim: He offers himself.

Jon: That's what we were looking for.

Tim: Yeah, Genesis 3:15. He offers himself. This moment is so important for the design pattern of the wounded victor. He gives his own life in the place of people as a sacrifice of atonement. And what's interesting, Yahweh, says, "You don't have to do that."

Jon: He doesn't make him pay.

Tim: What he says is "the one who has sinned against me, that's the one whose name I'll block out of my book. But as for you, go down."

Jon: So there we supposed to go, "So he isn't the one."

Tim: He's not the one but he did...

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Jon: He was ready to be the one, but he wasn't the one.

Tim: He's not the one. Now, this then is a part of the complex portrait of Moses character where Moses has his own series of failures. He's already had a failure before this when he met God at the burning bush. He had a failure at that moment where he said, "I'm not going to go. Send somebody else." And it says God got angry at Moses and says, "Your brother's gonna come, and he'll do it in your place. And you'll just stand next to him and talk to him, whisper in his ear."

Jon: "Is that good with you Moses?"

Tim: And then Moses will go on to have his own failures. Actually, in version of this, he's going to ask God in Number 11 to say, "I can't lead these people anymore. They're grumbling against me." And he says, "Kill me. If you're gonna make me lead these people, kill me now." So then he offers his life again, but for selfish purposes.

Jon: "Let's get out of this deal."

Tim: Totally. And then he has a failure at the water at the rock. He strikes it instead of speaking to. So anyway, all that to say is this is one of Moses' high point. Then this is the same narrative moment where his face is going to be transformed into divine glory. So he's complex. At his best he's like a human up in the New Eden, his face starts glowing, he starts being transformed by the divine holy, creative power of Yahweh. And he's like a human giving his life for the sins of others up at the new Eden. But then even he fails, and the story goes on.

And the rest of the story of Israel is going to be Israel worshipping idols in the form of at luxuriant green trees on top of high places - worshipping their gods of wood, stone, and metal. And all of the high places that are the culprits of...when the prophets name why Israel ends up in exile, it's going to be just replaying what happened to Mount Sinai. So the high places that Israel sacrifices that appear all throughout the story to follow are just fallout from this moment right here in the story.

Jon: It seems like in some way, creating or worshipping idols is really connected to choosing Yeah. Then wisdom on your own terms.

Tim: Correct. It's creating your own tree of life.

Jon: It's creating our own tree of life.

Tim: "Make us a God who will go up for us."

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Jon: What more explicit way are you defining and taking, seizing things on your own terms and crafting your own tree of life?

Tim: Correct. That's right.

Jon: But they didn't see it that way. They actually thought they were creating a god that...right?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: The golden calf...

Tim: "Create us a god who will lead us out of here."

Jon: So it's interesting humans in their own wisdom don't say, "Well, I'll figure this out." They're like, "We'll just find another power that will help us."

Tim: "Here's something that can rescue us out of the wilderness, that can lead us out of this place."

Jon: And we still do that as humans. Like we give ourselves to other powers. We think we're getting our own freedom but instead, we're really just kind of creating allegiances with whatever the other power structure or force is.

Tim: This conversation is a long one. That's okay. But what we're connecting is we're connecting that golden calf becomes the icon moment for the whole history of Israel's idolatry in the promised land. Where does that idolatry take place? In the narrative, takes place at what the biblical narratives call the high places. And every generation of Israel's kings keeps worshipping other gods at the high places. They're called the bamot in Hebrew.

Jon: What called the bamot?

Tim: The high place in Hebrew is called bamot. Jeroboam when he goes and he breaks off the northern tribes from the southern tribes - this is in 2 Kings 12 - he makes a new temple and he installs two golden calves and says, "These are your gods of Israel who brought you up out of Egypt." He's presented as now replaying the scene of a golden calf, but on a grander scale. And then he sets up, in vs 31, houses on high places all throughout the land and brings in a new priesthood that was not from the sons of Levi.

And then the rest of the narrative is you get little descriptions of these high places. And there's two things on these high places. They're either called the Asherah, which is the name of a Canaanite fertility goddess.

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- Tim: Goddess is symbolized as a symbolic pole placed in the middle of a garden on top of a tall pole. And sometimes that pole is called in Hebrew the luxuriant tree. In Hebrew, it's the etz raanan. And the word "raanan" is the word like luxuriant or green, but it's spelled with the letters of the word "Eden." So, Eden is , ian rotet dan and then the word raanan, the dolet looks like the Hebrew letter raesh. When you see this phrase in Hebrew, the luxuriant tree, it looks like you're looking at the word Eden. But all the letters are backwards.
- Jon: It's like a mixed up.
- Tim: It's a perverted Eden. And so you're just read through the story and you're like, "Oh, these fault places, these faults Eden's where they're worshiping their own human-made trees of life. And it ends them in exile in Babylon. So we just brush through whole section of the Hebrew Bible. But the whole point is, you get the whole story of Israel in a nutshell right there at the story of Mount Sinai. But what you never get in the stories of Israel to follow is another Moses who offers his life for the people. A prophet like Moses never arose.
- Jon: What's interesting to me, the new thought is, when I pictured the tree of knowing good and bad, I think of it in my modern construct of, I'm going to be my own king. But now we're talking about bringing idols, which is saying I'm going to give my allegiance to another power.
- Tim: We are creating our own salvation - the thing that we think will give us the life that we want, right?
- Jon: Yeah. But in an ancient psyche, you're not creating another power. You're creating an opportunity to worship the other power. I understand. Because they actually thought these were real powers. And in some ways they are.
- Tim: Correct. Because, what are they? These gods represent weather, fertility, war, metallurgy, kingship, fertility as sex, and also the economy - fertility - abundance, and then kingship and war which, which we would call politics. Sex, money, and power.
- Jon: So it's like by taking of the tree of knowing good and bad, I think of it as like, I'm taking my freedom. I'm taking..."
- Tim: "I want autonomy."
- Jon: "I'm taking things in my own hands." But really what you're doing, is you're giving your allegiance to...

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- Tim: You're replacing your allegiance. You're giving your allegiance to some other power.
- Jon: Because this becomes connected now to creating idols.
- Tim: Creating idols, that's right. You're giving over your allegiance to...
- Jon: And the idols are like false...
- Tim: Idols are human-made representations of real divine ideals.
- Jon: Divine ideals, trusting in a different way, not God's wisdom, but another wisdom of how to get to those ideals.
- Tim: Totally. That's right. And one of these false gods is Baal. Who is Baal? He's the God of Thunder. But also, if you look at statues of him, he's usually carrying a mace, big like basher head scepter and a thunderbolt. The god of war and thunder. Like the king of Moab in the Book of Kings, he sacrifices his son to Chemosh, the god of Moab. Then he wins a battle. And then as a king you go, "Oh yeah, if I give my son over to Chemosh, he will help me crush the skulls of my enemies." And it creates these cycles of humanly created narratives of how I get the good life and victory and abundance for me and mine. And I'll give even the life of my own sons or sacrifice my sons for the preservation of my tribe. And the gods look on it approvingly. And all of a sudden, you have a recipe for this idolatry.
- Jon: Did the golden calf have a specific god in mind?
- Tim: Oh, yeah, people have wondered this. The calf was...I'm afraid to say this off the top of my head. I'm pretty sure it's associated with Baal, the calves. But what Aaron says people is "these are your gods, O Israel who brought you up at a land of Egypt." And Aaron says, "Tomorrow we'll have a feast of Yahweh." So this is even more tricky is that they think they're worshipping Yahweh, but what they're actually worshipping is of their creation.
- Jon: They are perverting it.
- Tim: I think the fact that it's not associated with another deity makes it a paradigm that can fit.
- Jon: They're going to like, "We'll do it on our own terms. You want us to sit here and wait for Moses to come down, we'll come up with our own way. Your way seems scary and now I'm getting bored."
- Tim: Totally. Crazy. What's the storm up on the mountain and like let's...

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Jon: "We have another idea."

Tim: "I can't work with a god like that. Not manageable. Let's make something manageable so that we can understand and know and will take us where we want to go. This God who leaves us out into the wilderness, I think we're going die every other day, He wants us to trust him in crazy ways? That's crazy. I can't do that."

Jon: All this is swimming in my head now. Because you've got the tree of knowing good and bad, which then becomes in some stories really an altar by which to atone. But then also the tree of knowing good and bad also becomes these idols by which...

Tim: False trees of life.

Jon: False trees of life.

Tim: Again, thinking of how we've been able to do videos in the past, many of our theme videos have these cycles of patterns, and we can use composition color visual devices to draw analogies between scenes. But the scenes can develop just like these patterns are developing.

Jon: But we need to follow one continuity. If the trees are constantly kind of taking on different forms and doing different things, the continuity is, "will you trust my wisdom, be in my presence and rule with me or will you do it on your own terms?"

Tim: Correct. That's the continuity.

Jon: And because you've done it on your own terms and death has been unleashed, well, I'm going deal with that..."

Tim: By raising up the seed.

Jon: A sacrifice. And the sacrifice we will get to will eventually make that a sacrifice by hanging on a tree.

Tim: Correct. That's right. And Moses becomes the image of that in the narrative.

Jon: "Take me instead."

Tim: He's up there on the high place at the tree talking to God. And he says, "Take my life in the place of these people."

Jon: God likes the attitude, but it's not his job description.

Tim: Yeah. Moses is not the one but he becomes an image of that one.

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Thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. We are still taking questions that you all have about this series on the tree of life. We're going to do another question and response episode during the series. So if you have a question about this theme of trees in the Bible or any of the stories that we have explored, we want to hear your questions. If you could record yourself asking the question, give us your name, where you're from, hopefully, keep it to about 20 seconds or so, and email it to us at info@bibleproject.com.

Next week, we're going to continue in this series by looking at some stories about trees in the life of David. And in the book of Isaiah.

Jon: I've been dwelling on this image of the tree of life being on fire in a little bit...

Tim: It's terrifying.

Jon: And then having that same thing as like, "If I eat that fruit, it's gonna burn me." And that's kind of this image you've got here of like, "You're handing me coal from the fire and put it on my mouth?" It's horrifying.

Tim: Because what Isaiah announced when he sees God in the burning throne is "I'm a man of impure lips."

Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel. Our theme music comes from the band tents. The Bible Project is a crowdfunded nonprofit in Portland, Oregon. We make free resources that are showing how the Bible's a unified story that leads to Jesus. You guys, thank you for being a part of this with us.

Eli: Hi, this is Eli. I'm from Oregon.

Liam: Hi, my name is Liam. I'm from Oregon.

Isaac: Hi, my name is Isaac and I'm from Oregon.

Eli: We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

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