

Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts, Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to Hebrew, the Project Zion Podcast series that reduces Old Testament bitterness, through explanation, exploration, and through experiencing the Old Testament text. Our guides through the Old Testament for Hebrew Scriptures are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. And I'm your host, Karin Peter, in today's episode, which might be a little long, because it is our first episode, and there's a lot to get in there, just information wise. But we're going to start at the beginning with the creation stories in Genesis 1-3. So let's get started. Tony and Charmaine, how should we begin?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:13

Well, I think one of the things that we're going to want to do is to talk first about what is scripture, so that we have that we that the listener, watcher, whoever you are, that you'll know where we're coming from, when we are talking about scripture, of course, the Hebrew Scriptures are foundational for Christianity and Judaism. But well, how will we use it, and that's where we want to start.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:40

So one of our standard ways of describing scripture is that scripture is a collection of writings that came together over time. And these writings reflect people's experiences of God of their own time and place. And these, these experiences become part of various forms of writing, then, over this long period of time. These writings are given a certain kind of authority by a community of people, as they start to go back to these writings to say, this helps us remember who we are, and what we're about. We don't see scripture as Instagram posts from God or anything like that, right? Scripture is human writings. Writing is a human activity. And so that means that scripture, even though we give it a certain kind of pride of place in church life because of its because of long experience of meeting God, there still is human writing. And thus it reflects the culture of the time, the place, the language, and the prejudices of the people who wrote it. That's really important to know because that then requires us to do certain high level of responsible interpretation, because some of the texts we'll be looking at in this podcast series, will all of them are really ancient, some of them will reflect worldviews that are extremely foreign to us. And thus, we want to be able to understand those texts on their terms, but also recognizing that, that these these texts may or may not apply to us easily or at all. So we want to want to make sure we do that. Charmaine did you have anything to add?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:18

I think just that the writers of these texts, couldn't write from anywhere else, but where they are. And that means that their culture, their language, their inherited understandings of God, and how the world works, is what they have, and to not be harsh towards them, because they don't think like us, but to recognize that they will use what they have to communicate with, they're trying to communicate, and that will be part of what we want to look at is to say, what, what are they shaped by? What have they

had to struggle with where's, where's the writings coming from, as far as their circumstances or their despair, or their longing for God, or their fear that God has left them, that's going to be really important to let them be where they are. And for us to understand that as much as we can.

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:14

And so to, to do that we also have to kind of face a certain amount of self conceit on our part as postmodern people. When we when we say we want to understand these ancient texts, on the basis of the author's culture and background and their limitations, we have to also acknowledge that we as postmodern individuals reading these texts have limitations of our own that we can't even see, if we think the Old Testament is a violent book. We don't have to look very far in our own contemporary, for example, American culture to see we live in a violent culture. We want to be careful not to assume that somehow we as readers of the Hebrew Bible have in the 21st century have arrived, that they're just a bunch of ancients who have nothing really to say to us, we have a lot more in common with them than we think we do.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:01

So then the other piece that we would want to make sure that we looked at is what is the Old Testament. And sometimes we, we think of it as this whole collection of laws and all this judging language. And it's really much more subtle than that. And so we're going to be taking a look at the different parts of the Hebrew Bible, the the first part, the Torah, the first five books that are kind of the background story to why is this people a people in the first place? Why do they have a particular relationship with God? So we'll be doing a couple of we'll be doing four sessions on the the Torah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:48

You've mentioned, we we divide these sessions into three parts, explain, explore, and then experience. And so right now we're in the explained section, this is where we use the best current scholarly information, and background. Scholars have been studying these texts carefully for 200 years using modern methods to do that. And so we want to reflect the very best modern scholarship as we approach these texts. And I think my experience has been that the more we open ourselves to the insights of modern scholarship, the more humanizing and wonderful these texts become, right? So learning learning to see this literature, read it on its ancient terms really helps us make sense of it. And it helps kind of defang it from, from the ways that it can sometimes, you know, seemingly strike at us. So it's very important to do that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:39

And, and actually, we're going to encourage you that if you want to have an a resource, at the end of all of this, that a book that you can utilize is, Introduction to the Bible, Clyde Fant, that just gives you a lot of that really good historical background, and will be, I think, very helpful. It gives a little bit about each of the books in the Old Testament, and actually the New Testament as well, and gives you the historical context, without overwhelming you with too many details. So a good companion, if you want to have that while we as we go through this series.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:18

So Karin, will start off now and just do a few basic things to get us into our our topic for today want to deal First of all, what is the Old Testament and why do a series on the Old Testament, and then we'll talk about the version of the Bible that we would like to use in this. And then we'll go right into Genesis 1-3 and look at those creation stories. That's that's where we're starting, as you said "In the beginning", and by the way, that the first book of the Bible, which we commonly call Genesis, in Hebrew, it's titled baray sheath, which means in the beginning, so

Karin Peter 07:51

Perfect!

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:52

Yeah, it was common in in near Eastern antiquity for books to be titled simply by the first words of the book. So fortunately, we don't do that because "It was a dark and stormy night", there's a lot of a lot of books that start that way, so we really couldn't get away with that, but they could do it in the ancient world. So what's the Old Testament? First of all, I'll say, when I use the term Old Testament, I'm using Christian language. I'm using Christian language for a collection of books that Christians have borrowed from another world religion. Right? Actually, the Old Testament is the Jewish Bible, the Jewish scriptures. Scholars sometimes like to refer to it as the Hebrew Bible. It's, it's helpful, to some extent, because most of it was written in ancient Hebrew. There are a few places here and there that are written in a related language called Aramaic. So Hebrew Bible's not 100% accurate, but it's also a way of not putting any kind of value judgment on it old or a precursor, or something we can leave behind, just simply as a linguistic way to refer to it. In Jewish tradition, it's referred to as the Tanakh. And the reason it's called Tanakh, is because those, those three consonants in that word T and K, are actually abbreviations for the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. The law- Torah, the prophets- Levi, and the writings- Ketuvim. So by saying Tanakh, Jewish users of this literature have a nice shorthand way to identify its three divisions. We could say that the Hebrew Bible is a collection of 24 writings, in mostly in Hebrew, that Christians subsequently took took into the early Christian religion, and use the scripture but Judaism still uses these as its Bible. The extent of the Hebrew Bible was a matter of debate in the ancient world. It wasn't until around the year 100 of our era, that Jewish communities finally had limited the number of books that would be in that third category, the Ketuvim, the writings But Jews had been using other books, especially Greek speaking Jews have been using other books in that category for a couple 100 years. Those those other books that Jewish communities had been using, but that were finally not part of the Hebrew Bible continued to exist. And the early Christian communities that were Greek speaking took them over and use them as part of their Old Testaments. Protestants refer to those as the Apocrypha. And Roman Catholics refer them as the deuterocanonical writings. So those writings come out of Judaism, but did not finally make it into the Hebrew canon. So when we, when we say Hebrew Bible, we're actually referring to law, prophets and writings. As those texts were finally canonized by, by the Jewish tradition. The next thing we want to deal with is why would we want to use the New Revised Standard Version as a translation? And there's lots of reasons we could say, but generally speaking, the NRSV is a contemporary English translation that's based on the best available manuscripts. It's created by an ecumenical and even an interfaith team. So it doesn't represent a particular denominational view. It's highly accurate. There's no perfect Bible. It's not it's not perfect, but it's a highly accurate translation. And one of the things that it's really

important that it does, is that when the original text has an inclusive intent, like when it's referring when it is intending to refer to men and women, the nrsv translators will express that intent in English translation rather than always using male language, which which has been way too common in English translations of the Bible years. So it's a really fine translation fairly easy to read. It doesn't overlay a particular religious view on the text like some like for example, the New International Version does. And so we we use it for all of our classwork and find it a very rich and helpful translation. So let's now just jump into the book of Genesis. That's where we're going today. Genesis 1-3, of our one of our primary ways of approaching a biblical book is to start off by asking kind of the who, what, where, when, and why questions about it. So that gives us background information. And that information is really important for us to work work from, as we then try to work towards appropriation and application of the text. So what? We're reading the book of Genesis, what is this? So Genesis is the first book in a five part collection, that in Jewish tradition is called Torah. The word Torah in Hebrew is an often translated "law". But it's not a very helpful translation, because only part of this collection is law. Actually, a better a better translation is instruction. So the first the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were intended to be instruction, in where where did we, for we Jewish people, where did we come from? How do we get started? How do we first encounter this God? How did how did this covenant business get going? So it's the the Torah as a whole is the Jewish story of origins, these five books of the Torah were composed by many authors over a very long period of time. Traditionally, in both Judaism and Christianity, Moses was claimed to be the author of the Torah. It's not It's not even imaginable anymore. What we see in the Torah is layers upon layers of tradition, different different writing styles, different descriptions of the same apparent event, and also a narration of Moses his own death, which one would would find hard to do as dead, I should think,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:35

but also the statements in Deuteronomy, where it talks about how Moses was the most holy man,

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:39

Humble man! Moses, yes, that's in Numbers. Moses, Moses was the like the humblest man, the meekest man in the whole face of the Earth.

Karin Peter 13:47

Did he tweet that? I'm wondering if he tweeted that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:52

You just can't get away with that as an author. In actuality, Moses is such a towering figure in ancient Israelite thought, and then subsequently in Jewish thought, that his, his name and persona were placed over these, these five books of origins. But scholars for for now a couple 100 years have really not been able to legitimate the idea that it comes from a single author. So we have this collection of literature and within this collection of literature, there's genres of many types. So here's something we need to know when we read Genesis one, two and three. We have not one story of creation, we have to, we have two stories of creation with very different images and language, very different conceptions of God very different conceptions of what human beings are, and that these two stories are different because they come from different sources. In the 19th century, German scholars were the first ones who came up with what they call the documentary hypothesis. Holding that they were able to say, look,

we can we can trace out four distinct strands of tradition in the Torah. J, the Yahwist tradition, the Elohist tradition, E, D the Deuteronomistic tradition, and P, the Priestly tradition. This, this view has been nuanced a lot in current scholarship, but it generally still holds, holds sway, that what we have in the in the Torah is, is a collection of multiple traditions, which is why Genesis one, that particular creation story, why it has animals before human beings, and then why Genesis two and three have a human being and then animals and then another human being being created. We'll talk about that a little later. That will be one

Karin Peter 15:42

Yes! I was interested in mortified.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:45

We will, that's a difficult, difficult test. So yeah. So then what we have in Genesis 1-3, is a pair of creation stories. You know what, there's more, there's more creation stories and more creation mythology in the Hebrew Bible than just in Genesis one, two, and three. But those are the stories that everybody knows they're the ones that that kind of head off the Hebrew Bible. And those are the stories that have commonly been misread and misused, often, often to the detriment of women. And so it's really important for us to be able to make sense of those stories on on their ancient terms, which I think will be helpful. Those two stories are written in different styles. The first, the first story of origins is actually poetry, Genesis 1:1 to chapter two, verse 4a. That's that's that that was that was the, that's the P creation story. And so it's a it's a story in the form of, it's a story in the form of poetry, it's a hymn. And so right away when you're reading poetry, you should know as a reader, this is not a picture taken on my camera on my iPhone of events as they really are. It's poetry, for goodness sakes, right? This this particular story of origins, is very ordered and symmetrical. In the beginning, there was this, there was evening then there was morning, the first day, and then there was evening and morning the second day. And one would only want to be very, very careful about pressing into big details. That is not its point. We'll say a little bit more about its point here shortly. The second story is more of a narrative. And this is the story that's commonly referred to as the Adam and Eve story. But I want to say something about those words Adam and Eve in a little bit, that might help us kind of rethink what the story is about. So this this story, starting at Genesis two, four, B, and going to the end of chapter three, this story is another story of origins. And it's in the form of what we call an etiology. Etiology is the scholarly term for a particular little story that accounts for how things came to be the way they are. And actually, the second creation story is a collection of etiologies. And so it explains such things as, why is there this draw that tension between the sexes? Where did pain and childbirth come from? Why is farming so hard? Why is it that adults seem to have lost childhood innocence? Why are we so afraid of snakes? Me, I'm totally afraid of snakes. The story, the story is using the language and cultural apparatus of the time to say this, this is why things as we experienced them, experienced them are the way they are. That's what etiology does. And the Hebrew Bible's got lots of etiology type stories.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:34

And actually, I'll toss in here, one of the ways of thinking about etiologies is kind of related to legends quite often. And so, if you think of First Nation legends about, you know, why are their seasons or why is this animal an enemy to this animal? And etiology is very much like that it takes what is as presently, at the time of the writer as standard. And then in this case, then is how did this happen? So but like the Tonys, things Tony mentioned, like, you know, why, why is this? Why is childbirth so dangerous for women? And so here's the here's a way to tidy up all the uncomfortableness of these realities. So, so it's like, it all fits into this bigger picture. So the etiology is something that we'll see especially in that second creation story. Yeah, this, this etiology has some problematic texts in it, which we need to acknowledge and look at. I want to say, though, that the creation story in Genesis one is more recent than the creation story in Genesis two and three, that is, that etiology, Genesis two and three, it scholars typically dated to around the the 11th or 10th century BCE. It's fairly old. But most scholars now think that that's true. Worry was the was the beginning story for a narrative that came together in order to help Israel understand why it had a monarchy. And then the monarchy, ancient Israel did not happen until around the year, roughly around the year 1000 BCE. So this, you know, all all great empires had had stories of origins that explained why they were so great. And this is, this is the little kind of Hebrew story about why we with our King David and our King Solomon, and all that, why we are so great, this is where we came from. So that's when that story came about. The first of the first creation story, not chronologically, but you know, in the text, Genesis one, that story scholars connect to the Babylonian exile centuries later, the year would be 587 to 538 BCE, this is after that whole monarchy thing has declined and collapsed. And what's left of what's left of Judah is taken captive to Babylon. In Babylon, the main thing they're afraid of is losing their identity, their their, their Israelite in God and identity. And that creation story is actually a critique of the more ancient and very widespread Babylonian creation story.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:15

And not just a critique, but here they are, they've been taken out of their homeland and, and from their temple and from the places they worship in and how they thought the world was supposed to be. And they don't know if they'll be going back. And so they have to have a way to help their kids counter, the Babylonian religions and the Babylonian creation myth. And so the second one, which is actually the first one in Genesis, the story of God, creating humanity at the same time, as male and female, that comes in from the Babylonian era. 587 to 538. And, and its purpose is to say, Wait, wait, wait, the story that the Babylonians are telling, that's not how we see God, this is that's not our God. This is what our God is like, this is how this is how it happened.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:17

The Babylonian story that enema Elisha is 1000 years older than any of the stuff we're reading today in the Hebrew Bible, right? So that that creation story, though accounts for creation, it's a sort of a battle among the gods. And, and so that that creation story is polytheistic. It sees violence as embedded in the very substance of things. And what's interesting when you read Genesis one over against the Babylonian story is that you can tell the authors of the Genesis great new the Babylonian story, but they're also saying, "No, no, no, no, there's one God. Creation is an act of the spoken word, not an act of violence." And it very carefully does not name things like heavenly bodies, is a great light to rule by day and a lesser light, to rule by night. Because in Ancient Near Eastern religions, when you gave

those things a name, you deified them, and so that, so that the authors of the Genesis ones were being very careful to say, we worship one God, our God is not a God of violence. This is who we are as God's people, we got to remember who we are in this time of exile.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:25

And another one another reason for this story was to affirm that the creation is good. The Babylonian myth has the world is, the world is based on is the people live on what was a dragon that was destroyed in a conflict. And so it's a dead body. That is the world and evil it not necessarily evil, but, but negative. And so that's one of the things that the judeans are trying to say about their gods is, this is an intentional act on the part of our God and God saw this creation and us as good. So that's a, it's a big thing to, to want to make sure that you're the next generation and their connection to God and their identity, that those are important to it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:20

Now, one more thing about than about the second story, Genesis two to three,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:25

Which we haven't read to them yet, so we'll have to tell them what it is.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:28

Yeah, we'll have to pull the stories out here in a few minutes, but that that story. All right, Adam and Eve, right? Well, okay. The name Adam is actually more like a title. And it's meant to be a wordplay connected to the Hebrew word for Earth. The Hebrew word for earth or dirt is Adamah. So Adam, in the words of the great feminist biblical scholar, Phyllis Trible, Adam really should be translated, earth creature. So the earth creature was made from the dirt of the earth. And so the very name of the game is meant to show this intimate connection with earth. And often that story has been read to indicate that the the woman that ishah that was taken from from his side, was somehow a less than when in fact, if you read the story carefully, as feminist scholars have shown us over and over again, the fact that not nothing else is the man's equal except the ishah is actually a story about equality, not inequality, it's just that we have constantly read it with the language, the lenses of patriarchal culture, and all kinds of assumptions. So, Eve, the name Eve, is connected to the Hebrew word for living or to live. And so actually, this is a story, we like say that this is a story about dirt boy, and life woman. That's what this is about that. So you can already tell that there's a sort of a mythological nature to the story. But I think that's really important to know. The story is about connections, and equality long before it's about anything else. That's how it would have been read by its first, its first readers. So then, then, finally, why is Genesis? Why should we not see Genesis history or science? Well, I have simple answers, because it's not.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:24

They didn't pretend that it was.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:25

You know, you can find history in the Hebrew Bible, but that's usually marked. For example, you can find in Samuel and Kings, where you can tell the authors are using records and so on. Here, what you

have is sagas and legends being pulled together for a larger purpose of saying, hey, we've got our story of origins to like everybody else. This is, we know where we come from. This is where we come from. And poetry is not history. And etiology is not history. And so by paying attention to the literary forms, we know that, that we're not in the realm of history and science. And we shouldn't try to press these texts to give us science. Anybody who wants to use Genesis to teach modern biology should in mind, you should lose their teaching position, it's just simply not tenable to use this, for teaching anything like modern biology. We don't we don't live in the, you know, 10th century BCE, right, we live in the 21st century. And so we need to use our language and concepts to understand the world. But these texts then can give us some other things to work with in terms of our spiritual life, in terms of our relationship with God. So next, I guess we can go to explore.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:30

Explore, and what we need to do first, though, is to give some sense of what these scriptures are that you've been talking about.

Karin Peter 27:37

Yes. Yeah, that would be helpful! Let's look them.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:40

That would be helpful. And we're not going to be able to look at all three chapters, but we can get a little glimpse. And this is a timeline that you may that you may see more of, in the future. So the two, the two storylines. The first that we were talking about in Genesis one, is the story that Tony was talking about earlier, it talks about the day and the first creation, and the second day, morning and night and has quite a pattern and a rhythm going and then in 25-27, "God made the wild animals of the earth, and every, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the earth", and you can kind of get this rhythm, right, of how the author is, is, is developing this. "And God saw that it was good." Remember that part about how important it is for them to say that this is an intentional thing that God is creating and in the natural world, and people are good." Then God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image in the image of God, He created them, male and female, he created them." So here twice in this creation story, we get this image of humanity. There's not a division here that have male and female as far as order of creation, or order of importance of in any way. Humankind is created, male and female. So that's one side of it on the human side of it. But the other piece that's really important here is the gods side of this, and that God is, within God is both the male and female. It says in the image of God God created them male and female, so that both maleness and femaleness are in the image of God. And, and that's something that I think kind of gets lost sometimes. But this is the first of the, the creation stories part of it. And then we'll go on to segments of the second creation story in Genesis 2:20-25. And it's important to remember, to know that the first story creation story in Genesis is quite different from the second in lots of things, including including the order in which things happen. So here's the second story. So there's, the the man is created first. Man gives names to all the animals and the birds. That's where we're coming in on the story. For the man that was found, was not found a partner, suitable partner, so the Lord caused, Lord God caused a deep sleep, to fall upon the man and he slept. Then he took one of his

ribs and closed up, it's placed with flesh, and the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman, and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This, at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called woman, for out of man, this one was taken. And then it goes on there for man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and we're not ashamed. I didn't have to throw that last part in. But I just think it's really handy to have because it this is another one of those places where the Old Testament might surprise us about its views on the body, and on sex and things like that, that it may or may not actually say the things that we think it says, so a little nakedness every now and then it shows up a lot. Actually, in the Old Testament, there weren't any periods. So those are the two parts. This is one part of each of the creation stories that is very different. And it is the whole part about male and female are men and women, and what is their relationship to God? And a little bit locked in that second one? What is their relationship to each other in this in this last one, if I were, were to have gone on to the third chapter, that's the one that has all of the reasons why farming is so hard and why women have pain in childbirth, and why the snake goes on the ground. All of those kinds of things, all those those ideologies we were talking about, and why women's desire is for men and men will be over women. That's all part of this second creation story as well. But I figured this part would give us a good sense of kind of what the content of these two different stories is. Good. So you can, I mean, you can see the differences. And you can in this particular one, you can see its characters and etiology, how many things it's trying to explain. It's trying to explain ancient people's understanding of sex and marriage, and the kind of patriarchy and hierarchy that was already a part of their system. Right. So this particular text, I think, raises a lot of questions for women who are looking at this, that man gets created man gets to name all the animals. You and I talked about this earlier, which totally pleased me, because you got all the fun. And then oh, is kind of Adam looks around, and there's no suitable partner. So God makes them one and Adams like, Okay, fine. I'll name her to, it's just this really kind of, you can look at it again, through our modern context as women and go, this is not okay. I'm liking Genesis one way better. So what, you know, what do we do with that? Yeah. And as Tony said, you know, a feminist reading of this helps us to, to get at some of the subtleties here. Go ahead.

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:22

And yeah, sure. Well, I mean, that like so for for example, that phrase this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. This is about this is about equality and parity. It's not about one or the other. But the thing is, we're stuck. When when these creation texts come up in our culture, we have literally 2000 years of digital recordings playing in our heads about what they really mean, when in fact, much of much of that interpretation has not been all that careful in terms of acknowledging its own patriarchy. So if you come to this text with patriarchal lenses, you'll find patriarchy in it. But if you start to push back on this text and say what's it really trying to get at, you'll find all kinds of little signs within the text that, that it's more it's more nuanced and subtle than it's ever been treated by, by many Christian users of the text. So I think that's just important. Also, this, this text shouldn't be read as somehow trumping Genesis one, right? Somehow, this one is the real story, Genesis one, that's, that's a nice beginning, these are two very different accounts, I shouldn't use the word account, they're not accounts, they're not history. These are two different very different ways of talking about the origins of humankind. And in some respects, they they don't, they don't gel well, yet, they're both in the text, we have to, we have to try and account for them both. But we're not obligated to sort of take this one over the other one, or let this one tell us what the other one means. They're, they're there as two different views. And the Hebrew

Bible is really good about not kind of harmonizing stuff, but like putting two or three different views of things right side by side and saying, you guys figure it out, right? Your readers

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:01

You take the best out of the ones you like, you know, I think that that's, that's something that is actually would be very healthy for lots of Christians to, to embrace, that there's not just one way to read it, one meaning for it. And the Old Testament writers didn't want to lose anything. So they, they companion these different versions with each other. Because these were two different ways in which this was told, and they didn't want to lose any of it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:36

So so I think Karin, you have to just acknowledge that this text has been used in lots of bad ways to to bring to harm women. And we don't have to use it that way. That's been a bad habit, for centuries and centuries. And the only way to get rid of a bad habit is to name it and start to create a different habit. And so I would highly recommend that that people read some of the feminist interpretations of Genesis and and Phyllis Tribbles a classic one, but there's others, just to get a sense for, for how the subtleties of language here often escape us in English translation. I think that's really important.

Karin Peter 37:14

It behooves us as readers and listeners, as we go through this series to remember that it's not just Sunday school classes that have influenced how we think about this is our culture of movies and books that we've read and cartoons we have watched as we were growing up, that have reinforced some of the misinterpretations.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:34

Yeah, it's all around us, and in us, sometimes in places that we didn't expect. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:43

So let's have a look at these two different texts.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:47

And so that was part of the the exploring and saying, Okay, so what's in these texts? And what are some of these uncomfortable questions that it raises for us, which we shouldn't shy away from, but be able to say, Hey, this is, this is disturbing, parts of this, don't fit our best instincts about who God is, who God wants us to be with each other. And that's good, that's good to always have those questions out there, because it helps to be our corrective. And not to fall into this kind of passive, going back to literalistic reading of scripture as if it were describing a verbatim of something that happened or an actual picture. These are legends that comes so much later, to try and give some understanding of where was God in the beginning of all these things? There was, there was nobody there taking notes. So it's these people in difficult times, like the battle in the Judeans, and Babylon, saying, How can we best tell this story to ourselves and to our children, they'll understand who this God is, and who we are, to each other, to creation and to God.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:11

This, this story to Genesis to this originates in, in the Iron Age. And I think we just have to name that and say, You know what, I don't know what they did for headaches in the Iron Age, but I'm not going to use whatever they use for headaches in the postmodern age, right? So it might be interesting to know what they did for headaches. But frankly, I'm going to take an exception in the postmodern age when I have headache. So the same way, how did they view the relationship between sexes? How do they view gender out, they can't help what they were in the Iron Age, right? And we can we can try to sympathetically understand them, but they're not giving us a prescription and a prescriptive use of this text for gender roles or who should be doing what is a total abuse of the text and abuse of people with the text and we just have to name it like that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:59

So one of the other pieces, that is a question that came up for, for me, for us as we were going through this text and trying to hear it from other people's perspective, is in this passage, even though I do like this passage like Karin, more than the other because it isn't, it can't be abused quite as much. But here will people would say, Well, yes, it says, you know, image of God, male and female. But it says, many, many times here. So does that mean that God is male? And so, you know, you can imagine the people who would bring this up and why they would bring that up, but it's okay, you know, it's a, it's an honest question. And this is another one of those places where we need to remember, this was not written first in English, that the terms used for God, in the Hebrew Scriptures have several different origins. And that, and so their understand, the pronouns that were used then and the pronouns that have been applied to God, in English translations since then, have typically been key. And I think we just need to recognize that that's the convention of the language about God is that it's an assumed pronoun of he, even though this is very clear that God is not female, or male, that God is, both and more and else, something else than that. And so one of the things that we need to do when we're reading scripture of any kind, but I think, especially with Hebrew Scriptures, is to identify what is conventional use, like, in that time, or in the time of the translators, and it's conventional use here would be to refer to God as He. And to so distinguish between what is conventional and wasn't what is intentional in a passage, it's very intentional in this passage that God is not male, or female, and both and more. And so I think this, this will be a thing that would be helpful as we look through what what languages is cuz is conventional, is just the only pronouns they have to use. And what is intentional, what is the author trying to say here? That goes beyond what is conventional? And so I think, then, that may help that question. Go ahead, Karin.

Karin Peter 42:51

So I think it might be helpful for the listener to hear that in our context, we look to pronouns to define content. And what you're saying is that no, that what's defining the content, or the content of the passage is not the pronouns, those are secondary, those are almost irrelevant in this, but rather, the idea that I will create human time in our likeness. That's where we need to put our focus rather than being diverted by these male pronouns.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:26

Thank you. Yes, yes, absolutely. It's way better than, yes. And that that's, yes, that helps us to get at what, what the author is trying to point to, rather than this question of gender, for the, the original

authors and editors of the Old Testament, New God by many names, and some of them were masculine, some were neuter hadn't hadn't either. Some were feminine, some were non non human at all. So so that we have to think about when we're seeing the pronouns that are being used, that

Karin Peter 44:08

I'll try to remember that when my hackles my feminist hackles, you can all, just remind me throughout the year, those are pronouns. Let them go, have some grace.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:18

Right, and, and I think, again, you know, it's maybe our preoccupation in our time, far more than it would have been for the authors in that time. But the other reason is that these scriptures, these two passages, in particular, in Genesis have been used so badly against women, that they have become this place where they become a battleground about who is more, who is closer to God, who is is more human, in effect, and so, you know, that's why this these become problems is because of how people have used them.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:59

I think there's something else about this text that might be helpful just to pick up on is this the, the "our" language in it?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:09

That was another issue.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:10

And so this is clearly a monotheistic text. And you know that from the context it's it was created in, which is a battle in exile. So what is the business about our likeness? Most most critical scholarship would say what's being referenced, there's the divine court, right? That is, you know, there's the one God and there's these attendance in the court. And so the our language here has to do with relationship and relationality. That is that

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:36

It's not about multiple Gods,

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:37

Right. It's not about multiple Gods and it's, it's not ultimately about gender, here. It's about relationality, as the human beings were created to reflect the relationality, of, of the Divine court is sweet, we are fully human in relationship with each other, not as isolated individuals. And the image has little to do with maleness or female. So it has to do with the fact that we relate to each other. And that's a way, a way to move beyond even a gendered reading of this text, I think is just to recognize that the our language is, is a subtle hint that there's way more going on here than male, female. There's lots of lots of different space in this text, I think that's worth the space worth taking up and living in.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:23

So we want to move on to the experience part. Unless there's more questions. Karen, anything else?

Karin Peter 46:28

I'll have tons of questions here, and some might reflect back to this as we continue, but yeah, let's go on to the experience.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:38

Okay. So yeah, there's lots of good questions. And some of them will be repeats, as we deal with some of the same kinds of patterns as we go through the Old Testament. But let's take our experience today as a way of getting a little bit deeper into the Bible, as a as a Bible study. And so first, I just want to tell you how I'm approaching Bible study, because we're actually acutely aware that many people have been controlled or abused by the irresponsible use of Scripture. And that for many, there's a weariness about making room for scripture in your relationship with God. And so first, we want to acknowledge that and for for some people coming out of an abusive religious setting, they actually have to take the scriptures and put them on the shelf for a while, and not, because they're too vulnerable, that they have been used in such negative ways. But they're, it's, it's too difficult to want to delve into them. Because there's so many associations with them. So and, and for some people, the scriptures, take them back into old ways of thinking that they've been able to free themselves from, and they don't want to be drawn back into that, or they, or there's a sense of rejection or judgment that has come. And so we recognize all of that. So, in this kind of Bible study, we're trying to approach the scriptures by humanizing the writers. And we've already been doing that. Who were they what was the situation they were in? Why are they writing this in the first place? Who were their hearers? What was the situation of their hearers. And because we want to, to show scripture as simply an offering of their experience with God, to their hears in their time. And then what we're hoping is that the hearers, in this time, will have the freedom to decide whether or not there's anything in these passages that's useful to them to us in this time. And it doesn't have to be it doesn't have to have meaning for you. It doesn't have to be profound for you. But we'll offer it as the first author's offered it as simply part of their experience with God. This is something fits and helps great. If not, that's okay, too. So we're going to read the Scripture aloud. And you've already we've already read the two passages that we're going to be looking at today. And then the next step we will typically do is to help you become aware of the storyline. And again, we've been we've done that already a bit too, you know, the first one is the Judeans in Babylonian exile away from everything they knew, trying to pass on, who is this God? And who are we in relation to this God and how is it different than the Babylonian's God? So we want to do that to put out the storyline and but there's also this piece because we know that some of these passages have been harmfully used and have learned people, were aware that in some of these passages, there will be land mines. You know, it's like, you know, a field with landmines in it, you pick your way through it, and hope you don't hear that click, that means, you know, something is gonna blow up. So just for the hearer, or the, the reader of these texts, if you find that there are too many landmines, here are too many triggers, then it's not safe to go into this. You know what you need. And so don't, don't, don't further harm yourself. But one of the things we want to do is we want to be able to give you a look at the whole field. And to get a better sense of what is the bigger landscape of this scripture. And by doing that, maybe it will help you to know whether it's safe to, to adventure to explore into scripture again. And so this means acknowledging the fears, anger, and defensiveness that that might surface as you are going through some of these and, and Karin is a great person to help us verbalize some of those, what some of those might be. So I'm so thankful for that. So we might ask ourselves, what images of God or words

or judgment language in this passage might trip me up or destroy some of the freedom that I've gained in, in my struggle to have a new kind of relationship with God? And, and we want you to care for yourself there, but we also want to try and give you a bigger picture if this is a safe place for you to explore. So we will try to take into consideration as many of the realities of the author in the text as we can, what is their context and worldview? And we just did quite a bit of that on this passage. So I think you'll understand what I mean there and then we'll see if some of the things they wrote may connect with us, as readers today. And again, Maybe yes, maybe no. And it's been fun, though, to take a look at these passages and say, how can they help us today? What questions are in them, that might take us to some new places? So I've had fun doing that. And also, we'll be looking for ways that we can defuse some of the potential landmines. And the questions that we explore together will be part of that. And if you find that, you know, there's a scripture that we're dealing with, and it just is not a safe place for you to go, then I would just encourage you to take some time, and remind yourself of a scripture passage that reminds you of a loving God who is present with you, and reminds you of who you are in the sight of that loving God. And after all, this is really about trying to help people connect to God. So we've already talked about what are these two stories? What, what are they about? Little bit about their background? So now I'm just going to give us some questions that will help us look a little bit things we can ask ourselves about these texts, and we're calling it looking with the text. Though these are ancient ways of understanding origins, and God's connection to humanity, in the first text, that's the one where humanity is created male and female in the image of God. How might the affirmation that femaleness and maleness are equally representative of God's image affect how I see myself? Affect how I see others? You can answer that for yourself if you want to, but it's a place to linger. How might the affirmation that femaleness and maleness are equally representative of God's image affect how I see myself or others? Another question to consider and this one comes out of conversation with a trans friend who shared how the first creation story that the text there in the image of God who created the male and female reveals that God is not confined to a gender. So wherever we find ourselves on the gender spectrum, we can be assured that we too are certainly made in God's image. And, and just the way that she said that was so amazing. So how could that perspective, so what would it be like really to relate to like, talk or pray or listen for this kind of a god? Who is not male? Who is not female? But much more? How could? And so what would that be? Like? Would it change how we think about interacting with God, to think of God, not as male or female, but much more? And another question comes out of that? How could this concept challenge the gender binary tendencies of many of our societies? Think it's an amazing place to go. And who do you know, that would be encouraged by this perspective? Who do you know, that may be struggling with the idea of God being a gender, just male or just female? And who might be encouraged by what this text is saying? So those are the, looking with, or in the text, and we're saying, what are the questions this text can ask us, so that we start looking at the world in some new ways. And then the last part of the Bible study is the walking with. So both of these creation stories are ways of trying to explain among other things, our relationships to each other, to God and to creation. And both of them have been used in negative or in positive ways to value each other or to subjugate or to abuse. I once was walking from our home here over to work about seven blocks away. And about a block and a half away from the Temple. I was going by a home where the door was open, and a couple inside were arguing with each other. And you know, how you kind of tried to just ignore those kinds of things? Well, I could hear the man saying to the woman, well, I'm a man. And because of what Eve did in the garden, you have to trust me, you can't be trusted, you have to do what I say because I am the man. And you just have no idea how difficult it was for me to keep

walking, I wanted to go up to that door. "But wait! That's not all the scripture says!" So there's all of these ways in which these stories have been used or misused. But you know, what we get to choose how we will think about scripture stories, what we will take from them, and whether we will use them for good or for harm. And I think that's really an important thing to do. So if there was anything in these, the walking with part, which is the last part is how do we take this with us. So if anything in these passages is spoken to you in a way that helps you connect with a God who is loving and present. Take a few minutes right now to write down a few words, draw a picture, or whatever, we'll remind you of it. And then in the next few days, put it into some place where you'll see it. And then whenever you see it, enjoy thinking about a God who knows you and accepts you, and in whose image you are made.

Karin Peter 59:15

Thank you for that experience, Charmaine. That'll be a wonderful experience as people participate in this throughout the month before we meet again for our next episode of He'Brew. Any last thoughts or last comments before we come to a close?

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:35

Stop textual abuse!

Karin Peter 59:39

That's our He'Brew bumper sticker soon to be available at Project Zion Podcast. (laughter)

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:45

That's the abuse of people with the texts. And it's the abuse of the texts by not reading them well closely responsibly. And with the help of the best, the best scholarship and the best spirituality we we can have.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:00

So next time we'll be talking about Abraham, Sarah and Hagar.

Karin Peter 1:00:09

This is going to be an interesting conversation. Looking forward.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:14

Lots of disturbing questions, I'm sure.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:17

Like a Biblical threesome, Karin?

Karin Peter 1:00:20

Yes. All right. So thank you for this episode of Hebrew and for tuning in to learn more about the creation stories for Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. I'm here with Tony and Charmaine Jamal Smith. And we're going to leave you with these words from the Iona community worship book from a piece called Litnay. "Glory to you, Almighty God, you spoke and light came out of darkness, order rose from confusion. You breathed into dust of the earth and we were formed in your image. You looked on the

work of your hands and declared that it was all good. And still you speak, breathe, and look for us. We praise you. Glory to you, Holy Spirit. You brooded over chaos, mothering and shaping God's new creation. You inspired prophets and evangelists to discover the right word for the right season. He liberated the early church for a mission, claiming all of life for the Lord of all. And still, you brood over, inspire and liberate us. We praise you." And with that, we'll see you on our next episode of He'Brew. I'm Karin Peter for Project Zion Podcast. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:01:55

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