

He'Brew | Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to He'brew, the Project Zion series that reduces Old Testament bitterness through explanation, exploration, and experiencing the Old Testament text. Our guides through the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. In today's episode, we are looking at the prophet Jeremiah, the Book of Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet. And after slogging my way through the first half of it, I can totally get where that comes from.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:11

Are you weeping yet?

Karin Peter 01:13

I was not weeping. I was mortified at some points.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:16

Yeah.

Karin Peter 01:17

But, um, many of us, our only familiarity maybe, with Jeremiah, are just select verses, kind of, some nice ones that we can, we can pull out. So, I did that. I pulled out one that we tend to go to when we're using Jeremiah because it's easy. And that is the call of Jeremiah that many of us have read quite often. So, it's, it reads like this. And "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak, whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." And then we close the book of Jeremiah. Because after all, that's great stuff.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:11

We're good.

Karin Peter 02:12

So, what else do we actually need to know about Jeremiah? And why do we need to know it?

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:20

Yeah, so, this is a difficult book in lots of ways, and not least of which is that it's kind of a mess to read, right? It's really hard to read straight through.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:33

It's not a straightforward narrative.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:34

Right, though there are three distinct sections of the book. Like other prophetic books, what you have are collections of the prophets' oracles that have been highly edited, and put in different frameworks by, not the prophet himself, but by later editors. And I'll say something more about that in a little bit. So, it's a complicated book. I mean, you don't just sit down and read your way through Jeremiah, as you tried to do, and found yourself depressed and stymied at some point. But this book actually has a lot of resonances, when it's interpreted well, with contemporary, with our contemporary situation. And some of that we'll try to bring out as we proceed today. There's, this prophet, this weeping prophet, is highly relevant to us.

Karin Peter 03:26

Okay, well, I'm looking forward to learning more about it. So, let's begin.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:34

So, I'm going to go ahead and share the timeline. And we've talked about this before, but I, always good to come back to it, is to understand where, in the storyline, is this happening, and because that, in this case, in particular, and the prophets in general, the exile is the pivotal moment that is, defines both where they are, and where they can go. So, what we have is, we have the exile 587 to 538. And Jeremiah is, has been a voice to the kings, previous to the exile, for just the truth about three kings. And the first one, Josiah, he, kind of, valued what Jeremiah had to say and, kind of, listened to him and Josiah was trying to make some reforms within the culture, kind of, right along line of what Jeremiah is bringing to his attention. But the next couple of kings not so thrilled with Jeremiah and particularly Zedekiah, which is the last one that we hear about just before the fall of Judah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:06

Just a, yeah, kind of, like there's, I think, there's like two falls of Judah really. There's, like, one in 598 and then Zedekiah becomes King there. And then he sort of presides over the last 10 years. And so, he's there for the second fall, the real fall of Jerusalem.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:22

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:22

And that doesn't end well for him either. So.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:25

No, no, but he's, kind of, his approach to the impending doom is denial, Zedekiah's is. And so, Jeremiah is just annoying to him. And he tries to get rid of them in several different ways. So, Jeremiah is not a very popular prophet, though there's very few of them that were in their own time. They, they've had much more popularity after their death, then during their lives. So, Jeremiah had difficult things to say. And both the regular things that prophets would draw to people's attention, you know, how are they caring for each other? Where are they willing to recognize God at work, maybe even in other nations? You know, who is it that God is concerned about and that they should be concerned about? So, there's all of those kinds of things, plus more, with Judah during this time, that he's having to speak against, including a fair bit of experimentation, and let's see how many gods we can worship all at the same time, because, you know, we kind of cover all our bases that way. Or it's more fun to worship this one than this one. So, there's a lot of that going on as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:59

So, Karin, a few, when you were reading Jeremiah, if it felt like a downer, it's because...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:04

Very much so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:05

...he, Jeremiah is prophet. Walter Brueggemann, great Old Testament scholar, sees Hebrew prophets as something like poets in residence, right? God's poets in residence. And so, Jeremiah is prophet over the final gasps and collapse of the Davidic monarchy, and Judah, and Jerusalem. He's there as his country is collapsing around him. So, that's why it's a downer. And nobody...

Karin Peter 07:38

Well, and that desolation really comes through when you read through Jeremiah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:42

Yeah, and he knows a way out, but nobody's listening to him.

Karin Peter 07:46

Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:47

So, that's part of the desolation your experiences your read it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:51

Right. And then there's another piece that comes in from time to time, and that is that there are others who are calling themselves prophets, who are saying, oh, don't worry. This isn't gonna last that long. In two years, everything's going to be back to normal, right? How does that sound...

Karin Peter 08:08

COVID's gonna be over by Easter.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:10

Exactly, exactly. So, he's also having to combat these other voices that are saying much more popular things to people that they're, they want to embrace those things. And he's saying, ah, no. And he's trying to prepare them for this time of exile. And, you know, they don't know how long it's going to last. But there are these prophets who are saying, ah, it's only gonna be a couple of years. You're gonna, it's, don't even, you know, don't even lock your doors. It's, that's...

Karin Peter 08:45

You're leaving.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:46

It's gonna be fine. And so, he has to combat that as well. And the unpopularity that comes with saying, no, no, the unmaking and the remaking, the tearing down and the building up is going to take longer than that. So, I think that that's a really other and another element, psychologically, to think about as far as what's shaping Jeremiah's tone, his words, and his insistence about why and what the future may or it may not bring.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:23

And so, before we switch off the timeline here, just really, really important to restate, re-emphasize that that period of exile, that's the pivot point of the Hebrew Bible, that is, it's the period during which much of what we're reading in the Hebrew Bible comes into a written form, right? Before the exile, it's the ancient religions, the religion of ancient Israel and Judah. After the exile, we begin to speak of Judaism as a religion that has begun to form out of that experience and is now focusing on texts, not on oral traditions, places and practices. So, just really, you know, this might be overstatement, but no Babylonian exile, nothing like the Hebrew Bible we have, because it took that, it took that sense of absolute loss and despair to, for exiles to figure out, we better write some of this, we better kind of codify some of this stuff, or we're going to lose everything,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:25

Right. It's like, taking what's most valuable and preserving it in some way, so that it can be passed on to the next generation, so that this understanding of relationship with God can be passed on, can, that part of their identity can be maintained. And so, yeah, there's a great motivation, suddenly, to write these things down. And you'll see on the timeline, you know, this, the exile is that time period from 587 to

538. And then, you know, within 150 years, there's some of these writings that now are canon, are considered scripture for all of Judaism, or all Jews. And so, that's a pretty quick process, from the time of the exile, to now having scripture that is authoritative, validated by a whole people.

Karin Peter 11:25

The official story. So, it makes sense, in a way, when you think about how when your older relatives start to pass on, you begin to recognize that you haven't taken the time to learn the whole story, and so, you start to discover it, so that it's not going to be lost. It's that grief and loss that triggers the need to have the story. And I sense that in this.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:48

And the digging into genealogies and the same, oh, let's record these stories, or write these down, so that we can pass on, you know, where we come from?

Karin Peter 11:58

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:58

Yeah, that's a great analogy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:01

So, that gives us our, kind of, chronological bearings again. Now, Karin, here's some things we know about Jeremiah. This is complicated because of the nature of the book. And I'll say something about that in a minute. But who is Jeremiah? Jeremiah is a Judean prophet, and his ministry spans, kind of, the, from the late seventh century BCE, until sometime in the first quarter of the Babylonian exile. He's functioning as a prophet, around 627 BCE, during the time of King Josiah, and he ends up taken hostage to Egypt.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:40

At the end of his life.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:41

At the end of his life. That's where he ends up dying, in Egypt, not in Babylon. So, um, the Book of Jeremiah is the only access we have to this figure, but the book has gone through significant editing processes. In fact, the thing that you read that, that, his call story at the start, this is not autobiography. This is biography written by the editors, who are, kind of, setting him up as a prophet, like Moses, right, who's, who can't speak well, and who needs a lot of divine help, and so on. And so, Michael Coogan, really great Old Testament scholar says, we need to think about the book, the Book of Jeremiah as something like a hypertext that people kept adding stuff to for a long time. It's really actually hard to know, when was the, when's a date, an approximate date for the final form of Jeremiah, because

apparently, there were two final forms of the book. There's the Hebrew text, which we call the Masoretic text. That's the one that we would be, you know, reading in translation from the NRSV. But then there's the Septuagint, the Greek translation of ancient Hebrew writings, that was made, you know, started, they started making the third, early third century BCE, when there were more and more Jews speaking Greek. And the Septuagint version of Jeremiah is an eighth shorter, and it has things in different order, and it says some things differently. So, that comes from a Hebrew text. So, will the real Hebrew text of Jeremiah please stand up? And the response that is, well, we don't know which it is, but we're going to work with the Masoretic text, which is the standard Hebrew text. The thing is that it's hard to get at the historical figure, Jeremiah, because of the fact that the book is a hypertext. It's been edited and re-edited by people who like certain facets of his theology, and were trying to spin the book, in that...

Karin Peter 14:40

And, ouch. We're starting to get into restoration narrative here, when we do that, because we've done that ourselves in our own tradition, by trying to spin our own story.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:52

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:52

Yup.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:53

Exactly, right. So, and maybe that's because we tend to think of history and, as facts, but what if history is, kind of, always a moving target, right, instead of just a bunch of facts. So, but there are some biographical things about Jeremiah we can fish out of the text that are reliable, and one is that he was from a disaffected priestly family. He's not functioning as a priest. His family traced themselves back 400 years to priests that Solomon basically silenced, if you want to use Community of Christ language. And so...

Karin Peter 15:27

Or apostate, if we want to use Mormon language,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:30

There you go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:30

There's 400 years of family disaffection from the priestly family that is functioning in the temple. So, there's that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:41

And that may account for some of the friction between his family and kings in general.

Karin Peter 15:49

Yeah, 'cuz you really pick that up?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:51

Yes. Not, so, he doesn't think that's that great of an idea, this whole monarchy thing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:57

So, Charmaine has mentioned that Jeremiah's ministry, you know, starts during the time of King Josiah. King Josiah is a religious reformer. He's one of the Judean or Davidic monarchs that gets the most praise. You know, when you're reading 1 and 2 Kings, you say, "And so, this king did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and this king did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh. And this king did even more evil." And when you get, when you get to Josiah, the judgment of the Deuteronomistic editors of 1 and 2 Kings, is that he's like one of the most righteous of the kings. And he starts this religious reform around the year 627 BCE, based on the discovery of what we'll call the rough draft, rough draft of the book of Deuteronomy, right? A written-ish form of Deuteronomy proceeds Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, in terms of writing. And so, this Deuteronomistic theology is a covenant theology connected to traditions about Moses. It's highly conditional. You could only have, you could only worship in one place, not in many places. And you have to do this, this and this. If we don't follow all of the covenant stipulations, we will be expelled from the land. And Josiah is trying to fix everything that's been going wrong in Judah religion for generations, and he's super righteous, and he's following the Deuteronomistic theology, and he dies in battle. And it's like, ah...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:30

Too late.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:31

Jeremiah is, Jeremiah starts off as a proponent of this theology. And yet, it's interesting that the, that Jere-, that Josiah, who's trying to live as righteously as he can by this, by the Torah, doesn't, doesn't prosper.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:47

Isn't protected. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:50

He's killed. And so, that kind of throws a little stumbling block into that Deuteronomistic theology. But that's, he, Jeremiah starts off with that theology, and generally, the book has a Deuteronomistic feel to it. If you do X, you will get Y, and it'll be good. If you do, if you do A and A is evil, typically, idolatry or

failure of justice, just actions, then you will be, then the land will vomit you out, as Deuteronomy says. So, that's this highly conditional theology. And next thing we know about Jeremiah is that he ran afoul of all of the Judean nationalists and monarchists, because he's going around preaching this theology, which is quite different from theirs. Jeremiah is considered unpatriotic. He's considered a traitor, right. And so, he has a couple of stints in prison, too. So, there you go. He's unemployable after that, right? So, basically, Jeremiah is a powerless spectator through two exiles and the destruction of the monarchy, the Temple and the nation. I mean, this is like one's worst case scenario of a job offer, right? You're going to preside over the nation as it, as it simply disappears.

Karin Peter 19:17

Well, yeah. Because when we talk about speaking truth to power, we assume truth wins. We assume justice prevails. And in this particular case, we watch that not happen.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:30

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:30

Right.

Karin Peter 19:31

Jeremiah's lie.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:32

And yet, it's funny, I mean, it's ironic, because his continuing to speak has this long-term effect. So, I don't know if you were going to talk about what Zedekiah does with the first scroll. So, this...

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:52

I wasn't, go ahead if you want to.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:54

So, this is the first of the prophets where they're commanded to write this down, to write this down on a scroll. And so, Baruch, who is his, Jeremiah's secretary, or coworker, or however you want to talk about it, does so. He's, you know, and they present this scroll to Zedekiah, along with the message of reform and the need to be honest before God. And Zedekiah tears it up and burns it. And, let you know, like book burning. It really is book burning.

Karin Peter 20:37

We don't like this story, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:39

Exactly. And so...

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:41

We don't want this book in our public library.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:45

And so again, God tells Jeremiah, to write the scroll. And so, it's like, this insistence on this message being concrete started this whole, meant that this message was even more available to people than it would have been if it had just been given to Zedekiah. So, now, it's been written down again, and is something to remind people about what it is that God is trying to point them towards, rather than them just going about assuming that whatever they do is, must be good, because, you know, they're part of God's chosen people and so on. And they've had this Davidic covenant thing, you know? They're gonna always have the, an heir of David on the throne. And they've had these amazing experiences where it looked like Jerusalem was gonna fall, and then somehow the armies disappeared, and they were good again. And so, they're riding on that idea that we're untouchable. Please, stop bothering us with all this alarm. Oh my gosh.

Karin Peter 22:04

We're number one.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:07

And, honestly...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:07

Make Judah...

Karin Peter 22:10

Great Again?

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:11

That's right. And, honestly the people that Jerem-, Jeremiah speak to, essentially accused him all the time of perpetrating hoaxes, right. This is BS, Jeremiah. We're gonna be fine. And we actually, during, you know, Zedekiah is this young-ish king for 10 years, after the first, the first time the Babylonians come up and take away some people. You would have think, you would have thought that they'd learned some things, but Zedekiah finally says, eh, we're gonna revolt. And Jeremiah is, don't revolt. Don't revolt against the Babylonians. We need to submit to them. If we submit, we'll be able to stay. And Zedekiah's like, hoax, liar. Get out of here. And they revolt.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:58

Fake news?

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:59

Fake. Yeah. Jeremiah, you were giving us fake news. We're gonna do what we want to do. And they did what they wanted to do. And then Nebuchadnezzar comes up a second time, and it's not good the second time. And Zedekiah, the King Zedekiah, for rebelling against the Babylonians, has his children murdered by the Babylonians before his eyes, and then has his eyes put out as punishment. So, that's the last thing he sees, right? So, you don't, Jeremiah knows you don't mess with the Babylonians. And we don't have the moral capacity to stand against them. Not physical, but the moral capacity to stand. We're in a sorry way, Jeremiah is saying, and everybody's like, no, we, we go to the Temple. We worship. We've got the Temple in our midst. We're great. Everything's wonderful.

Karin Peter 23:49

We're blessed. We're a blessed people. God loves us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:53

And Jeremiah says, nope, you're not looking deep enough. You're not looking at the underbelly of what's really happening here. And so, Jeremiah is ignored, ignored, ignored, denounced. In fact, I'm going to shorten up this story a lot here, but when the Babylonians come up the second time and take away a large number of the people, destroy the Temple, put the monarchy essentially to an end, there is a remnant that is allowed to stay behind. Jeremiah is on his way with captives to Babylonia and one of the captains of the guard says, I give you a choice. You can either go to Babylon, and I'll take care of you, or you can stay here in Judah. Jeremiah chooses to stay in Judah. And at the same time, the Babylonians appointed a Judean by the name of Gedaliah to be something like a governor. So, they let some people stay. They wanted Jud-, they allowed some Judeans to govern the land and so on. Gedaliah is a friend of Jeremiah and he's going to do what Jeremiah says, but Gedaliah is assassinated. And then it's like a little civil war, tiny civil war starts. The, a group of Judeans wreaks vengeance on those who assassinated Gedaliah, and they go to Jeremiah and they say, ask God, we have a question for you to ask God. Should we stay? Or should we go the opposite direction and run off to Egypt and be safe there? And 10 days later, Jeremiah comes back and says, here's your answer. Stay. The Lord says, stay, and you'll be safe. And they say, you're lying. We're going to Egypt,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:38

And we're taking you with us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:38

...and you're coming with us. And that's around chapter 42, 43. That's, that's where Jeremiah ends up. He dies in Egypt at some point. So, that, that's, this is a prophet. He's called, you called him the weeping prophet. He had a lot to cry about, actually.

Karin Peter 25:56

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:56

And one of the things that's a little irony, that, it's kind of like, if you've got, been reading the prophets and the constant reminders that God wants you to take care of the alien, orphans, and widows, there's this little irony that you'll pick up as you're reading through Jeremiah, because when all of the aristocrats and the religious leaders and all of that class of people are taking off to Babylon, the new government gives the houses and the land to the poor. And you've got that whole sense of, they didn't have the moral standing to be able to stay. And this, and the invaders brought the kind of equality or justice that they were unwilling to bring. So, I think that's, that's, when you're wanting to see, you know, what is God about here, instead of just going to the, oh, God is punishing them, taking everything away from them, and sending them off somewhere, to look at the other place, the other pieces of what else is happening here to those who are often the forgotten and the unseen. So, any, just a little, one of those little twists in the storyline.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:21

So, that's, we've just kind of worked through explaining the text. I mean, there's obviously tons and tons more to explain here. But that's an introduction to the text of Jeremiah and gets us in the ballpark of trying to understand what's going on there.

Karin Peter 27:35

Okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:36

It's a very long book, too. As you know.

Karin Peter 27:41

I remembered that from my Hebrew Scriptures class in seminary, but I was thoroughly reminded as I opened it again. Yes. Okay. So, let's explore it a bit then.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:53

Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:54

So, let's, I want to go back to these two covenant traditions. I think this is really important for us to understand, and something lots of readers of the Bible don't ever really pick up on and that is that in the book of Jeremiah, what we have, this is a battleground between two different covenant theologies, both of which can claim divine origin. So, one of the main reasons that kings and upper-class people and lots

of townspeople in Jerusalem think Jeremiah is a lowlife liar is they have been steeped in this Davidic or royal covenant theology that goes all the way back to Nathan's announcement to David that God was going to build David a dynasty. And then the promise in that, the promise that Nathan makes to David, or that God makes to him, David through Nathan, is that there will always be one of your heirs on the throne in perpetuity. Even if your heir messes up and sins. There'll be consequences, but I will not take my steadfast love away from the House of David, right. So, that promise, coupled with the rise of a temple during Solomon's time, and the idea that now this is the, Jerusalem is Mount Zion. It's where the divine, the divine word, God's right-hand man is and where God's presence is in the Temple. This theology emerged that Jerusalem and Mount Zion were inviolable, could not be taken.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:37

And up, at this point, they've had 400 years of this theology, the Davidic covenant, and so it's many generations that have seen and believed it as they've seen it lived out.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:53

And so, and Charmaine mentioned this, like, twice during the reign, during the Assyrian Empire, the Assyrians, the Assyrians are, the Assyrians destroy, conquer, and destroy every capital city but Jerusalem in the near east. And twice they failed to take Jerusalem, for weird reasons. And so, the Jerusalemites are like, woo, we cannot fail.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:17

We are untouchable.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:18

Absolutely. We, you know, we, God is always on our side, no matter what we do. It's unconditional covenant. And so, there's that covenant tradition. And that's the one that is causing a lot of people in Jerusalem, including the royal family and royal and monarchists to say, what is Jeremiah bringing in this recent theology, this if-then theology? What's that? That's stupid. And then, let's go to the other covenant tradition. It's a Mosaic covenant tradition that the Deuteronomistic theology upholds, right? And that theology goes, has traditions that go back to Mount Sinai. So, in other words, Jeremiah is drawing on older traditions to critique the Davidic tradition, because in Jeremiah's view, from the Deuteronomistic point of view, the Davidic covenant theology is failing. It's a failing theology, right? It's not enabling people to live by justice and mercy and compassion because they think we've got it, it's a done deal where whatever we do is fine. We can worship Yahweh in the Temple. We can go worship, we can go worship Marduk's daughter somewhere else. You know, it's like, doesn't matter.

Karin Peter 31:40

So, it's better to go back to this rule of law, so to speak.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:43

Right. And so, these two theologies are different. One is conditional. One is unconditional. And there they are, both in the Bible. And so, that's why we have to be very careful when we're reading and interpreting the Bible, to get context really, really well and to make sure we understand what's being said on what basis, and not just quote passages as if somehow those were, you know, divine nuggets being thrown at all of us. Theology in the Hebrew Bible is a constant struggle. And I think that's a good lesson for us. So, Charmaine, you want to pull that text up? This is from Jeremiah 3, or sorry, Jeremiah 7.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:19

7:3-10.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:20

Yeah. And Charmaine titled this one, "Communal Justice: A Prophets' Bread and Butter". And, you know, if we did more sessions on more prophets, you'd see how frequently this theme comes up. And so, Jeremiah, early in his ministry, is a representative of a kind of Deuteronomistic theology.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:40

You want to read it?

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:41

Yeah, that has this deep sense of social responsibility in it. "Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place." Now notice, that means that Yahweh is not trapped by the place.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:00

It's God's choice where God is.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:02

Right. And that choice is contingent on what people do. "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, this is the temple of the Lord, this is the temple of the Lord.'" In other words, that's what people are saying in Jerusalem, as the whole nation is collapsing around them. We've got the Temple. And Jeremiah's saying, don't say that. That's stupid. "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien..." right, the people without green cards? "...if you do not oppress the orphan, and the widow..." those most vulnerable in society.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:43

Or the people with a green card.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:44

Or they could be the people with the green card, yeah, right. "...or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever," right. "Here you are, trusting in deceptive words." You know, these other false prophets, to no avail. "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name and say, 'We are safe!' - only to go on doing all these abominations?" So, this is the kind of stuff Jeremiah's saying. You kind of understand why people don't like him.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:42

But, and these, this is one of those texts that people often bring up to talk about how, you know, the angry God of the Old Testament. But now, once you know how, have a little bit more of the background, you can begin to understand that this is out of a place of indignation about injustice, and about people pretending to love God, but really are just using that for their own status and to feel secure. It's not really about God at all. And so, gets, begin to see that this is trying to break open the deception that they have been feeding themselves.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:25

I should say, centuries later, another Jewish prophet will say, "Love God, and your neighbor as yourself." These belong together, right? And so, Jesus draws from a long tradition of the prophets saying, hey, justice matters. So, this is somewhat aligned with the Deuteronomistic theology and it's different, right? Yahweh's presence is not guaranteed in the Temple just because it's the Temple. And so, I think that's really important. But, you know, if you read the whole book of Deuteronomy, you'll discover in different sections that, yeah, the final editors of Jeremiah were themselves Deuteronomists. They put that kind of mark on the lot of it. But you can tell that Jeremiah himself modified his Deuteronomistic outlook as he went. So, he does come to the conclusion eventually, and says so that divine rejection and exile won't be forever. And there's always an opportunity to turn. This is the great Hebrew word for repentance, tshuva or teshuva, turning around. There's, even in exile, you can turn, and we can start a new future. And so that's, I think that's a really important aspect of Jeremiah's theology. And it's a little, that's different from Deuteronomistic theology, which is very absolute. So, Jeremiah holds out the possibility that a future turning will change the shape of the people's relationship with God and the land.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:05

And sometimes, Jeremiah is underestimated on this, but he has lots of hope. There's lots of passages, that, especially when the people are in exile, when he is writing to them, that he's trying to help them say, see that a) God can be with them, even in Babylon, and b) that God is concerned about their future and has a plan. So, there's some hope and good news in there that, I think, that resonates for people

when they are in a place where they can't see a way out and want to believe that God could be with them there. So, I think there's also the night, and you get that at the end of the story.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:54

Yeah. Couple more things, then, just as we explore. We mentioned earlier, this book is, kind of, relevant. It's a relevant feel. And let me...

Karin Peter 38:06

So, if we've been feeling pricks of conscious as you've gone through some of this, that's intended? Is that what you're telling us?

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:13

Let me draw a parallel here. So, imagine this, Karin, nationalistic ideologies that defiantly snub the facts, whether the facts are economic, scientific or historical, for the sake of preserving a revered mythology about the past. That's us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:37

And power over people.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:38

Right.

Karin Peter 38:39

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:40

But this is analogous to what Jeremiah faces among Jerusalemites, right, a nationalistic ideology of Temple, monarch-city, and we're the chosen people, and God is to bound us, and we're going to be okay. And anything that, anything that raises any questions about us or our past must be false, right? And then he is rejected, mocked, imprisoned for, because he's a truth teller. So, I think there's things to learn from the book of Jeremiah about the power of false mythologies, and what, and how they often conceal, not reveal truth, right? And so, Jeremiah is trying to demythologize for them. What you're saying is false. It's not going to work out this way. And, you know, anybody, you would have thought, in, if you're standing on the city walls in Jerusalem, in you know, 588 BCE, of course, you don't know that's the date, but I mean, if you're standing on the walls of Jerusalem, you got to be thinking, the Babylonian Empire? No, we can't stand against that. That's stupid. But I don't know if you have the right, i.e. wrong mythology, you would say, we're, we are who we are. We are the chosen nation. We can stand against anything. God is on our side. Mythology can keep you from, sometimes mythology reveals truth. Sometimes mythology conceals truth. And Jeremiah, as prophet, one of the roles of prophets in the Hebrew Bible is to strip away untruth so people can see what's really going on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:34

And so that they can see that they have been lulled into indifference and hear its indifference towards each other. And especially for those who are the, those who have no voice or who have no power, and also an indifference to God.

Karin Peter 40:52

So, it's okay if I go, if I simply go to church on Sunday, but I demand that my school system not embrace critical race theory. So...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:01

Yes, and...

Karin Peter 40:02

I mean, no, if you are going to take it to an extreme, that's what you, when you talk about the alien and the orphan and the widow, it's like, holy cow, that's Medicare, or universal health care and social security and our immigration policies and our refusal to look at white privilege.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:19

And climate change? We did...

Karin Peter 41:22

Let's add that as I'm sitting in 110 degrees in Washington State. Lord!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:27

Exactly. And it's like, we want to, we don't want to hear the scientists, la, la, la, la, la, la. You know, and we'll just sing our hymns louder, because, you know, God won't let that happen, or if it does, it'll just be the evil people who are affected by it. And so, you know, we'll listen to the 1 or 2% of scientists who go against this, and that will make us feel comfortable. We won't look at what's really there, whether it's systemic racism, or whether it's climate change, or whether it's our, you know, our educational or prison system, or, you know, it's the same thing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:12

Most of the Judeans in Jeremiah's time preferred to live with the lies they loved.

Karin Peter 42:19

Well, I prefer to live with the lies I love. It's not very healthy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:23

Well, there's a lesson for us all in there, and there's a lesson about what the prophetic is about. The prophetic is about unmasking the lies that we love, and learning to face the truth head on. And that's why Jeremiah got into trouble.

Karin Peter 42:41

Yeah, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:41

Especially when those lies feed the ego of us. So, the idea that somehow our national identity is superior to others, somehow, people who look like me are smarter, or more deserving, or whatever. You know, it's all of these different things that help us to feel better than someone else. And, you know, I think, for many of us, those times of deep experience with God has not lifted us up as being better than other people, but has brought us down to see how little we are, and yet how loved we are. And those things go together. And sometimes, if we're trying to project our importance, we can't rely on the kind of love God has for our littleness. So, but this is being revealed all over the place in Jeremiah. Here's the people who, you know, that think that they are better than their neighbors. And those who are worshiping most see themselves as better than their poor neighbors who can't go there because they're working to survive. And it's everywhere.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:10

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:11

So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:12

So, Karin, a couple things. We did this with Isaiah last time, and then just some reflections on who is God for Jeremiah? And then we'll go on to, unless you have other questions, we'll go on to experiencing the text then, at that point.

Karin Peter 44:23

I only have one question at the end, and it'll help us lead into the episode we're going to do next. So,

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:30

Okay, well.

Karin Peter 44:3

I'll save it till then.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:32

All right. So, these are just some of my quick reflections on: Who's God for Jeremiah? And, as for Hosea, another prophet who's, in kind, of those northern Deuteronomy, Deuteronomic traditions, as for Hosea, for Jeremiah, God is like a spurned lover, right? And so, some of the language in the book is akin to "I've been cheated on" language. You call me God and you call me Yahweh in the Temple, then you go out and you sleep with other gods, right? And so, there's that sense of God is, God's love and care have been rejected. Um, another thing has to do with divine wrath. Now, this is a tricky topic, isn't it, divine wrath?

Karin Peter 45:17

Ouch, yes. It's why we avoid the Old Testament.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:20

Yeah. So, one of the most helpful things I've ever found on this topic was written by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, great, great Hebrew Bible scholar, and rabbi. And Heschel wrote a two volume book called *The Prophets*. And one of the things he says, commenting on God's wrath in the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, is that divine wrath is the flip side of divine love. It's not opposed to love. It is love, but love, love's backside, right? And divine wrath, he says, is the sign that God is not indifferent to the injustice, violence and evil people do to each other. And so, whenever we run across those divine wrath texts, I think it's helpful to remember that, for Hebrew prophets, this is their way, their language for talking about, look, God cares about how we treat each other, and God's not going to be indifferent about it. So, um, another thing for Jeremiah, God is not Judah's mascot, or national pet deity, right? God's a free agent here. And so, don't think that God is somehow the property of the Davidic monarch, or the Temple, or of Judah. And then, related to that, for Jeremiah, God is not imprisoned by past ways God has acted.

Karin Peter 46:49

Oh, now, be careful here, because we know that God doesn't change, right? So...

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:57

God's, God doesn't change in God's preferred future justice for the human family. But God's modes change, right, all the time. And so, I think it's really important to get, in the Hebrew prophets, how flexible their understanding of God is. God is, God for Jeremiah, like for other prophets, the God of open futures, not predestined futures. This direction, this can change if you turn. This direction, that's disaster. And you're, the further you get towards the disaster, the more it's going to be hard to change, but you don't know. You could turn and it could change. So, God in the Hebrew Bible is often depicted as flexible, changing God's mind on things, which is a way of saying there isn't one future, there's multiple futures here. And then, you know, Charmaine will say more about this and I'll just mention it briefly. God, for Jeremiah, is present in both the unmaking and the remaking. So, we'll come to that in a little bit. So...

Karin Peter 48:01

The plucking up, and the replanting?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:03

Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:03

Yeah, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:05

Yes, exactly. The tearing down and the building up, yup.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:08

And then, this is a place where Jeremiah begins to depart from the Deuteronomistic theology he inherited and that's that Yahweh remains faithful, despite Judah's faithfulness, and that's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:23

Faithlessness.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:24

Faithlessness. Did I say faithfulness? Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:26

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:27

Sorry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:28

That's why there's two of us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:29

Yes. We need a pair of brains here, right? So, God remains faithful. God will remain faithful, even though Judah has totally lost it and messed up and is going into exile. And that's because God has a long range, preferred vision. And so, God, God's going to be faithful to that vision, and that will involve a restoration of the people at a future date. And then finally, this is the thing that I think touches me as a Community of Christ person, that's that, for Jeremiah, God calls a prophet, and derivatively a prophetic people, to share in the world's anguish, and suffering, and turmoil, not to evade it, or conceal it, or lie about it, right? God is a God of truth about situations and therefore lying about our situation, or evading

it, or creating another reality so we don't have to deal with it, a prophetic people would be called to call that out. So, I think that's stuff we can learn from Jeremiah's vision of God, and his very torturous experience. I mean, man, no one would ever apply for the job of prophet if they read Jeremiah.

Karin Peter 49:56

Well, no, and in Community of Christ, we recognize that the past decade for us has not been easy. And so, when we receive inspired counsel that says, "God weeps for the poor," or "You are called to stand against these injustices," we go, "Oh, no, that can't be right," because things suck right now. But the reality is, yes, sometimes it does. And that doesn't mean it diminishes our call to be who God is calling us to be.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:24

And it promises that in doing that, we meet God.

Karin Peter 50:28

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:29

...that we encounter God in a, kind of, realness that we may not otherwise have had opportunity to really take in deeply, so, yeah. So, God is all about us connecting deeply with God, and is willing to lead us there if we're willing to say, "Yes." And that's part of what Jeremiah's journey is about, but it's also about, it's what he's trying to teach the people about where they can expect to find God in the difficult situation before them. So, we're going on to the experience part. We're going to look at a couple of passages from Jeremiah, and just with one or two questions to reflect on, like you might in a Bible study. But before we get to those passages, I just want to always give us a reminder that we are approaching these writings as human writings. People wrote to share what they understood about God and God's interactions in the world. And you know, this whole story about Jeremiah writing the scroll again, or Baruch helping him write the scroll again, again, is really important that they're witnesses of their time, and of their desire for people to understand what God is about, as they understand that. They wrote from their time and context, often unaware of the biases and the incompleteness of what they could see. And so, they're in the same boat as we are, when we're trying to understand and explain who God is. But their instinct was to pass on their experience with God so that future generations would have their record of the realness of Yahweh, of God, so that they don't have to start from scratch, that they can use the witnesses of those who've come before as something to build on, not to embrace it, as though there's nothing else, but something to build on. And so, as we are using these writings, and thinking about how they might be appropriate to us, if something in their story speaks to you, go with it, use it, let it guide you in your relationship. If there's too much that's getting in the way, then don't worry about it. Just let it be what it is, someone's writings about their understanding of God. And, but keep listening in case there's some that will speak to you at some point. So, we'll be looking at, so, we're gonna invite you to see if there are insights, words of wisdom, invitation, or encouragement for you in Jeremiah's stories

today. And we're gonna look at two different passages. One is often called The Potter and it's a very visual one, so, lots of people have heard of this, even if they don't know it's from Jeremiah. And that's from Jeremiah 18. And the other one is from, I'm calling it the letter to the exiles. So, it's Jeremiah's letter to those who are already in Babylon, and saying, here's how to live there and to recognize God in your midst. And that's Jeremiah 29:1-14. So, I'm gonna go ahead and pull up my next page here. So, that's what I just said, about how we're approaching these scriptures. And here's Jeremiah 18:1-12, The Potter, and then we'll just have a question or two for you to take with you as you think about this passage. "The words that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' So I went to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him." And, "Then the word of the Lord came to me:" So this is God's interpretation, "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hands, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I've spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it." Going back to Tony's thing about the flexibility of God in Jeremiah's theology. "And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom and I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. But they say", the people say, "It is no use! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will." I love that. That sounds like, I don't know, a defiant, 15 year old, which is in all of us. So, that's the text. So, you've got the visual of the potter remaking, and of God saying to, first Jeremiah, and then to Judah, hey, there's this thing that's about to happen, and, you know, we can rework it if you're willing to see where, that there's consequences for behaviors that you've had. So, The Potter. Judah has lost track of what it meant to be in relationship with God, and for most theologies in the Hebrew Scriptures, as Tony has been talking about, that means there must be consequences. But the potter analogy is really quite revealing. We might often get stuck on the, you know, I'm making...[audio pause]...make you, you know, kind of that, that light, I have lightning wielding punisher from above. But this analogy is revealing because the author reveals what they see, as the, I should say, authors reveal what they see as the nature of God, not as this punisher from above, but as someone quite different. And so, Judah's mistakes, their disregard for the vulnerable, and their outright willfulness, do not mean God will reject, leave or destroy them. Instead, God cares enough about them to help them be unmade, so they can be remade. So, that lump of clay that is Judah is not dumped in the trash. It's cherished, and it's reclaimed, and God is willing to reform it. So, a couple of questions just to think about in your own life: Have you had times in life when God has taken the misshapen pieces of your life and brought new life from them? And if you've had that experience, then reflect on, what does that say about God? I mean, God was not revolted by those parts of ourselves, but instead, like Jesus with the leper, touches that, those parts of us anyhow. But what does that say about God? And then, what does that say about you?

What does that say about you in God's eyes? So, throughout this book, the theme is the way forward with God will look like failure or defeat to others. So, Jeremiah's advice to Judah: submit to Babylon. Cooperate with Babylon. Well, for the nationalists in that group, that was defeat. That was failure. How could you say that we should submit to anybody? But, sometimes for us to the way forward with God will look like failure, or defeat, or outright rejection to what our values are supposed to be by other people. But nevertheless, this is often where God is inviting you to go. So, that's the theme that is running through Jeremiah. When has this been God's invitation to you to not worry how this looks to anyone else, but to hear the invitation that God is inviting you to be remade? Next is, I call it Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon. I'm not going to read the whole thing to you because it's, I've already limited it. But, "These are the words of the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exile and to the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah. It is said, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles, whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may be our sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord." See, this sense of God saying, I want to be in relationship with you wherever you are, and live fully where you are, and I'm happy to be there with you. So, just a little reflection on the unmaking and remaking of a people. The path to Babylon has included humiliation for Judah, and the loss of many things, and the foremost being their national identity. They are now simply prisoners in somebody else's land. They've lost their status. They've lost their lands, their homes, their Temple, and their people. Their idea, they've lost, had to let go of their ideas of the purpose of worship, because back in Jerusalem was all about being seen in the right place at the right time, and seeing, being seen as religious, and now that doesn't matter. That doesn't matter where they are. They've had to loosen their grip and let go of the assumption that they have God guarantees of safety and comfort, no matter what's happening around them in the world, and no matter what they are doing. They have had to lose the view of themselves as privileged and superior to others inside their culture, as well as in relation to other cultures. For some, they didn't believe that God cared about anybody else but them. So, they had to lose their patterns of seeing others as less than them. And they had to let go of the belief that they could, they should have, not that they could have, but they should have a predictable sense of the future, that God should have made it all comfortable and easy for them after all. They are them. So, all of these things had been stripped away, and they could begin to see themselves, their world, and I would say especially God, in new ways, in clearer ways. So, this letter is inviting them to live life and know that God is with them in this new stripped down reality. And I think about how the pandemic has done that for lots of people. It's stripped away a lot of the stuff we thought we, determined who we were, and what our worth was. And it's helped us say, what is it that really matters in my life? Who is it that really matters in my life? What

relationships do I want to take more care with? So, and for lots of people in the pandemic, how do I know God is with me, a) because the question often opens the door to the recognition, and then the realization that God can be with us in this new place in ways that we maybe hadn't understood before. So, personal reflection; which of the things listed above, so you can see all of those things, would I benefit from losing? How might its absence affect my relationship with an understanding of God. And maybe there's more than one from that list that we would benefit from losing. But it's one of the lessons that I think the people that Jeremiah is talking to, have to teach us, as much as Jeremiah's words.

Karin Peter 1:05:25

Thank you, Charmaine, that was really helpful to find some things within the text of Jeremiah after going through so much pain and despair that we can use to really be reflective in our own situation. So, my question, are we at that point?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:43

Yup.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:43

I think so.

Karin Peter 1:05:43

Okay. So, um, when I go through and read that the texts that we're going to be exploring, I read from the New Interpreters Study Bible, because I like its notes. I like its study notes. I think they bring a lot of things to the forefront that some of the other, even my other favorite, the Oxford annotated, that they don't, that it doesn't bring forward, and this is the New Revised Standard Version. And one of the things in Jeremiah, that notes in this particular edition brought out were, some of the, what they call poetic imagery and symbolism about relationships, the language that Jeremiah uses to denote how he is experiencing God, and how God is experiencing the people, that is demeaning to women, that's insulting to women, that characterizes women as wanton, over-sexed beings that need to be controlled by men. So, our listeners are aware that in each episode, as we have gone through different parts of the Old Testament, I have blanched at some of this contextual reality, from my own feminist perspective. So, first, what do you have to say about that, briefly, in this? And then, second, maybe you can talk about our next episode, and what we're going to do there?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:11

I think the first thing to say, and we will continue to say this is, that no matter who you are, and what time period you're in, you have blind spots. And so, what would commonly be used as an analogy in one time, would be very inappropriate, and actually could be abused in another time. And that's part of what we're seeing, and we'll see this, you see it in, really, all Scripture because it's time bound. It's bound by the cultures, and the language, and the kinds of images that people can relate to in their time. And so,

and the other piece is always, these are not God's words. You know, these are the writings of human beings.

Karin Peter 1:08:05

Men.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:10

Mostly *men*. And so, yeah, you're going to have that perspective? And why would we be surprised that we're going to have perspectives that don't speak to everyone in their time, or in our time? And, but I think, loosening, undoing that, it's just, we absorb it everywhere, the idea that somehow scripture is God's direct word to us, and that it's command, and it's all of these things, and this is how God sees the world, you know, the things that we find in scripture, the more we can keep disconnecting from that. Yes, we can find God in the, you know, the little Bible studies ways of doing it, finding God as we read this, but it's not God that's saying, you know, the culture in 587 is the culture that we should have in 2020.

Karin Peter 1:09:07

Right. And so, we do harm when we approach scripture literalistically, and we see that in cultures and religions around the world.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:09:16

And, when we take some piece of scripture, and we take it out of its whole context, and we use it to control, abuse, oppress, suppress the voices of other people. And that's, we just need to keep coming back to that again, and again, and again, because there's a standard default that many of us have just absorbed, that somehow these words that are in the Bible come directly from God, and so they must describe the reality as it should be. And, of course, even the writers knew they were writing, they were writing with the limitations of their time. And most of the writers of scripture had no idea that it was going to become scripture. Jeremiah is writing for his people in his time and to tweak the king. And...

Karin Peter 1:10:13

So, partly to assuage my own outrage, and partly because it's the responsible thing to do, what are we going to do next?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:10:22

Like, what our next podcast? Yeah, we're gonna, we've talked about this already among us here, and we've decided we're going to do a, this is the fourth one in our series on the prophets, right? So, we did four on the Torah, the law, now we've done four on the prophets, and then, the next would be four on the *Ketuvim*, the writings of the Hebrew bible. But we're going to insert one in between this and the writings in which we deal with these questions of gendered use of language in the Hebrew Bible, images of male-female relationships, how to navigate through the imagery of the Hebrew Bible, and understand it on its

terms, and also understand it responsibly, so that it's not, so that we learned not to treat it as some kind of blueprint for how things always must be.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:11:20

And, in some ways, maybe to create some armor for those who are most abused by the misuse of scripture, to be able to give themselves some distance from these concepts that are 1000s of years old, from cultures totally unrelated to our own. And to be able to be, have that inner reminder, this is not God's view of reality. This is some people's view of their reality and their time, and to keep focusing on what they're trying to do, which is pass on their understanding of God in their partial and limited way. And maybe it can be helpful to us. And maybe it won't, and that's okay. We can let it, we can just let it go. But that's part of the necessity. That's what liberation theologians do, have been doing for decades, is helping people to understand where they need armor, and where they need to be open to scripture. And who did, who is this God that all of Scripture points to, not just this one passage, but how, how do we let Jesus give us a bigger view of God? How do we let present day prophets and prophetic people give us a bigger view of who God is, and not one passage?

Karin Peter 1:12:49

Well, and hopefully find some examples of women in this part of the Old Testament that we have gone through where their experience helps us understand more fully the nature of God, as that is often overlooked as we try to navigate our way through.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:13:07

Wonderful.

Karin Peter 1:13:08

So, I appreciate that. And so, for our listeners, Charmaine has entitled this next episode, instead of He'brew, it's going to be She'brew. So, all of you who have been waiting for that particular word to come forth, it will be here, our next episode. Tony, did you have anything else to share on this particular topic, before we...?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:13:31

Only it's really, really important to recognize the Bible is literature, right? It's literature, and it's a library of literature. And we just have to keep stressing that because, you know, you hear people say, the Bible is the blueprint for life. And it's like, but nobody would say the library is the blueprint for life. It's like, no, we've got to try and find, and there are much more responsible ways of using this sacred collection of texts. It's a travesty to use this collection of texts simply to buttress patriarchy, and gender violence, and the misogyny that's so characterized in so many cultures. It's a travesty to do that. It's to miss the point. And so, yeah, I'm all in on this one. I'm anxious to do the one together on She'brew. I think it's going to be a fun one.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:14:27

So, this is a little funny, as we look ahead, and that is, we were listening to Walter Brueggemann on YouTube. He was a world-renowned Old Testament scholar, and he was doing some sessions on Jeremiah. And he was talking about how one passage of Jeremiah, the one about, you know, God has knitted me together in my mother's womb and all of that, and how that gets used to be against abortion. And he says, you know, that's what I call a pelvic theology, and that's not appropriate. That's not what the Bible is about. Talking about all the ways in which the Bible is used to try and control people, their ideas and their choices. And I thought, oh, that's such a great term. So, it may come up again, as we're talking about...

Karin Peter 1:15:23

In She'brew. Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:15:26

I mean, I just want to reiterate, the Bible is too important to let it be abused, and misused and misread and misinterpreted and used to support abuses and injustices and violence. It's too important a collection of texts to do that. And it, that's the common way it's used, and certainly in American culture. So, we're trying, what we want to do in these kind of sessions is, let it be the revolutionary collection of texts it's meant to be, and then find responsible ways to read it that will help us internalize the Bible's best instincts about God and the future of creation that God wishes. So, that's a way to, so.

Karin Peter 1:16:16

That's a hopeful closing. And so, I appreciate that after slogging through Jeremiah. The, within Jeremiah, and I think it's the 31st chapter, there's some, a portion that's called the New Covenant. And it's often misused by Christians to, kind of, point to Jesus and talk about how Christians are so much better than any other religion that might have come before, but there's a part of it that I think really is a wonderful explore, not exploration, a wonderful statement of grace. So, we're gonna close with that today. And this is 31st chapter, 33rd verse. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." So, we'll end with a statement of grace, grace upon Jeremiah and those male, Old Testament writers today, and look forward to our next version, our next episode, which will be She'brew. So, until next time, I'm Karin Peter, and I've been here with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, our guides through Hebrew Scriptures. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:18:05

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