

Day of the Lord P6

Revelation and Jesus in Modern Politics

Podcast Date: May 17, 2017

(50.41)

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Jon: This is The Bible Project podcast. I'm Jon. Today, on this episode, I'm going to be talking with Tim Mackie about The Day of the Lord. This is the final in a six-part series on The Day of the Lord. So it's been a long journey, but we're finally here.

If you're just joining us, I'd highly recommend you listen to the other five episodes. But if you're not going to, here's a couple ideas to be familiar with so you can keep up with the conversation.

The first word is Babylon. Babylon was an ancient civilization that Israel was captured by. It represented to them a civilization in rebellion against God, a corrupt, unjust human system that God needs to up end. But in the Bible, Babylon becomes an archetype. It becomes a way of describing any civilization that's in rebellion against God. So Egypt is described as Babylon, even Israel is described as Babylon, and the day of Jesus, Rome was considered Babylon.

The second thing to keep in mind is this phrase "The Day of the Lord." Biblical authors use this phrase to describe when and how God intervenes in human history, to stop corrupt civilization to destroy Babylon.

In the last episode, we talked about how Jesus came and how his death was considered a Day of the Lord. And that's where we'll pick up this conversation again. That will lead us into a conversation about the book of Revelation, a book that's made Christians really scratch their heads and ask a lot of questions like, when's Jesus going come back? What's it going to look like?

Tim: The final Day of the Lord, what does it actually mean? The biblical authors are not interested in giving us that information. It's like Paul says, "Concerning times and dates, I'm not going to write to you about that."

Jon: We'll finish this episode with the practical conversation about what it means to be living in Babylon while waiting for The Day of the Lord, and participating in a new type of kingdom. Thanks for listening. Here we go.

[00:02:23]

Jon: The homestretch on this theme of The Day of the Lord, we're going to talk about what the followers of Jesus thought of and how they used the phrase "The Day of the Lord" and what that phrase "the Day of the Lord" means to us now, 2,000 years later.

Tim: Then the question is, The Day of the Lord in modern popular usage, Jesus' Second Coming, his return and the events leading up to that, what's interesting, there are

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two letters in the New Testament that use the phrase "Day of the Lord" more than once - it's Paul's 1st and 2nd of the Thessalonians.

This was the church community that had a lot of questions about Jesus' return, and what was all going to happen, and they were afraid.

Jon: Can we stop for a second. His return, why didn't it just end there? So, Jesus defeats death and at that point the Big D day the Lord could have begun. But instead he appears to His disciples, and he says, "Go and proclaim this kingdom to the whole world and use the power of the Holy Spirit, which I will give you."

Now we've been living in this era for 2,000 years, where followers of Jesus are supposed to be living in this counter Babylon. But then Jesus promises that one day he will come back and defeat evil permanently, then there'll be the new age.

Tim: Yeah. Although the claim is that The Day of the Lord, the victory actually did happen on Good Friday.

Jon: That was The Day of the Lord?

Tim: It was the inauguration, to use a theological term that I find helpful. It was like an inaugural ceremony that truly placed Jesus as the Lord of heaven on earth. And he is truly reigning, but—

Jon: Not everyone knows.

Tim: Yeah, not everyone knows, apparently or not everyone acknowledges it, like Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar, and not everyone responds appropriately.

Jon: Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar before Jesus'...

[crosstalk 00:04:51]

Tim: Oh, I'm just using them as icons. Like Pharaoh said, "I don't acknowledge Yahweh." So somebody who knows about Yahweh, the God of Israel but they don't acknowledge that.

Jon: Some people know Jesus, but don't acknowledge him.

Tim: Don't acknowledge him as their Lord. And then the delay has been a challenge for Christians from the very beginning. 2 Peter addresses this where he responds to skeptics who said, "Yeah, everything's going on like it did before. Jesus never came. So did anything really change?"

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And Peters reflects on it, and he says, "Listen, God works with long expanses of time." He just had the basic biblical chronology. He just had an inkling of the time expanses involved. But he uses the language of Psalm 90 to say, "1,000 years is like a day." So how God works in history doesn't all correspond to our perceptions of time. That's the point.

Then he says, "And it is God's mercy that's giving you time to come to terms with your own mortality and participation and evil so that you'll repent." I mean, I'm with you. It's a tough one.

So the Thessalonians wrote to Paul and said, "Well, wait, what about followers of Jesus who died before he returns? What about them? Because it's just like the first generation." So he writes in chapter 4, "Don't worry, it's okay. Jesus can reclaim people from the dead, whether they're in the grave or alive and it's okay."

Then, what he calls it is "the Lord's Coming." And then right after that, he says, "Brothers and sisters, about times and dates, we're not going to write to you. I can't predict this in a prophecy code for this, for you know very well that The Day of the Lord - that's one of the key appearances in the New Testament of that phrase - will come like a thief in the night while people are saying peace and safety..." This was a public service announcement of the Roman Empire, the Pax Romana.

Jon: Stay calm and—

Tim: "We're fine. Everything's fine."

Jon: What was the British line? Stay calm and carry on?

Tim: Stay calm and carry on, yeah. Peace and safety. Here, he's poking at Rome's version of peace. Sure, true shalom has come to the world through Rome. At what cost? Enormous cost of the majority of the population are slaves and the gigantic army is securing that peace. He doesn't say Rome, but he doesn't need to. He just quotes the propaganda.

And then he says, "Destruction will come on them." And then he quotes different Old Testament prophets, "As labor pains on a pregnant woman, they won't escape." Both from the book of Isaiah.

So Paul will appeal to The Day of the Lord to talk about the Babylon of his day, namely Rome, and his basic council is it's not about timelines and predicting this. "Just know that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth and that your life and your death is power."

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Jon: So there he's talking about Rome falling not about the...?

Tim: Well, we got the same. For him, it's the same thing in Isaiah. Was Isaiah talking about the end of the world or the fall of Babylon? And so, was Paul talking here about the fall of Rome or Jesus' ultimate return and defeat of Babylon? It doesn't seem like he even wants to think about those as separate things because, again, in the biblical way of viewing history, it's the same narrative story and storyline.

Jon: It's like looking forward, it's the same. When you look back you go, "Oh that was The Day of the Lord against Rome or the Day of the Lord against Babylon." But when you're looking forward to it, you don't distinguish it between that and...

Tim: And how could they know?

Jon: God could tell them.

Tim: Sure, but apparently He didn't. Because he says, "About times and dates, I'm not going to write to you." So he doesn't say, "Well Rome's going to fall roughly in the 400s, and I could just..."

Jon: But in a couple more thousands.

Tim: Yeah. And the same way, why Jesus doesn't draw this clear line between the fall of Jerusalem and his own return in the Gospel. Because what they want their listeners to see is that the same justice that God will bring on the whole world is exactly what's breaking into history right here in the fall of Jerusalem, or in the fall of Rome.

[00:09:58]

Tim: The book of the New Testament that is all about the hope of Jesus' return is, of course, the last one, the book of Revelation. The whole book is about the conflict of the Kingdom of God brought through Jesus, the slain Lamb, the crucified Jesus, in conflict with the kingdom of this world, which is only ever called...well, it's called Babylon through most of the book of Revelation, but there's one place in chapter 11, where the unified humanity in rebellion against God, is in chapter 11:8, called the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where the Lord was crucified.

So, if you are wondering, like, "Are these guys playing fast and loose, making Babylon and Egypt and Israel becomes Babylon?" Well, here you go. The smoking gun is a New Testament author—

Jon: Just throwing it all together.

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Tim: Yeah. He's talking about Babylon as the larger character in the book of Revelation, but he also calls the great city, Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem, the crucified Jesus. He sees them all as manifestations of the same thing - a city, a whole people group that have given into the promise of evil. I love that phrase. The promise of evil.

So, at the end of the book, before Jesus comes riding on the white horse to bring his kingdom, if God's kingdom is going to come through Jesus, Babylon must fall. And so, in the Revelation chapter 17 through 19 is a long set of visions and poems about the fall of Babylon. And it's amazing. Every single Old Testament passage from the prophets about the fall of Babylon gets quoted in those chapters of Revelation about the fall of Babylon.

Jon: They just all get thrown in.

Tim: Literally, he's quoted from—

Jon: He's just grabbing everything he can.

Tim: There's a bunch in Isaiah, a bunch in Jeremiah, a bunch in Ezekiel, and then, a handful of minor prophets. He systematically pulled quotes from all of them. It's really remarkable. And other from the fall of Tyre to Israel's north, from Edom to the south-east, and at Sodom and Egypt and Jerusalem. So it's just the mega...I think we've talked about this. In Revelation, the great city, Babylon is like a mega transformer.

Jon: That's right. You've talked about that.

Tim: I don't remember.

Jon: Yeah, I remember you talking about this before.

Tim: There's one version from my childhood that I think you don't remember called "Voltron." It was like five lions, robotic lions that would join into one.

Jon: "Defender of the Universe"?

Tim: Yes, Voltron. And then in "Transformers," there were both—

Jon: That wasn't in "Transformers." Voltron was a different thing.

Tim: No, no, that was just Voltron. But then in "Transformers" there was the Autobahn version and a Decepticon version of a team of robots.

Jon: They can all combine into one massive "Transformer."

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Tim: They combine into this big massive robot. I remember I had the constructor cons, the Decepticon one. They were all these neon green construction vehicles that formed into this massive destructive robot. And that's exactly the way Babylon—

Jon: Yeah, all of these ancient cities, all are current cities all thrown together as this one massive Empire.

Tim: In these chapters, it's basically just the kingdom collapses and Babylon collapses, and the nations of the earth lament and mourn, and a long list of all the economic goods that Babylon made its wealth off. And the last one in the list is human lives. It's in chapter 18.

Then after that is the coming of the rider on the white horse. It's Jesus. There's some debate about this, because he comes with a sword, but then—

Jon: But the sword's coming out of his mouth?

Tim: Yeah. "The sword" it's a metaphor because it's coming out of his mouth. He's quoting from two passages in Isaiah, which is proclaiming justice. It's his verdict.

Jon: The sword is his words?

Tim: It's his words that hold Babylon and those who participated accountable. This fits into the whole depiction of Jesus as the victor in the book of Revelation. He's a slain Lamb. So he's the most helpless creature. And not only that. His neck is slit and he's all bloody. That's the victor in the Revelation.

So he's taking the image of the cross and made it a theme to describe the essence of Jesus' identity. The slain Victor. I was actually really thinking about this over the weekend. We watched a movie with Jessica's sister-in-law and her husband called "The Magnificent Seven."

Jon: I saw half of it and then I fell asleep. Not because it was boring, but because I was really tired.

Tim: Denzel Washington, Chris Pratt.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And just a classic Western tale.

Jon: Totally. And you just want to see him beat up the bad guy.

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Tim: Yeah. It's just a classic. But what was interesting was the innocent town that gets hijacked by the evil gold mining baron, that kind of thing, the innocent people are super religious. And the first scene of the pastor, he's this wimp of a man. Of course, he's portrayed as a total coward.

He first uses prophetic critique of the bad guy. "Who do you think you are? Don't come into the Lord's house." And then he's just slap down. He is one of the characters in the story who has this conversion. And what his conversion to is the only way to beat this guy is to kill him and to kill all of his henchmen.

By the end the ends up praying for and giving his blessing on the heroes as they're about to go annihilate the bad guys and kill them all. Then the preacher's there at the end, thanking God for this victory. It's exactly what we're talking about here.

Jon: That's The Day of the Lord as you would imagine it.

Tim: That is The Day of the Lord from the Old Testament prophets' point of view.

Jon: The Day that [unintelligible 00:17:02] and they took down that villain and his crew and rescued the oppressed.

Tim: But according to Jesus, that's not The Day of the Lord. If Jesus had been Denzel Washington, he would have failed. That would be a failure because he would have given in to the devil. And so, in a way—

Jon: There was a scene where Denzel Washington is confronted by this spiritual force who says, "Hey, I'm going to give you success if you give me allegiance and I'm going to give you this power."

Tim: "I'll give you a chance to blow the bad guys head off."

Jon: And then Denzel Washington is like, "Yes." And then he goes and they take care of business. That seemed [unintelligible 00:17:47]

Tim: Yeah, totally. The preacher in "The Magnificent Seven," I think, according to honest reading of the gospel's narratives would actually put the preacher in the place of Judas. Like, he said he's on the side of Jesus, but actually, in the end, he knows the only real way to defeat evil is to be like Babylon. And so, it becomes a betrayal of Jesus. Anyway.

And I walked away from the movie really disturbed because everything in me wants to celebrate. I grew up watching "Westerns" with my dad. It's really nostalgic for me to watch "Westerns." But I was really conflicted by the end of the film, because I was

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like, "That's not the way of Jesus." But I love that the bad guy died the way that he did. It's the scandal of the cross, I think.

Jon: Yeah, that's uncomfortable.

Tim: It is uncomfortable. So he comes riding on a white horse. So he takes a very traditional image of Denzel Washington. But then his guns aren't material; they're his words.

Then we're told that he's covered in blood but the battle hasn't even happened yet. He's already covered in blood before the battle happens. Here's the thing. This is a good example.

In that phrase, he's using an image drawn from Isaiah 63 that's really actually a divine warrior image. That's kind of disturbing. But this is a good example of how the New Testament authors work.

So it's a depiction of The Day of the Lord in Isaiah 63. And the Prophet asks...it's like he's on a mountain or a hill and he sees a savior figure coming up over the hills. "Who is this coming up from the south, from Edom, the land of one of Israel's great enemies, from Bozrah - it's another land - and his garments are all stained red? Who is this coming robed in splendor striding in the greatness of his strength?"

And then the Victor speaks. "It's me proclaiming victory, mighty to save." Then the Prophet asked, "Why are your clothes all red like you've been treading in a winepress?" And then the Victor responds, "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nation's no one was with me. I trampled the nations in my anger, trod them in my wrath; their blood we're using treading a winepress, the blood of grapes spatters my garment, stained my clothing. For me, it was the day of vengeance, The Day of the Lord."

Jon: And there, the blood was the nations.

Tim: It's a metaphor. He's stomping the wicked of the nations like grapes. The poem isn't saying, "Oh, he's squashing tiny humans." He's crushing grapes, and it's a metaphor of divine justice on the nations.

Jon: He's in the winepress by himself, squishing down the grapes, and he's saying that's him bringing vengeance on—

Tim: Avenging all the innocent blood.

Jon: So the wine on his garments is really the blood—

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Tim: Becomes this metaphor of the blood of the wicked that he's...I mean, it's a very violent image. It's super violent image.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So here's how John picks this image up in the Revelation. In Revelation 19:11, he says, "I saw heaven standing open, there before me was a white horse! His rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he brings judgment and he wages war.

His eyes are like blazing fire - this is from Daniel, describing the ancient days in Daniel. On his head are many crowns." Remember that from Revelation chapter 5. "He has a name written on him that nobody knows but himself." The name representing your truest identity. "He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God, the armies of heaven following him riding on a white horse." So here he is. He's bloody and the battle hasn't even started.

Jon: How do you know the battle hasn't started?

Tim: Oh, because it's going to start down below. All he did is arrive over the hilltop with the sunrise. That's the idea.

Jon: He's waging war but the battle hasn't started.

Tim: He arrives with his clothes covered with blood. "Coming out of his mouth is the sword" - that is a metaphor of his verdict. "With which he strikes the nation" - this is a quotation from Isaiah 11. "He strikes the wicked with the breath of his mouth. He rules with the iron scepter" - that's a quote from Psalm 2. "He treads the winepress of the wrath of God Almighty." And you're like, "Wait, I thought...Wait. He tried to winepress—

Jon: So the wine press can't be him at battle because he hasn't gone to battle yet.

Tim: Right. Or he treads the winepress with the fear of the wrath. In Isaiah 63—

Jon: That's how he got bloody.

Tim: That's how he gets bloody it's by treading the winepress. Here, he's already bloody, and this is how he's waging war. So John's showing his colliding images here. He's showing that Jesus's way of waging war is the fulfillment of all of these old testament images. But he's also, at the same time, turning it upside down in light of the scandal on the cross.

It's the same thing that happened earlier in Revelation where he says, "I saw the one who could guide history and open the scroll. It's the Lion of Judah. The aggressive

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lion." He says that's what he heard announced. And then what he sees is a Lamb with a slit throat.

So he's constantly taking aggressive, violent Old Testament Day of the Lord imagery and saying, "The cross was the day of the Lord. It was the fulfillment of those images, and it did not involve God killing his enemies. It actually involved the Son of God allowing himself to be killed by them."

[00:24:46]

Tim: I think it's inescapable. This is why readings of the book of Revelation that, I don't know, help people look forward to some future cataclysm of violence where Jesus comes with the sword cutting people apart, to me, it's not just a misreading of Revelation. To me, it's a betrayal of Jesus. Because what you're saying is, "Oh, Jesus, use the means of the cross, but that was just like, his way of being nice for a little bit."

Jon: Ultimately, he will use a threat of death as his true power to bring justice.

Tim: And I'm not saying that there isn't a reality to final justice where people suffer the consequences of their decisions if they don't yield to Jesus. I'm not saying that. But what I'm saying is, the New Testament is transforming these violent images of The Day of the Lord in a really important way that has gone largely unnoticed by the modern Western church. Because we love Denzel Washington strangling the bad guy to death.

Jon: It feels good.

Tim: It does. It's satisfying. Anyhow, that's how the day of the Lord comes to its completion in the last book of the Bible, is this paradox. Here, he defeats the armies of evil. And then in chapter 20, Babylon death, the beast, the dragon, they're all cast into the lake of fire. They are assigned, they are quarantined to the place of eternal self-destruction. And that's the defeat of evil.

And you could say that the violent image, but it's interesting, it's people being consigned or handed over to what they've chosen. Something that they've chosen, which is destruction.

Jon: Well, how did Butler talk about...he talked about creating a place for that to exist but not inside of creation.

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Tim: If somebody refuses, like Pharaoh, to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord - using Pharaoh as icon or Babylon - then God will honor the dignity of that decision and allow people to exist in that.

Jon: Oh, confinement, I think was the term.

Tim: Confinement, yes. But what God won't allow is for that evil to pollute or vandalize his creation anymore. The end of Revelation is the New Jerusalem and then outside the city are...Wait, I thought they were in a lake a fire in chapter 20. But then in chapter 22, the wicked are just outside the city.

So these images of that God will contain those who choose evil, and the point is that He won't allow them to ruin His world anymore. And, of course, we wonder, "What does that all actually refer to? The final Day of the Lord, what does it actually mean?"

Jon: And when will we know it's going to happen?

Tim: The biblical authors are not interested in giving us that information. It's like Paul says, "Concerning times and dates, I'm not going to write to you about that. What you need to know is what this means for history and for your own setting right now so that you can follow the Messiah."

Jon: What are the telltale signs that you have become part of Babylon?

Tim: Well, think through the portraits. We have three steps so far. We had Genesis 3 to 11, then we had Egypt, the description of Egypt in the Book of Exodus, and then we had Solomon's reign and the description of Israel in those books. Each one kind of progress the portrait.

So Genesis three to 11 was about autonomy, human autonomy from God wanting to redefine good and evil.

Jon: And every political structure does that.

Tim: Yeah, every political structure has to define what is good and not good in its regime.

Jon: There's no political structure that says, "You know, we're going to do this under the guidance of Yahweh." Right?

Tim: Well, I don't know. I think in the ancient world, every political—

Jon: Maybe in the ancient world.

Tim: Oh, right now. Well, sure. Again, it gets into a whole debate about American history.

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Jon: Sure.

Tim: But God language has been used in America's entire political history, and for most of European political history.

Jon: God language meaning?

Tim: Appealing to some kind of divine standard as giving moral legitimacy to policies and decisions. So one nation under God, the liberty - all of that. That's all godly.

[crosstalk 00:29:58]

Jon: ...that comes from Judean Christian overview. But no one's constitution written in is saying, —

Tim: No, not right now. That's like the laws of the Torah.

Jon: Well, not the laws of the Torah necessarily, but even just as a nation, we will always fear God and we will not try to define Good and Evil on our own terms but always do it under God's guidance.

Tim: Well, it depends like which God. I mean, that's a whole debate. Even about America, "one nation under God." What God is that? Like the kind of neutered Christian God of the American Civil Religion or the actual God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth?

Jon: I think that's what I'm trying to say is, there isn't any nation-state that says, "Yahweh is our God." Written into our constitution is that we will..."

Jon: Yeah, you're right. That nation state does not exist. Even Modern Israel is not that nation-state. It's an extremely secular nation-state. Like America uses its religious heritage as a framework for its language but the actual people and the value systems at work are modern secular world.

Jon: And I think what's interesting is there's this fear. Because when you see that happen in like radical Islam, it really can get ugly.

Tim: Yes, yes.

Jon: And so you wonder, "Will that be the same thing if a nation state said, 'Hey, we follow Yahweh and believe in Jesus and the resurrection and the kingdom of God and we want to build around that?'" Is it going to get ugly?

I guess if you truly are following Jesus, then you would be this weird nation state that constantly is forgiving and surrendering weird moments, and creating peace

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and justice in radical ways. Maybe it's not even possible. You'll probably just get beat up and taken out.

Tim: No, it exists right now.

Jon: How does it exist?

Tim: It's called the church.

Jon: But that's not a nation-state.

Tim: No.

Jon: That's an institution. And that's what the church is supposed to be.

Tim: It's an institution that Jesus instituted, a multi-ethnic covenant people bound by their allegiance to Jesus and his love for them that lives by a radically different value system as a counter back to Babylon. We're describing churches in the New Testament...

Jon: You're right, we're describing churches, with the vision—

Tim: ...with the vision of what the movement of Jesus is.

Jon: But I've never thought of churches on the same kind of platform as political structure.

Tim: Oh, I see. Well, what is the political structure? It's just a group of people who share resources and agree to a set of policies and values that govern their common life together. That's what the word "politics" mean.

The word "polis" refers to abound to city surrounded by a wall, and "politikos" is the terms to which we all commit to live together. And so, the movement that Jesus started is a political movement in the classic sense of that word.

Jon: In the classic sense?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Not in the sense of we're going to start a new party.

Tim: Any group of people that commits to a commitment to living together by a certain set of values is a political body in the classic sense of that word.

Jon: Yeah.

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- Tim: Stanley Hauerwas, in some circles controversial Christian theologian, but he's probably one of the most important voices arguing for a complete separation between the movement of Jesus and the power structures of the world. And he talks about that the church doesn't have a political influence. He just says, "The church is a politics." It's a great way of putting it.
- Jon: Yeah, that makes sense the way we're talking about it. That seems like the strategy that you should have as the church is don't intertwine yourself with politics; be your own politics.
- Tim: But the problem is, that's not actually what the apostles advocated.
- Jon: Right, okay.
- Tim: They adopted Jeremiah's philosophy, which was live in the midst of Babylon and fully immerse yourself but out of allegiance to a different ruler, and with a completely different value system. Which most of the time is going to create overlap in pursuit of the common good, but sometimes will create a conflict of allegiance.
- And then God's people are to obey God rather than man, as Peter puts in the book of Acts and happily suffers whatever consequences that come, even if it means death. And here we're into the book of Daniel or Esther.
- Jon: Yeah, because depending on that moment in history, and what you're doing as the church, you're either being celebrated or you're a threat to national security.
- Tim: That's right. Which is exactly how the early Christians were perceived in the first two centuries is a political threat - a group of people organizing out of allegiance to a different King.
- Jon: And that's true persecution, like when you're a political threat correct. If all of a sudden - and sorry international listeners - but if all of a sudden in America Christianity is a political threat, then you could say, "Okay, persecution."
- Tim: Until then, you just get made fun of in cities on each of the west or east coast. That's the worst to get.
- Jon: Lots of jokes.
- Tim: But yeah, our brothers and sisters in many, many countries in the world are actually persecuted because the Christian movement is viewed as a threat to the social order. And there are some Americans who feel that way about Christianity, that it's actually a danger to America social order.

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- Jon: Sure.
- Tim: And of course, so many American Christians views is exactly the opposite.
- Jon: Right.
- Tim: The Day of the Lord in the prophets absolutely raises the questions of what you call political theology. The way you think as a Christian about my relationship to the power institutions of the world.
- Jon: When people ask you about your politics, you don't go into detail. But if someone asked you, "Do you have an answer? Do you have kind of like 'here's my stance on things politically?'"
- Tim: Well, I mean, you can just do in a shorthand way that just invites a conversation. Which is to say, "Jesus is Lord." And so, when Caesar or Nebuchadnezzar or the president is on board with the common good as defined by Jesus, then we're happy neighbors seeking each other's well-being.
- Jon: So when someone says, "What political party you are in?" you say, "Jesus is Lord?"
- Tim: I think that's what a Christian should say. Then out of moral conscience, you get informed about the issues, the policies, the leaders. If you're in a democratic republic, like we have the privilege of being, use you're voting influence, decide according to your conscience. And that clearly differs even within the body of Christ. Clearly.
- Jon: Sure.
- Tim: Because different values are different senses of what is right or we're different core values of what is right. And here we go. Man, I just listened to a podcast on Jonathan Haidt, "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion." I don't think he's a Christian, but the podcast I was listening to, it's for theologians who talk about theology.
- Jon: What's that one called?
- Tim: It's called Mere Fidelity.
- Jon: Yeah, Mere Fidelity.
- Tim: It is a great review and discussion of this book. But Jonathan Haidt has identified why it is that people in American culture just talk past each other. His argument is

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just simply that they have different core values of defining what is the right and the good.

So some people define evil as harm. Some people define evil as disorder or violating natural boundary lines. Some people define evil as inequality, lack of equality. And those base definitions will then create whole narratives of what is good. Then you get people in the same room who are just talking past each other; they inhabit different worlds.

His point in writing the book is to just help people see that true dialogue means learning what's underneath other people's core values. And that diversity is within the body of Christ itself, which is by definition a multi-ethnic international movement. And so we should expect that they'll be different ways that different Christians in different countries in different times relate to the power structures around them.

Jon: I think one thing that leads to a lot of political divides is fear. And that is, your nation-state protects you and your way of life. One of the biggest fears as a human is to lose security, to lose your freedoms.

I think that how you think that might come to happen is the thing you're going to fight against. And the things that you think are going to protect those freedoms is what you're going to fight for. But at the base of it is because we're really afraid. I get afraid of thinking like, "What if the economy collapses? What if all these different scenarios...?"

I was just listening to this podcast last night and they were talking about how antibiotic strains are actually effective, and it'll take a couple billion dollars, probably to develop a new one. And corporations don't want to do it because there's not really any money in it because people only use it once. And the nation states are not organized enough to do it or isn't a priority. So we're just kind of sitting around waiting for—

Tim: The next black plague.

Jon: Yeah. So there those fear that's just normal. But I think what I'm realizing is, if your politics is Jesus is Lord, no matter what happens. You know that phrase like, whatever happens, God's in control. The prophets as they're seeing all this chaos and they're seeing these wars—

Tim: Imagine the world they inhabit in.

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Jon: Oh, my goodness. And they go, "This is the Day of the Lord. This is the Lord at work, even though it's ugly, even though it's scary." I'm kind of imagining like, "What's the worst case scenario for me in my part of the world? And if that happens, I'm usually not the one to say this, but God must have a plan and the church will stand. The kingdom of God will prevail. So we don't have to be afraid."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. This is why the Old Testament story doesn't end with exile. It goes on to continue the story of what it means to be the covenant people of God, even when all the structures that we thought are what defined us as the people of God are obliterated. You have Daniel, what did he do wrong? You know.

Jon: What did Daniel do wrong?

Tim: Yeah, what did Daniel do wrong? He's a Torah abiding worshiper of Yahweh and his life gets ruined because of the rise and fall of kingdoms in Babylon. And so he's forced to walk this line of allegiance to the God of Israel even though against his will, it seems, he's constructed into the Babylonian government.

And he takes a Babylonian name, he wears Babylonian clothes, and he serves in the Babylonian government. But then there are these moments of conflict of values. And he publicly pledges allegiance to the God of Israel and says, "I'll happily suffer the consequences but I won't acknowledge the Babylon as God." He does it with a good attitude. And he says, "You can kill me." That becomes the paradigm of God's people among Babylon and among the nations.

Jon: He wasn't driven by fear.

Tim: He wasn't driven by fear. Yeah, totally. It's right. This is why the Jesus story is such a scandal. Such a scandal. And it doesn't mean rejecting, faking, being proud of what national identity you have. I don't think it means that.

But it does me and my national identity is relativized, it's transcended right by my allegiance to the king of the nation's and my allegiance to the body. That political body which is the body of Jesus.

I mean, this is so this is so scandalous to say, but what it means is, I create this healthy ambiguity in my allegiance to whatever nation I happen to live in. I'll seek its best, but if the things come crashing down because it's become Babylon, well, that's the way the Day of the Lord works. And my kingdom became Babylon. I sure hope I wasn't participating in it.

Jon: And that puts in a very interesting position. Because, let's say you, Tim had the ear of the President, but the President knows you are sitting in this ambiguous position

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where you will seek the best of the country, but you will not if it is an antithesis to the kingdom of God.

So at one moment, you could be in great favor with the president because there's all this alignment, and then the next moment, you could be thrown into a lion's den.

Tim: Yeah, because you're not fully on the team. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Do you think Christians need to embrace that ambiguity or that reality?

Tim: I think many or most do. And then there are the extremes that just say, "Withdraw and go farm in the countryside, and just and let Babylon go to hell in a handbasket." Then there are those who say, "No, you know, this is the best thing."

Jon: "God is at work."

Tim: "God is at work, and this is the best expression of God's will in the world, is this form of government. And so I'm going to..."

Jon: There is a perfect alignment.

Tim: Perfect alignment.

Jon: That's one extreme. The other extreme is—

Tim: Full separatism.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then the messy middle is where almost all the stories in the Bible tend to land which is Daniel, Joseph, Esther, the apostles' relationship to the temple in Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts. And Paul in Rome at the end of the book of Acts, he's under house arrest, doesn't try and escape. He fully submits to the political machinery of the Roman system, even though he knows that he's there unjustly. And then he leverages his prison time to talk to strategic influencers about Jesus. There you go.

Political theology is anything but simple. It's never simple. Anything that simplifies it is just trying to sell you something.

Jon: This is what further complicates it is that then your definition of what is the kingdom supposed to look like, how do you define evil, like what you were saying? Like, now you have to, as the church, come to an agreement on how we're defining evil. And that influences then what you think the kingdom of God is.

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Tim: Yeah, how it ought to take expression through a specific local church.

Jon: And it seems like even within Christian communities, there's a disagreement.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Which is even messier. That's right. It's the greatest threat, the dissolution of the family and of sexual immorality, or is the greatest threat vast racial and economic inequalities. You just have to go back to the teachings of the apostles and the prophets and discern, in the guidance of the Spirit, what expression a particular church is supposed to make in its context.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: So the Day of the Lord.

Jon: That's a lot.

Tim: The Day Lord is solving a problem so that something better can happen afterwards. It's not an end in itself.

Jon: Okay, we did it, The Day of the Lord. This was by far the longest and most in-depth series we've done but we've gotten a lot of good feedback about it. And I hope you enjoyed it.

I'm sure you've got some lingering questions. So in an upcoming episode, we're going to do our best to respond to many of those questions. If you want your question responded to, send it to us in audio form. Try to keep it around 15 seconds, and make sure to use your name and where you're from as well, then send your questions to support@jointhebibleproject.com.

We need your questions by 9 am on Tuesday morning. That's May 23. So I know a lot of people listen to this on Monday morning on a commute, I mean, you just got 24 hours.

In the meantime, if you missed any of the previous episodes, we recommend you go back and listen to them. And if you haven't done so already, our video on The Day of the Lord is out on YouTube, youtube.com/thebibleproject. We summarized this entire thing in five minutes as best as we could.

The Bible Project is a nonprofit crowdfunded studio here in Portland, Oregon. We make videos and resources that are free and we can do it because of the generous support of people like you. You pitch in and make it happen. We believe the Bible as one unified story that leads to Jesus and has profound wisdom for the modern world. So thanks for listening, and being a part of this with us.