H2R P1 - What is the Bible?

E1: What's in your Bible?

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E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: Tim and I like to discuss how books of the Bible are designed - the literary structure. We also like to talk about themes in the Bible, motifs that go through the entire narrative arc of Scripture and tie the whole thing together. But in this episode, we're going to take a step back, and we're going to talk about what the Bible is in the first place.

Tim: The Hebrew Bible is an extremely sophisticated piece of ancient literary art that has a theological message. But it's doing it through this incredibly nuanced literary medium.

Jon: The Bible didn't drop out of heaven. It was produced over hundreds of years by many different authors who all came from one particular people group known as ancient Israel.

Tim: Came into existence through the history of how God was at work with a people. It emerged out of that history.

Jon: Through this people, God's working in human history in a unique way.

Tim: You're trying to understand the story of the biblical texts and the message that they have. They're telling a story. It has the people of Israel at its center, but it actually has the story of the whole world and all humanity as its main focus.

Jon: In this episode, we talked about this collection of ancient texts that we call the Bible and why Christians have been intimately tied to this book. Here we go.

Tim: We are going to produce a series starting in 2017 about what is the Bible and how to read it.

Jon: 101.

Tim: 101. We've been taking people through books of the Bible, themes that run throughout the whole Bible, but it dawned on me/us over, I don't know, recent past, that we don't have anything in the video library that takes someone who has virtually zero or zero knowledge about the Bible, and helps them get going.

Jon: Yeah, all our videos assume you understand something basic things about the Bible and you're ready to jump in.

Tim: I mean, you could just start in the Genesis videos and dive in, but that doesn't help you know why Genesis is in the Bible and how it fits into this thing called the Old Testament. We just don't have a lot like that.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: So that's what we're going to talk through. Specifically, what's the Bible, how it's composed. We won't talk about how we got the Bible. That would be a whole nother conversation.

Tim: Oh, yeah, that is awesome that we plan on having in the future. Things we want to work on is a lot of historical origins, and where are these collections that are called canons came from.

Jon: So we won't have that conversation but we will talk about what the Bible is in its structure and—

Tim: And the different forms that the Bible takes in different religious communities today because there's more than one shaped to the Bible, though that's a controversial topic.

The way this is going to flow is we just want to do a basic outline of what is the Bible and where did it come from, and its basic shape. Then also, why did it take shape in different forms in different traditions, and Christianity, and Judaism.

Jon: By different forms, you mean there's the Jewish Bible?

Tim: Jewish Bible that Christians will call the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: And then there's the Protestant?

Tim: Yeah. Protestant Bible would tack on the New Testament as a collection of 27 books. But then also in the mix is a number of Jewish writings that were written in the period of the Jewish Second Temple in between,

Jon: After the Old Testament ends?

Tim: After the Old Testament history/period; not necessarily the formation of the book but the history period, and before Jesus of Nazareth.

Jon: The intertestamental period?

Tim: Yes. Sometimes called the intertestamental period. I think more helpful to call it the Second Temple period as it was referred to.

Jon: Why is that more helpful?

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: Well, it gives us clear demarcations. Nobody was marketing history by, "When did the Old Testament end? That's the end of an era. When did the New Testament begin?" They were just in the thick of historical events - the swirl of the events.

Jon: But arguably, New Testament writings are also Second Temple Jewish literature.

Tim: They are Second Temple literature. That's exactly right.

Jon: So is it helpful to call them both Second Temple.

Tim: I think so, yeah. There was a huge amount of literature produced by the Israelite people in the period of the Second Temple. Some of that literature got shaped into what became the Hebrew Bible. Others of that literature were important but weren't included within the original shape of the Hebrew Bible, but we're read and valued by Jewish communities, including the followers of Jesus.

Jon: And many of those books are the books that are found in the Catholic canonization of the Bible?

Tim: Yeah. Catholic tradition and even proceeding, there were discussions about these books as some a collection alongside scripture, but they were affirmed as scripture within the Catholic tradition. And so that's seven separate books and then two updated versions of Old Testament books. And that's the Catholic Bible within the Orthodox tradition, Greek Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox. There are even a couple other books in their collection.

Jon: Which books are those?

Tim: Enoch.

Jon: Oh, they have Enoch?

Tim: Significantly, yeah, the Book of Enoch. Well, this is important. Just to say, from the beginning, and it's something important to us, The Bible Project, is addressing a cultural perception that to believe that the Bible is a divine word means that human history and human involvement in the Bible was incidental or not significant, because that would mire the fact that it's a Divine Word, which essentially needs to have fallen from heaven.

That's an assumption that I think is actually not true to what the Bible says about its own origins, because there's lots of information in the Bible about its own origins. But also, we lose something really important about what the Bible is. That it came

into existence through the history of how God was at work with a people through history. It emerged out of that history.

So, we should expect the Bible story to be somewhat complex, because God's chosen to get involved in the mess of human history. So the Bible has different shapes in different religious communities. And that's just a historical fact that's got to be recognized.

Jon: And the quick cheat sheet is Jewish community is what Christians call the Old Testament. There is in the Catholic tradition, was it four intertestamental books?

Tim: Seven books and two updated edition.

Jon: Seven books? Wow.

Tim: Seven distinct books.

Jon: Seven more books, those are written during the Second Temple period that Jewish people didn't consider part of their canon but considered a significant religious...

[crosstalk 00:07:11]

Tim: Well, in the same way that includes world Christianity today, there is a difference of opinion about the shape of the Bible: Protestant Bible, Catholic Bible, Orthodox Bible. That same kind of diversity existed even in the Second Temple period about—

Jon: When they were canonizing their scriptures?

Tim: ...the shape of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jon: Okay. So some Jewish groups would say that was part of their scriptures?

Tim: Some would say only the five books of the Torah. We know of groups that said that. We know of groups that accepted what's called the three-part shape of the Hebrew Bible, the Tanak, the law of the prophets and the writing.

There were other groups. One of their libraries was discovered in with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. And they seem to have viewed some of their own writings within the community as having some kind of authoritative divine status as well.

So throughout history, there's then diverse religious groups that have a belief that divine scriptures have a different shape. That's going to throw a wrench in some people. And that's okay. It threw a huge wrench in my view of things.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: So we've got the Jewish scriptures, which we call the Old Testament, but for them is called the Tanak. But during the second time period, there was a unanimous decision?

Tim: Yeah. This is a surprise. When I first learned it surprised many people. But the form of Judaism, modern Judaism as it exists today and all of its different branches, reform, orthodox and so on, all of that comes out of one crucially important stream of Jewish history in the Second Temple period. But it's not the only form that Judaism took in that period. It's just the one that became the most dominant throughout history.

Jon: And the rest ended going away?

Tim: Called Rabbinic Judaism, is the shape. And that's the Judaism that's informed not only by the scriptures but also by two other bodies of religious literature after the scriptures that help them understand the scripture.

Jon: What were those called again?

Tim: The Mission and the Talmud. In a way, easy parallels to think within Jewish history, the Hebrew Scriptures were supplemented by another body of literature, the mission and the Talmud, that all help the people of Israel observe the laws of the Torah with great faithfulness.

Jon: When was that all...?

[crosstalk 00:09:54]

Tim: That's generating the ideas and the conversations and the traditions behind The Mission and the Talmud are taking place in the period around Jesus and afterward.

Jon: Okay. So what happened all the other Jewish traditions?

Tim: They were part of historical groups that just went out of existence. Some still exist. There's a group called the Samaritans who claim a connection to the early history of Israel. They still exist. It's a very small population. It's a small ethnic population that's existing and carrying on the basis of the five books of the Torah.

There were other groups...I mean they are mentioned in the New Testament sometimes. Sadducees. The Pharisees are the nucleus of the group that would become what's called the shapers of Rabbinic Judaism.

Jon: Oh, really?

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Okay. We're totally rabbit trailing here, but that's created by me. The Sadducees, how did they differ from the Pharisees?

Tim: Sadducee were the power brokers in Jerusalem who were in charge of the city and the temple complex.

Jon: So they weren't like rabbis?

Tim: I mean, there were religious Torah scholars on payroll, but for the most part, they were a small group of elite and powerful families running the show in Jerusalem. The Pharisees were a lot more like a popular religious political movement that didn't have a base of power in Jerusalem, but they had centers of influence all over the land of Israel, and they were rising to their peak of influence in the period of Jesus and the apostles. Which is why they appear so much in the New Testament.

Jon: And you're saying that's the seedbed for the Rabbinic tradition?

Tim: Exactly right. As far as we can tell, the Pharisees are the nucleus. They had a vision for what the Jewish people needed to become. And after the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70AD, it was these leaders who forged a new path for existence. Because Israel existed as a temple Jerusalem focus religion.

Jon: And then there's normal temple.

Tim: And then there's normal temple and Jerusalem's destroyed. So the Pharisees were the seedbed of what would become Judaism as it exists throughout its history. This all takes place post-New Testament period.

The interpretations of life according to the Torah that the Pharisees kept developing and later became these two bodies of literature called The Mission and the Talmud.

Jon: I see. So they saw the Tanak as the canonization of Scripture?

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. They treat it as a divine-human word. And there are even more writings that these Jewish scholars produced in these centuries.

But what's interesting to me it's a parallel to the Jesus movement, and then the writings that Jesus followers produced that we call the New Testament, it's the Hebrew Bible, in and of itself is, is an incomplete storyline. It demands some form of completion.

And so Rabbinic Judaism and what's become the dominant form of world Judaism today, that was one way of a community completing. So they supplemented it with other literature, and they are living out their vision of what they think the Scriptures call God's people to. But the Jesus movement was claiming the exact same thing, that the story of the Scriptures was being fulfilled in Jesus and the movement he started.

The Dead Sea scroll community that produced the Dead Sea scrolls down at Qumran, which is the name of the location today where they were, they believed that the story of the Hebrew Scriptures was coming to be fulfilled in themselves and their community and their leader who they called the teacher of righteousness.

Again, this is a good example where the Bible took a different shape in each of these communities because it emerged out of their history. And so, to understand what the Bible is automatically kind of tease you up to at least knowing something about the history of the people group at the center of the Bible, which is the history of the Israelite people.

Jon: So we said, we weren't going to talk about how the Bible was formed, and I feel like we're jumping into it.

Tim: I know.

Jon: But it is helpful. Jewish Scriptures we call the Old Testament it's the Tanak in Rabbinic Judaism today.

Tim: Rabbinic Judaism. Most main branches of Judaism today there's—

Jon: Also have The Mission and the Talmud, which supplement?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But they don't put it at the same level?

Tim: It depends on the tradition. It depends on the tradition.

Jon: Okay. Some of their traditions will call it the same level of Scripture in the same way that Christians will consider the New Testament at the same level of Scriptures?

Tim: That's right. And there are traditions within Judaism that actually treat these later text Mission and the Talmud actually in day to day use more important than the Hebrew Scriptures. Just like there are some forms of Christianity that treat the New

Testament as more important. They'll acknowledge the Old Testament of Scripture, but they never read it. They just read the New Testament.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: There's a parallel to that within some Jewish groups as well.

Jon: Yeah, probably because it's more applicable to their life.

Tim: It's more applicable to their place in the story. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: And then, Catholicism—

Tim: It's tricky. The Catholic Bible results from this body of literature that's pre-Christian.

Jon: The Catholic Bible is a body of literature that's pre-Christian?

Tim: This is they were calling the apocryphal or deuterocanonical works.

Jon: Jewish scripture...

[crosstalk 00:15:29]

Tim: Jewish literature is pre-Christian.

Jon: By pre-Christian, you mean before Jesus death and resurrection?

Tim: Before Jesus, exactly right. These texts, I mean, they're brilliant. They're incredible works and you should know about them and read them. They're amazing.

But as far as we can tell, from our ancient evidence - and I actually happened to hold of view about the shape and history of the Hebrew Bible and the canon - that's not the majority view within the scholarly field. It's not a fringe view, the view that I hold, but it's not the majority view. Which is that the shape of the Hebrew Scriptures, The Tanak, the Protestants knows the Old Testament that that's the original most early shape of the Hebrew Bible.

The boundaries of that were roughly firmed up somewhere within the 3rd to 2nd Century BC. And that's precisely the time period when these other works that are called the apocryphal or deuterocanonical works, that's when these works were being produced. And most of these works are aware of themselves as being dependent on the Hebrew scriptures in some way.

Jon: Dependent meaning?

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: They quote from it. They're aware of it.

Jon: Scripture does that to itself all the time.

Tim: Totally. I'm not saying it's a reason why it should or should not be part of the Bible. It's just it clearly come late in the literature of the biblical tradition.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: I think there are a number of internal clues within the Hebrew Bible and about these books that show they aren't designed to be part of the Hebrew Bible. They're just awesome literature that existed in Jewish communities alongside the Bible.

Jon: And in the Catholic tradition and in the Eastern Orthodox tradition?

Tim: Well, in the early church, these books were read and preserved among Jesus' followers. I mean, they're the reason why they actually were passed on and existed is because early Christians were reading them widely.

Jon: So whether or not they considered them part of Scripture, they were revered and they were passed along?

Tim: They've always been read and valued by Christians until the Protestant Reformation. Then, on the Catholic and Orthodox, people have tended to read and value these writings, which is really unfortunate.

There was a debate going on even in the first few centuries about the status of these books. Are they considering divine-human word the same way as the Hebrew Scriptures? There's a lot of debate going on about that. And that gets us more of the details that are really fascinating but—

Jon: But we won't get into.

Tim: This video's going to have nothing to do with that.

Jon: With information about?

Tim: Yeah. This video really, the beginning of the How to Read the Bible series, it's just going to be like, "What is the Bible? It's the Old Testament. It's the New Testament. It's the Protestant Bible."

Jon: But it helps us to understand how they came to be, to understand why there are differences.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: I agree.

Jon: But we don't have to get into it.

Tim: I agree. We're going to have to find a balance.

Jon: Let me try to do the summary one more time.

Tim: I interrupted you before you've done so?

Jon: No, I just keep rabbit trailing. So, there is the Jewish Scripture called the Tanak, we call it the Old Testament. By we, Protestant Christians.

Tim: You and I.

Jon: You and I. ...called the Old Testament. There was Jewish Second Temple writings that came on the heels of that - which some Jewish traditions considered Scripture, some didn't - called the apocryphal or—

Tim: Apocryphal is how Protestants refer to them. Deuterocanonical is how Catholics and Orthodox refer to them.

Jon: Deuterocanonical.

Tim: Which just means a Second Canon.

Jon: A Second Canon?

Tim: Yeah, a second part of the Canon.

Jon: And Jesus followers read these, early Christians read these. And then there was all the material produced by Jesus's apostles, and that is then the New Testament books, which Protestants consider part of the Canon and so do Catholics and so do the Eastern Orthodox.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: That leaves just one more wrinkle, which is the Eastern Orthodox has a couple more deuterocanonical books than the Catholic tradition.

Tim: That's correct.

Jon: Okay. This will make much more sense when we visualize it on the video.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, it will.

[00:20:18]

Jon: So, the Bible is a book. And I just want to talk about this idea of a book really quick. When I think of a book, I have different categories. I think of a novel, so a story with characters and a plot. I pick it up chapter 1, I start reading, I learn about the world that this story takes place in. There's conflict and resolution by the end, and the book is done. That's fiction.

Then there's a nonfiction book. It seems like a lot of nonfiction books I've read are kind of "how to books - how to get better at things, or how to think about things differently. Those are more topical. Like, here's a topic, you know, creating a business, and here's a book too with a new idea for how businesses succeed or something.

But then I'm also familiar with textbooks, you know, going to school. Those are more like, "Let's try to really systematize all the information you need to know and bring you through it in a very clear structure and make sure you understand it and give you questions and that kind of stuff."

Those are kind of the main books, I guess. But I'm like, "But I read all sorts of other things. I read magazine articles. I read blog posts. I read Facebook updates."

In fact, it's kind of been said that we're writing and reading more than any time in human history. We're very familiar with reading thing, whether or not it's an actual book. And so, the Bible is a book but it doesn't really fit any of those categories exactly.

Tim: Well, we could add a few more categories. And it may be just the categories you don't read that often.

Jon: Scholarly stuff?

Tim: No, no. I'm thinking, books can take a narrative format. There's narrative. But they can take the form of a fictional narrative. But then there's, you know, historical narrative that can be recreating a fictional narrative within what we would take to be a historical event that took place in history.

I mean, my kids love "Magic Tree House" series. It's all a real time in history with real people.

Jon: But fake sports.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: I remember my five-year-old when it hit him—

Tim: These things didn't actually happen?

Tim: Yes. He was devastated.

Jon: That there was no actual Magic Tree House?

Tim: But then I had to try and explain to him Pompeii was real. That's a real city, that was a real volcano, this kind of thing. Then his brain was spun. He was like, "Wait, so it's really real events. The other people Jack and Annie meet are real. But Jack and Annie are not real." I think he gets it now. But that's complicated. But that's another form of narrative.

Then they're straight up historical narrative, biography. It's narrative in its form but that's reconstructing historical events but creating a plot line and showing you the thread between events. So those are all forms of narrative writing and they can all be different levels of quality too.

Jon: And there's historical nonfiction, which is kind of like a biography but about time of...

[crosstalk 00:23:36]

Tim: That's right. It's less interesting maybe.

Jon: Yeah, probably less interesting.

Tim: It is summaries of historical events.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Obviously, the Bible is dominantly narrative. Precisely, 43%. Statistics in front of me, a nice chart. So narrative it's this most dominant shape that the Bible takes.

Jon: Narrative meaning there's characters in a setting, a plot?

Tim: Yeah, characters in a setting with the plotline driving the storyline forward. That's from page 1, "in the beginning." So there's a narrative unifying this entire collection from beginning to end. Within that narrative are large sections or some books that are entirely poetry. Either poetry embedded narrative or books of poetry.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Then there's also a broader category that you could just call discourse, which it's not storytelling, it's not poetry, it's just speech. In the Old Testament, the classic example is the book of Deuteronomy, which is Moses's speech to Israel.

In the New Testament, this would be something like the letters, Paul's letters. But it's tricky because even Paul's letters sometimes have poems in them. Many. And sometimes he's in narrative mode telling a story about what happened to him or telling in short form the story of Jesus.

Jon: Which, I mean, we're familiar with. Someone can give a speech and be telling stories in the speech.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So using narrative?

Tim: Yeah. One way to put it is that the Bible is a totally unique kind of book on the modern literary scene.

Jon: Yeah, there isn't a good equivalent.

Tim: There's not a good analogy, perfect analogy.

Jon: Because you could pick it up and it's a book, but then—

Tim: You realize it's a small library book.

Jon: But it's a small library of books.

Tim: But it's not like walking into the library which is different books and different authors that have no cohesion.

Jon: Right. They all work together.

Tim: In the Bible, we're talking about the first collection, the Old Testament, that has over 1,000-year long formation history. A millennium-long formation history.

Jon: 4,000, you said?

Tim: 1,000. The New Testament in terms of the event that's...And 1,000 years is from the events roughly that we can date historically and then to around 300, 200 B.C.

Jon: Thousand years, that's a long time.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: It's a long period of formation. For the New Testament, it's shorter because it begins with the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth, and then it goes through to the events of his followers over the next 60 some odd years.

So the formation history of the books of the New Testament is like 60 years. These are two very different collections with very different formation histories. They cohesively read together as one unified epic narrative. You're good at an analogy. So what's an analogy for—

Jon: Well, I was just trying to think of some fictional...like, let's just make a fictional book.

Tim: Well, I mean, close equivalent that I think the author was trying to imitate biblical style is something like the "Lord of the Rings" epic. It's fictional, but Tolkien, he structures it in terms of books that don't actually match the physical books. You get the trilogy, it's three books, but actually, I think it's six or seven books within those three physical books. And it feels like you're reading a section from this ancient document.

Then there'll be a poem embedded by some characters, and then an epic narrative about here. But actually, you get into it, you realize Tom Bombadil is a long section that was only a little subplot that only brings you back to the main plot to pick it up again.

Jon: Then he has a similarity, which is like the Genesis story.

Tim: Yeah. I don't tend to read this literature, like, epic fantasy literature, but epic narrative that's weaving a cast of hundreds and thousands over long periods of time. And there's epic stories and very intimate personal stories and poetry woven in.

Jon: I wonder if there's something similar with like if you chronicle together all of Greek mythology or something in the Canon, and you get then all these stories that are probably working together in some way.

Tim: People have compared the biblical canon to the canon of homers works. Like the Odyssey with Iliad. Which again, also feature characters that we know we're Greek kings and generals and so on, but they've been put into this kind of fantasy world of Greek mythology, they're interacting with the gods, and so on.

In the canon of Homers, there's much debate about the origins of these different materials. There are whole scholarly fields that people's whole careers are just about. Just like in biblical studies. So there are ancient parallels to at least the kind of book that the Bible is.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: Because you would never do that today. Well, I guess Tolkien tried it. But I mean, that's super rare to sit down and try to...I mean, and the thing is, is like it wasn't one author. It was many people working together.

Tim: That's right. It's a collection of collections. So even the people who are bringing the final shape of the Hebrew Bible together, the whole Old Testament or Tanak, you have prophets and scholars working in the Second Temple period.

Like Ezra and Nehemiah who feature within the Old Testament themselves, we're told that Ezra was a scholar of the Torah of Moses. These are authors whose authorship is actually to curate much older works and to work them together and weave them together into much longer epic literary works. And that's a different way of authoring. Tolkien just sat down and over time—

Jon: It's kind of like biographer does sometimes.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. You just do tons of research, right?

Jon: Yeah. And then he pulls together all of this work. Especially if you're doing a biography of someone who wrote a bunch of stuff.

Tim: A biography is a good example, where you have a bunch of historical sources. You do interviews, you have pre-existing biographies of the topic person or whatever, and then you work all that together into a new overall cohesive narrative about General MacArthur or something like that.

There's previous history written, you incorporate their work, and you quote them and so on. But you've also done fresh research, and you do your own reflection, and you tie it all together.

Jon: And that's what was happening during the Second Temple Judaism?

Tim: Correct, yeah. The Bible is taking shape. Each of the books of the Old Testament in different ways. There are at different stories to be told about its own formation history.

Many of them had independent authors and origins. But at some point, these different books were recognized as having a divine sacred quality to them. That when Israelites were gathered in worship, that something happened. That they experience the Divine Word through these texts. And so these are the texts that kind of rose to the surface.

E1: What's in your Bible?

A very similar story is to be told about the ordinance of the New Testament about the four gospels, the letters of Paul, the letters of Peter. As early Christians gathered on Sundays, and they read the writings of the apostles allowed, certain ones went viral and became more popular. Other ones, they were valuable, and we're even really amazing but didn't rise to the top.

One of the earliest post-New Testament documents that we know of is called The First Letter of Clement, who was the lead church leader in Rome. It's an amazing document. It's unbelievable. And it reads like one of Paul's letters. But Clement wasn't a part of that original first layer of circle of the apostles, disciples around Jesus.

Jon: Was he like a second layer?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. His letter, while preserved among many circles, didn't rise to the top, virally, so to speak and it wasn't linked to the apostles. And so, it wasn't included within the collection of the New Testament.

There is something about these books that there's an existential element to how they became scripture. Once they were written and read as a part of this Jewish and later Christian communities, they were recognized as a part of this grand epic narrative that the books of the Bible wove together.

Jon: It's interesting that we're jumping around from just what is the Bible back to how the Bible was formed. In this series, we'll not try to discuss how the Bible was formed.

Tim: But we are hatching a plan.

Jon: Yeah, we're hatching a plan.

Tim: We're hatching a plan to do something bigger in The Bible Project about a documentary about the origins of the Bible.

Jon: But for the sake of this video then, it's more about that the Bible is a book that is really a library of books that all work together. And they all work together by contributing to an epic narrative.

Tim: To an epic unified story.

Jon: And this unified story is simplified, is story of Abraham. Well, I'm jumping through a bunch of stuff. But the story of God and the world, and specifically...We were working on the heaven and earth workbook, you can talk about the story in terms of the union of heaven and earth and that separation.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: Yeah, you can talk about it in a couple of ways. You can talk about it just in historical terms. If we're trying to reconstruct the history of the Bible and people group that it came from, then you're talking about the story of Israel. But if you're trying to understand the story of the biblical texts and the message that they have, they're telling a story which has the people of Israel at its center, but it actually has the story of the whole world and all humanity in as its main focus.

So for the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible, the Tanak, it begins with a set of stories saying, "The world was designed for so much more than what we currently experience. What we currently experience is a world that's been vandalized by stupid human, rebellious humans who lost a great opportunity through choosing selfishness and sin." Which the story defines as humans trying to define right and wrong on their own wisdom, apart from God's wisdom.

And so the world's in a bad state and human history is gone off the tracks. What is God going to do about it? He starts a conversation with a guy named Abraham. That's on Page 12 of the Bible. Chapter 12. The rest of the Old Testament becomes a story of the family of Abraham, but all within that larger story of what is God going to do to rescue the world from itself.

Jon: But to be fair, the rest of story is about the family of Abraham, and the story is produced by the family of Abraham as a way for them to understand their identity.

Tim: Yeah, their role in the world, their history and their God.

Jon: So it wasn't like some other Bibliographer coming back and saying, like, "Let me tell the story of this Abraham's family?" It was actually produced over time within there.

Tim: That's right. And by significant individuals within their history, namely, these figures called the prophets. So individuals who had a very unique live connection to their God of Israel. And when they looked out at human history, when they looked at their own people's History, they saw history in a way that other people didn't. They saw God's hand at work, weaving Israel's history as a part of the bigger picture to rescue the whole world.

And so, the claim of these documents is that this history of Israel is a theological history that comes from these figures called the Israelite Prophet, starting with Moses and then the chain goes on down through all the famous ones: Elijah, Nathan, Gad. All these prophets and prophetesses.

So the story of Israel essentially is how is God going to save the world through this family. That's the storyline of the Old Testament. And it gets complicated. They go

into slavery so God rescued them. God makes a covenant with them. They go into the promised land; they get kings who were mostly bad. But there's one good king, and one good king's really important, David. Because God says it's actually through the king from the line of David that his rescue for the whole world is going to come.

[00:37:37]

Jon: What would be good analogy is our friend Scott Erickson. I don't know how well you know Scott Erickson.

Tim: Acquaintance.

Jon: He's called the painter. He did this show. It's kind of one-man show. He was telling a story, a personal story. But while he's doing it, he's at times painting and talking to you. At times he's playing video that is doing something, at times he's reading a poem, and at times he's going back to a story. So it's this eclectic group of types of communication that he all use together. But by the end, you don't feel like you just watched some random—

Tim: You didn't watch a movie.

Jon: You didn't watch a movie. You didn't watch a guy paint. You didn't watch a guy read poetry or do standup comedy. But he did tell jokes. So it's just this mash-up of all these different things.

Tim: Different types of media.

Jon: Different types of media. But also you don't go away and go, "Man, that was just a random smattering of things. You go away going, "Wow. That all work together to communicate something really significant." And not only was it significant in meaning, but it was a unified story. Like he was telling a story from beginning to end about belonging. I think that's maybe a good analogy for what the Bible is doing.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, that is a good analogy. I mean, just to maybe put some people ideas or whatever, I think Jon and I both hold a historic orthodox view about the inspiration of the Bible as a divine and human word. But I think what for us the concern and what's driving this is, for many people that belief somehow has fostered this other belief that the actual history of the Bible it's complex manuscript history and a very complex history of authorship, and so on. Somehow that becomes a threat or a scandal to certain people's view of the Bible as a Divine Word.

Then people have to manufacture all of this energy in books and apologetic literature to defend a view of the Bible as if it fell out of heaven and hasn't been touched by history. And boy, I just think we're really setting up people for a fall when we raise children and form people in church communities with that view of the Bible.

What we're trying to do is orient people to what it is, which is this epic narrative that speaks through so many different kinds of media. I really like that analogy. I think that's—

Jon: You'd have to take it further and say, "It wasn't a one-man show."

Tim: That's right. Sorry. This is what I got in that tangent is because, in a way, that is my theological view of the Bible is that it was the Spirit of God.

Jon: Yeah, the Spirit of God is the one-man show who came—

Tim: Working through many, many different people in a long process to bring these books into existence and as a unified collection. And so that would be the role of Scott. To flush the analogy out, it would be Scott working with or overseeing a bunch of individual artists who work through their different media.

Jon: But over time. And those people don't necessarily meet each other, but they know of each other's work.

Tim: Because Scott would have to live for over a millennium.

Jon: Scott would do it over a millennium. Scott would start in 2016, and then somehow survive for many years, and then finish his project in—

Tim: About 3,100 AD.

Jon: Yeah, 3100 AD. And then have all of these different types of media together.

Tim: Yeah, that's a good analogy. That's a good analogy. And what other book do you read on an average day that's like that? I mean, it's a very unique kind of book.

Jon: The Bible as an art project or metaphors that were—

Tim: I'm a pastor and a Bible nerd. I love to read the Bible. I read it in my spare time as much as possible, and all about it. But I don't for a second think that that's where everybody's at. It's hard to read.

Jon: Or it's an ancient art project...

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: Because it's an ancient...yeah.

Jon: ...divinely inspired.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And it's rooted in his history and historical events. There's an enormous amount of debate about how that works out but it is routed.

Jon: When I say art project, all sudden I realize someone's going to go like, "Oh, what a hippie?"

Tim: But on, let's pause here. For me, one of the most exciting, igniting things to my imagination, I've been a Christian for about a year. I signed up for classes at a local Christian University, and I'm taking my first Bible classes from a teacher professor named Ray Lubeck, and his whole deal is Christians need to learn how to read the Old Testament like Jewish people read it, and as a work of high literary and theological art.

All the books of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament are, as I've called it, the work of literary...Well, this is my friend, Andy who calls it the work of literary ninjas. Truly, the literary—

Jon: Why does he like the word ninja?

Tim: Well, I think he's just thinking of somebody who's extremely nimble and sophisticated, nothing's unintentional, every movement is calculated.

Jon: And then you're like, "How did you break that guy's neck, all of a sudden? You barely moved."

Tim: The Hebrew Bible is an extremely sophisticated piece of ancient literary art that has a theological message, but it's doing it through this incredibly nuanced literary medium. To me, that just exploded my brain.

Then, I was sent on whatever...when was that? That was almost 20 years ago and I still feel like I'm scratching the surface.

Jon: Oh, that was like 97, 96?

Tim: It was 96 I signed up for classes.

Jon: Oh, wow.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: I was almost 20. No, I was 20. I'm still so boggled by the sophistication of the literary art of the Bible.

Jon: It's literary genius.

Tim: It's literary genius. I mean, we're talking Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, and Steinbeck type of level here. But it's from an ancient culture, which is what makes it hard. I think those two things together make it hard for us to engage.

Jon: It's hard to appreciate literary genius even when it's in your own culture at all times because it's a lot to chew on.

Tim: Chew on. Bite off.

Jon: Bite off. But this is from the ancient culture the thinks in different ways that I think—

Tim: Written in a different language.

Jon: Written in a different language. And so, yeah, double whammy.

Tim: And it's our conviction that that's the vehicle that God has chosen to speak to His people throughout history. You just got to stick that in your pipe and smoke it, so to speak. You just got to chew on that one. But that's certainly how Jesus view the scriptures.

Jon: Okay. We're talking about how sophisticated the Bible is. It's literary genius, and it's also an ancient document. This can get really intimidating for people. It's kind of like saying, "In order to be a Christian, you have to be a food connoisseur or a movie critic." It's a high bar.

Tim: Well, okay. I hear that. But once again, we're back to that the Bible didn't fall out of heaven, and then say, "You all have to become movie critics to understand who God is." The Bible emerged from a living historical people group that was a worshipping community - people of Israel, and then the early Christians.

So the history of the Bible is very much the history of God's people. People didn't encounter the Bible in a vacuum. They encountered it as a part, a vibrant, thriving religious community, where you're learning about God, not only through these texts, but through your parents, and your friends and your family.

I want to not make the sophistication of the Bible some kind of barrier to just be like, "You have to know everything to just be a Christian." No, you just have to know the story about Jesus and one to love God and love your neighbor. But maturing and

growing as a follower of Jesus means to learn about the Bible and how to read it better at least.

Jon: Right. Well, it can feel daunting to say that you would benefit by appreciating literary art. That can feel very feel very daunting to people. But I think also that the way literature works is kind of hardwired in our brain.

Tim: Especially narrative.

Jon: Yeah, especially narrative. I mean, it's just how we think.

Tim: It's just really, really well-crafted narratives and stories.

Jon: And the way we tell each other stories, and the way we communicate, a good turn of phrase is in a way poetry. While we don't all go away and write and read poetry and really soak it up, we all can appreciate how language can be poetic, and then, all sudden, have so much more meaning and importance in daily life.

I feel like basic to being human is appreciating language.

Tim: That's right. It's a very intentional, beautiful form of communication: storytelling, poetry. And so the Bible is that.

Jon: It's just interesting that since the Bible is at the center of Christian experience, then being a person who appreciates literature should be at the center of the Christian experience. I mean, not the center. Jesus should be at the center.

Tim: No, I was actually about to say, "I think Jesus is the center of Christian existence and then the Bible is the indispensable way that we encounter Jesus through the Spirit speaking, through the Scriptures to the people."

The Bible has a very close relationship to Jesus. Jesus is the center and the Bible is the way that we can encounter that center. One of the primary ways. I think there are other ways, but Protestants have been debating about that for centuries.

[00:48:58]

Jon: I get really excited when we talk about being people of the book and how important this book is, and how it could turn people off and be like, "Oh, man, I got to be an English major now in order to be a Christian." Not even an English major. Like a Hebrew scholar.

Tim: Which is obviously not true.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: Which is not true. No.

Tim: But it does mean growing in my ability and appreciation of literature - at least of biblical literature.

Jon: But that excites me, and not because...I'm not a literature guy. I haven't read Shakespeare, except for the one or two things I've had to read. I'm not a literary geek, but it excites me to think that that will help me understand my faith more. I think there's a way to make that inspirational.

Tim: Here's maybe an angle. I forget what essay this was by CS Lewis. But I remember reading it early on. It was talking about the importance of literature in a classical education. Something about, "Through literature, I can live life through the eyes of others and I can see the world through the eyes of other people stories and cultures."

That is one of the great values of literature is it's someone's experience, another people groups or another person's experience, story or poem that invites me into their way of seeing the world. And that's precisely what the Bible is doing.

It is trying to invite us into an alternate view of the world and an alternate view of who we are, and of human history and of what's most important. And it does it through this well-crafted piece of literature. That's what literature does to you. In that sense, I agree with you. It is exciting.

Jon: It is exciting the same way that like - and maybe this is Portland culture - but it's like, "Oh, man, I'm really into beer now. What are you going to do?" You're going to like get the homebrew kit, you're going to learn about all the ingredients, you're going to mess around, and you're going to just geek out and you're going to go on brewery tours. I mean, you're just going to dive in deep. You're going to geek out.

Tim: That's even quite broad. I mean, Portland is host to so many niche subculture.

Jon: Right. You're going to get really good at a specific IPA or something.

Tim: Oh, no, I'm talking about salt. Have you been to the salt store where they have hundreds of different kinds of salt from all over the planet?

Jon: No, I haven't been to the salt store.

Tim: Different tastes, different purposes. And you buy these tiny little pouches of salt for a lot of money to put in certain recipes. Okay, sorry.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: Right. Totally, exactly. If I'm going to season my food, I'm going to do it right. I've been joking about how we need a handcrafted artisanal tots stand. There's something exciting about saying like, "Not only am I going to care about this, but I think if I dive in as deep as possible, this thing will create a lot of meaning for my life." And there's a spirit of that in Portland.

I mean, that's fun to learn about salts and get really good at knowing about your salt. This is actually going to bring you true meaning. That's a good hobby possibly. But there's something about diving in about this book and appreciating the artistry of the book and geeking out about it. That you don't have to do that to be a Christian. Like, you don't have to go all in. But you it's so much more connected to finding meaning because that's all it's interested in.

Tim: Yeah, that's right about the meaning of human existence.

Jon: Human flourishing and being connected to God and divine and everything.

Tim: Yeah, I agree. What we're saying is, we both feel that personally. That's already infused a lot of what we're doing in The Bible Project.

Jon: In a different level, you've devoted your life for the last 20 years geeking out at like level 10.

Tim: And brought even to my happy little world.

Jon: And I'm in here crawling around, scratching out things in that world. Then there'll be other people who might listen to a podcast, or they might go to a class, or different things, throughout different kinds of levels, but I'm not going to learn Hebrew.

Tim: No?

Jon: I think it's too late in my life to try to read Hebrew.

Tim: I don't recommend it. At the same time, not everybody is going to read the hundred great modern classics or something like that. It's not realistic for most people. But there are some—

Jon: But that doesn't mean you shouldn't pick up a classic and appreciate it?

Tim: That's right. Steinbeck's East of Eden, arguably one of the most important, important literary works of the last 100 years and it'll just blow you. By the way, it's all about Genesis chapter 4. The whole story span out of Genesis chapter 4.

That's a great example of the legacy of the literary art of the Bible living on in one of the Great Western literary classics.

Jon: Maybe there could be something like that. I don't know if it's that, like Portland hipster sounding good or bad about like, "What is the Bible/why should I care?" I don't know. Maybe it doesn't fit.

Tim: I agree. I think—

Jon: Because arguably, you could say, "Yeah, I'm going to be a Christian, but the Bible, I don't really need it. I'm not going to read it. I might pretend I do just to get some people off my back, but my Christian experience is connected to praying and..."

Tim: Praying, my participation in a church community.

Jon: The sacraments at the church, the relationships I have there. I have an appreciation for scripture, and every once in a while, I might enjoy being read at a wedding, or at mass or service or whatever, but I'm not going to really geek out about this book. And I'm okay with that. I'm also really highly suspicious of other people who do because it's usually for lame purpose, tots."

Tim: Yeah, you feel like you're being sold or something.

Jon: I don't know. I'd be interested if we couldn't get that person to go, "Man, I was going to geek out about fly fishing in this next season of my life, but maybe I'll put some of that geekery towards the Bible."

Tim: In the same way that many people turn to reading literature to enrich their lives, it's the same thing. It's saying, "This is a remarkable piece of literature." I think it does more above and beyond your normal piece of literature. But it's not less than a piece of amazing literature.

Jon: It could feel that way at times because it's written in a different language. So that you'll read parts of the Bible and then you'll be like, "Oh, this is boring."

Tim: But it's all about your expectations that you come with. Most people if they've been introduced to the Bible, it's been through their childhood, and it's through being presented versions of the biblical stories that are nowhere near as brilliant as the actual version. That's the problem of whatever.

Jon: Yeah, that's true. I mean, dumbed down for—

E1: What's in your Bible?

Tim: And whitewashed with the scandalous parts all removed for kids. They're turned into children's literature. And the Bible is not children's literature.

Jon: But also for adults just to keep it simple. Like, remove some of the complexity.

Tim: That's right. Then once somebody knows the story, then they come to the actual biblical account, and they assume they already know what to expect from it. But if my expectation coming is to a narrative in the Bible, that "Man, there's so much more going on here than I realized, there's a brilliant mind under here and I'm going to read and reread and think and ponder because somebody amazing and brilliant is trying to talk to me here," that will make for a completely different kind of experience and reading the story about David for example.

Jon: Can we talk about kids for a second because we both have young kids?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: I think, in evangelical Christian culture, there's this assumption that when your kids are really young, one of the most important things you can do is educate them with Bible stories. That's really, really important because that's when their minds are most malleable.

So, if they're going to not only learn something well, I mean, like, when you're going to learn a language, you're going to learn most things, like your brain is developing, there's that argument. But then also, it's easier to convince someone of the value of something when—

Tim: When they've got that in their background.

Jon: No, when they're that young. Like, we could tell our kids like, "This is important and they'll be like, "Oh, yeah, sure. Of course, because you're my dad."

But we've identified this other problem, which is, if you try to take the Bible and turn it into kid’s material, you generally have to shave off the edges a little bit and dumb it down a little bit. Because one, part of it's not appropriate for kids, but two, it's too sophisticated for kids to understand in many levels.

So, I don't know. There's this tension here then because if you do that, then you're going to have a kid grow up and go, "Yeah, the Bible that's a really childish, boring piece of literature that I've been told before and it's boring." And it's because you probably were given a much more digestible version, which—

Tim: Than the real thing.

E1: What's in your Bible?

Jon: But then the other route is you just say, "Hey, son, this is too sophisticated for you. Come back to me when you're older." And then we'll open up scriptures." Or you missed out a great opportunity to help your kids experience God's word in a time when their brains are developing, and very important.

Tim: Obviously, a lot of people are going to have very differing and deep convictions about how to go with that. So I don't claim. And I'm a young dad and my kids were little.

At this point, what I'm trying to do is get the stories about Jesus in front of my kids as much as possible, if anything. I mean, I know the Noah and the ark and Moses and so on and that kind of stuff is important. I agree. But what actually I care about more is that the stories about Jesus' character and his teachings, and how he treated people, that that's the bedrock of their childhood Bible imagination.

Then from there, personally I'm just floating real high over the biblical story with my kids. It's great to have The Bible Project videos to do that. But I feel like I'm just now starting to engage my five-year-old on the bigger storyline of the Bible.

My biggest fear is that there's going to be all this stuff that I kind of help him fix in his mind, and then I'm later going to have to do some unlearning to help him learn the next layer of whatever. I think to me that's the challenge is encountering the flood story it's just not helpful if all you get is that story by itself. Because then, usually it's a whitewash story that's just like, "Noah obeyed God and built the boat. So, you go build a boat too. I don't know." But when it fits into that—

Jon: Obey God.

Tim: Obey God. And so, that's fine. I actually do think that's a motif of the story that Moses was righteous and walked with God. But how that story fits in to the stories before it and after it and leads up to Genesis chapter 12 and Abraham, that's all crucial, crucial for how that story is told. And that's, I don't know, it's challenging.

Right now, I'm sticking with Jesus, and the overall biblical story of like, God loves the world, the world screwed up, but God wants to rescue it, and Jesus was key to that.

Jon: That's it for this episode. We're going to continue this conversation and walk through the structure of the Bible, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and look at every single book and how it contributes to the story. It's going to be really great informative discussion. It gives you a bird's eye view of the composition of this book.

E1: What's in your Bible?

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