

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 *Project Zion Podcast*. We have completed an entire year of "He'Brew", our series on the Old Testament and exploring the Hebrew Scriptures, and today is our final episode for "He'Brew", and it's actually a "She'Brew" episode, our second "She'Brew" episode, and we're looking at two books in the Old Testament that actually focus on women. The main characters in each book are women and the books are named for those women. So, we're going to look at them the same way that we have with the rest of our work here in "He'Brew". We're going to delve into some explanation, some exploration and then we're going to experience the text in ways that will help us better navigate what we're reading. So, as always, our guides through the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures, are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. So, first, hi, Tony and Charmaine. We haven't seen each other for over a month, so it's nice to see you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:34

Nice to see you, too, Karin.

Karin Peter 01:36

So, we are looking at these two entire books, and it sounds like a lot for one episode, so we probably should dive right in. So, are we starting with Ruth or are we starting with Esther?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:48

We're gonna start with Ruth.

Karin Peter 01:50

Oh, that's my favorite.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:52

Yay! And I think our inclination is we'll do Ruth first, and then we'll come back, and do Esther, right, Charmaine? That's what we talked about?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:59

We could and we'll do that for the explain and explore parts. And then we'll put them both together for the experience part, and in the experience part...

Karin Peter 02:08

Okay.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:09

...we're looking at specific passages and seeing how they might engage us. We'll do those together as our endings if that works okay.

Karin Peter 02:17

Alrighty, that works for me. So, let's get started.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:21

Okay, so we're going to start with the Book of Ruth, which is four chapters long. Our undergrad students always like biblical books that are four chapters long, because then they...

Karin Peter 02:29

Your seminary students appreciate that too.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:32

Yes, I'm sure that they do. So, what do we have in the Book of Ruth? We have an artfully constructed short story. There are likely historical elements in it, but there are a number of elements that suggest that we're in the realm of historical fiction as well. And one of those has to do with the names of the characters. So, this book starts off with, it's a story about Elimelech, "My God is King", Naomi, "Pleasant", and their two sons, "Weak" and "Sickly". And...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:12

That's what the names translate.

Karin Peter 03:13

That's foreshadowing is what that is in literary discussion.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:18

Exactly. I'm trying to imagine going through junior high and being named Sickly. But, so, Weak and Sickly are married to Moabite women, and this automatically, kind of, cues us in as readers, if we know anything else in the Hebrew Bible, that Israelites and Moabites did not get along very well, and so, we, kind of, know that we're in the realm of a story that's constructed to teach a point.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:41

Good. And one thing I want to add into this, the context part is that Naomi and Elimelech have moved from their home area around Bethlehem to Moab because of famines. And I think that's a really interesting thing to always remember in the stories from this area of the world is, that many things are run by the rainfalls or not. And so, not unlike today, they have to migrate at times when there's a shortage of food because the rains are not coming when they are planned to come. And so, Naomi and Elimelech have gone to Moab to try to survive, and there their children, their two boys, are, become grown and become married to women from the area. So, they, that's why they're married to Moabites.

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:40

Oh, well, Bethlehem is a real historical place. It's kind of funny how it fits into the story because the Hebrew word, Bet Lehem, means something like "house of bread", right? So, there's a famine in Breadville. So that sends them across, you know, across the river and over into Moabite territory. So that's how it, the story gets going, right, and the story is easy to rehearse. The two sons have died, Weak and Sickly, as we anticipate, have died...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:16

As has Elimelech.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:17

As has Elimelech. So, what we have now is we have a widow with two widowed daughters who are aliens, right? So, what's going to happen? Well, Naomi is going to go back home because if you've got to be a widow in the ancient world, better to be a widow in your hometown than it is to be a widow and an expatriate somewhere. So, this, as the story moves on then, Ruth, one of the Moabite daughters-in-law, chooses to go with Naomi back to Bethlehem, which then we have two vulnerable women, a widow, and a refugee, who is, belongs to a hated people. They come back home during a famine. So, that's, kind of, how the story gets going.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:07

Good. And one of the most quoted parts of Ruth is the part where Ruth affirms to Naomi that she isn't going to go back to her own family, but she's with Ruth, even though she knows that she'll be going into a place where she will be seen as an outsider and a foreigner. So, she knows she's going back to Bethlehem, or going to Bethlehem with Naomi will put her in a, in some ways, a new and vulnerable role. So, that's the part that we often hear is the part that Ruth says to Naomi, which is, you know, "I'll go where you go. Your God will be my God." That's the part that people often hear and use in things like weddings, which we'll talk about a little bit later on about, actually, there's way more going on here.

Karin Peter 07:04

Well, weddings and women's retreats. So, for all our female listeners out there, women's retreats are a long tradition in Community of Christ. And I cannot tell you how many of them I've gone to where they have chosen this kind of female fidelity, or solidarity, or relationship. But if you really look at the text that is questionable.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:29

Right. And I mean, there's lots of questions that can be raised. We don't know, you know, there, this story doesn't give us any background as to what Ruth's situation would be if she stayed. We don't know if Naomi really wanted the girls to come or not.

Karin Peter 07:46

Well, the part that you just talked about, the next line gives a clue, though, in that it says when she saw that she was determined to go with her, she didn't say anymore. Well, what was she saying before? Like, no, thank you. I don't know. She doesn't sound that thrilled.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:03

So, there's lots of things that could be read between the lines, but I think this, again, is a great place to remind ourselves that this, though there may be historical details in it, it's created as a short story. And so, a short story typically has a goal, a moral or a lesson to teach. And so, it's not going to give us the background because there may or may not be background to access. But also, the people, in some ways, are a little more two dimensional. So, we can, it's probably, though it's a great deal of fun, it's, probably reading between the lines will not, will just take us down little rabbit holes, which might be fun. But,

Karin Peter 08:44

Well, it is fun if you read between the lines as a cynic, which is how you really should read most of the Old Testament, just for fun, and then go back and read it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:52

When we get to chapter three, to the scene at the threshing floor, the text invites us to

Karin Peter 08:56

Yes, between the lines. Yes, there's a lot of between the lines going on there. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:05

Yes, yeah. It's just a couple of things. When was this book written? Well, this is a book that scholars really disagree on. And some see it as a very ancient text, maybe from the time of King David, so roughly around 1000 BCE. I think the bulk of scholarship currently sees it as a later text, written after the exile, Babylonian exile, so sometime after, you know, the 500s BCE. A couple of, a couple things suggest it's a later book. Though of course, the story could have circulated orally in some form for centuries, but in the form we're reading it. So, the key, one of the key figures is a Moabite, and in the book of Deuteronomy, which is a later book that comes together during the ex-, the Babylonian exile, the Book of Deuteronomy says this in chapter 23, "No Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord," right. So...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:02

So, these biases have been concretized in a very explicit...

Karin Peter 10:06

Yes. A Moabite prohibition.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:10

Right. And so, here's a little short story that says, no, you're wrong. In other words, it could be written as a rejoinder to this Deuteronomic law. And then secondly, you can read Ruth as a, kind of, counterpoint to the Book of Ezra, which is definitely from, say, the 400s BCE. Ezra, which has a, kind of, for its own contextual reasons, has a, kind of, ethnocentric view of Jewish identity. And yet, here's a book which says, well, no, and I don't want to, I'm gonna get to the punchline of the book right here. No, remember King David, our greatest king we wish were still king? He's part Moabite. His great-grandmother was a Moabite. So, in other words, there's this conflict in the Hebrew Bible about what does it really mean to be part of God's people?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:58

So, just one of the specifics, Tony was talking about Ezra. One of the things that Ezra institutes, because he's concerned about the identity of the Jewish people being this, what's the word? Anyhow, becoming less concrete, of it being dissipated.

Karin Peter 11:18

He's afraid it's becoming diluted, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:21

Diluted, that's the word I was looking for. And so, he, you know, he institutes this, if you're married to a non-Jewish woman, divorce her, out with her. And, you know, we want to be pure, whatever that means, since we can see any where we read in the Bible that this was not a purely ethnic group that only stayed within their tribal boundaries when it came to marriage. So, pure was really a silly word to use with the mix that was already there. But it was this attempt, context, to keep our identity, without it being watered down at all, and becoming too much like everybody else around us. So.

Karin Peter 12:11

Well, we have a little bit of that in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:15

Yes, we do. Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:16

Yeah. Yeah. There was a time...

Karin Peter 12:18

You marry outside the faith, you're weak in the faith.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:20

Exactly. Exactly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:21

You're evenly yoked.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:21

Exactly. Here we have in parts of the Hebrew Bible. You know, Tony, if you marry one of those Canadians...

Karin Peter 12:28

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:28

...you're gonna start worshipping their Canadian gods and Tony's like, yes, I really want to worship the Canadian gods.

Karin Peter 12:33

You could have Thanksgiving on October one. So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:37

So, this is the story of Ruth. And part of the story wants to show that Ruth, the Moabite, practices this greatest of all virtues in the Hebrew Bible, "hesed," steadfast love, though I don't think it's a good translation, because when we hear the word love, we usually think of feelings and in the Hebrew Bible, hesed is way, way, way, way more than a feeling. It's an act. So, it's a will to act, of loyalty, at whatever cost to yourself. And so, she's willing to do that. And so, she follows Naomi back to Bethlehem, a refugee, a vulnerable widow. No, there's no, they have no children. There's no future for them, except to try and survive.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:21

And so, they arrive back, back for Naomi, new for the first time for Ruth, to Bethlehem. And, yes, Naomi has family there, and we've learned later in the story that her husband has some property there. She can only access it by selling it. So, she can access the, as resources only by selling it to a next of kin. So, who again, there again, she's vulnerable, because, as a woman in that culture, she couldn't do a lot of bargaining. She may very well have to take whatever price her relatives, her husband's relatives ask, so, or offer I should say. So, we have Ruth now, Naomi's her only contact in this whole new world, and so she's looking to Naomi for instruction and guidance. And, but she takes the initiative, Ruth does, to say I'm going to go and glean around the fields. So again, there's this very Jewish identity piece here, where the law says to not harvest all the way to the edges and to let others, let the poor come and glean in the field. So, she takes that on, to go and glean, and she eventually ends up in Boaz' field, and Boaz happens to be a relative of Naomi, and he notices her and finds out from his harvesters her story, and her dedication to Naomi. And he takes special care to make sure that she's not bothered by the men, the young men.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:15

i.e. read sexually harassed.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:18

Yes, he, and he also says, go along with my women who are there. And the men have been told not to even, to not to bother you. And he then instructs the harvesters to pull out some of the grain from the sheafs so that she will find them and then he invites her, this foreigner, very poor person, to come and eat with them when they stop to eat for the day, and offers her the cooked barley and wine and bread. So, I think that there's a whole bunch of themes that are woven in there, but the idea of hospitality is there, kindness, thoughtfulness, an awareness of, and lifting up of this dedication that Ruth has for her mother-in-law.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:13

So, Coogan, one of the great current Old Testament scholars says, you know, this kind of work is historical fiction, but there's a historical dimension to it. This is not taking place in some mythical land. This actually places you in village life in the ancient Near East. You can actually, this is actually from village life, right? And so, then, so, Boaz turns out to be kin.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:38

Pretty close kin, actually.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:40

Yeah, and in this culture, here's the deal, this is, you find this elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, if a man dies without children, then a brother or a kins-person may try to raise up, can marry that woman, and try to raise up children on behalf of the deceased husband. And so, Naomi's, once it's clear that Boaz is interested, curious, attracted to, I don't know. You know, the story just lets you, kind of, figure out, why is he taking such an interest in her?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:17

And Naomi, the mother-in-law is like, okay, here's the door.

Karin Peter 17:24

Here's an option.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:26

To do, yes. It was very much an option, and schools her in how to take some next steps. And...

Karin Peter 17:33

That is such an interesting way to phrase pimping out your daughter-in-law, Charmaine.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:43

I mean, that's how we would look, some would look at it today. But this is a really good place to put ourself in the reality of that time, which is, as women, you don't get to decide the structure. You only have ways of figuring out how to survive, or thrive, in the structure. And you will see this throughout both of these books, both Ruth and Esther. There isn't a condoning of the structure, per se, but there is wisdom and manipulation, and use of power, discovering and using your own power in the midst of this patriarchal society that wants to make sure you don't have any power.

Karin Peter 18:32

So, I think that that's a really important point for our listeners to hear, Charmaine, because as people of faith today, we try to go back and look at these stories and whitewash anything that makes us uncomfortable, and sex makes us terribly uncomfortable. And so, we try to take that out of the narrative in any way, or we try to ignore what's really happening here, which is women had to find a way to survive or become prostitutes or beggars. I mean, that's pretty much what the options were. So, this story tells us how Naomi and Ruth navigate this, but because we're so uncomfortable with the reality of what's happening, we ignore that and instead, we try to make the story about something entirely more palatable.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:24

Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:25

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:25

And there's a lot going on here. So, Naomi saying, okay, I'm destitute, basically, and Ruth even more so. She doesn't have any other means. She doesn't have any family but me. And so, as you'll find throughout the Old Testament, figuring out how to align yourself with men, but using what choice you have in how that's done. So, Boaz presents us a very interesting person. It appears that he's older, he's well off, but he, there's no mention that he's ever been married before. But he's a gentle person, and it appears that he doesn't feel like he has any privilege over women, if that makes sense, that he doesn't have any right to use women in, as he could have, you know. Here's a vulnerable woman, you know, he doesn't have to protect her. He, you know, if he had designs on her, he could do things, but instead chooses kindness, chooses generosity, chooses respect. And so, you know, this would be what I would say is, Naomi is saying, ah, this man may be, this may be a win-win for everybody.

Karin Peter 20:59

He's also following the laws of hospitality, which go deep in the tradition, and yet, could easily be ignored because Ruth is a Moabite, right?

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:12

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:12

Exactly. You'd have it, you could justify not taking care of her, yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:18

Go ahead Charmaine. I want to get us to the threshing floor.

Karin Peter 21:22

Yes, that is the interesting part of the story.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:24

Well, that's where I was going to tell the next part of the story, but you can if you want.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:28

No, please.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:29

So, when Naomi hears how much interest that Boaz has taken in Ruth, she says, all right, this is the moment. This is the moment where we act. And who knows how much Ruth really understands the

traditions of this culture. But Naomi says, gussy yourself up, you know, look pretty. Put your best rags on, whatever she's got. Get clean. And then here's what you do. So, it's harvest time, and, you know, this, the food part of this keeps coming up throughout the story. This is harvest time. That's why they're back there is because there's now food in Bethlehem, and, whereas there had been famine before. So, they've come back because it's barley harvest, and because it's the barley harvest, people will work during the day, and then will eat and drink their evening meal. And in this case, I think, before the grain is stored, while it's still drying, they will sleep near the crops so that they're protected. And so, here's Boaz. He's eaten his supper. He's drunk. He feels good, and he falls asleep. And Naomi had suggested to Ruth that once he'd fallen asleep to position herself at his feet, and...

Karin Peter 23:12

So, for our listeners, Charmaine just made air quotes.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:17

...little quotation marks around feet, because it's a playful word, I might say, in much, in lots of places in Hebrew Scripture, because feet is a euphemism for genitals. And here it's unclear which it means but the authors are, I think, are giving us that place to read between the lines if we want to. And so, there's this sexual suggestion...

Karin Peter 23:46

Drunk tired, out in the fields, pretty woman comes lays at his feet. I don't think there's a lot of between the lines imagination happening up here.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:55

Karin, sometimes in the Hebrew Bible, a foot is a foot, but sometimes it's not. And so, Hebrew readers of the story, they, they're going to get the play.

Karin Peter 24:06

Sure.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:07

And then the *New Interpreters Study Bible* says, there's a couple of other Hebrew verbs being used here which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible connote sexual activity. So, it doesn't, this story isn't explicit, but the story leaves a lot for the imagination to run with.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:23

Right. It's suggesting that Ruth is suggesting far more than what she says, which is, will you put your cloak over me? Will you put your wing over me? Will you take me under your wing? But in effect, it's a marriage proposal, is what she has just done, is proposed marriage to him. And he's quite delighted, actually, and it says, yep...

Karin Peter 24:54

No sure, that's what it says, Charmaine. I'm reading it right now.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:58

Go, go there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:59

He's got one little obstacle.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:03

Right, but before, just, he's quite delighted to stay with me until it's starting to get dawn, and then leave before people can tell, you know, can see from who you are, and then we'll work this all out. And Naomi's, once Ruth gets home and tells Naomi, I can see Naomi, you know, like clapping her hands and going, oh, good. Just wait to see what happens. He's gonna take care of this today, you know?

Karin Peter 25:31

Well, yeah, but her first thing is, how did it go? I mean, come on. When she got home, that's Naomi's first line, tell me all about it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:39

Exactly. And she's delighted because her plan has worked. And Boaz has said, you know, he's acknowledged her proposal for marriage by saying, I will do what you say, which is to go and find out. And this was interesting, he already knew he wasn't the next of kin, he knew who the next of kin was, who was in the way, who could choose to buy the land, Naomi's husband's land. He already knew. So, he, I don't know if he'd been doing research, or if it was just everybody knew who the next of kin would be, who would have option to buy that land. So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:24

Yeah, so that, so then there's this transaction at the village, at the gates of the village. And this is actually true to life in the ancient world. This is the gate, the main entry to a village is where the guys sat around and did business, right. And so, it's, kind of, funny how Boaz does this. He says to the next of kin, you want the land? The guy's, kind of like, well, yeah, I could do that. And then, you know, there's a, the Moabite girl comes with it. I don't want the refugee girl. That's gonna complicate my inheritance stuff. And, so Boaz is like, yes!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:01

Right, right. And right there and then, in front of the 10 men that were needed in order to solemnize a deal, he basically says, well, I guess I could buy it. And, oh, and I guess I'll take Ruth as my wife. So, it's legal, and it's done.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:21

And then the amazing climax of the story is right at the end, where we find out, we wouldn't know this until we get to the end of the story, that Ruth is the great grandmother of King David, right. So, if this book is, let, we'll say published in the time, in the fifth century BCE, when there's a real strong focus on protecting the boundaries of Jewish identity, both ethnically and religiously, and you discover that the great-grandmother of Israel's most renowned king was a Moabite. This is, like, ha ha! You're wrong,

right? It's that, kind of a, in other words, the Hebrew Bible has all these kinds of conversations and arguments in it, back and forth, about what's, how do we do this? How do we follow this God?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:08

And there's some more, there's, this is first time I really followed it through and figured this out too. The, it has these two little kickers at the end as well. So, at that end, you know, where it talks about David being the great-grandson of Ruth, it also makes connections back to, farther back in the ancestral stories, where I don't, we've talked a little bit about Tamar, who was married to Er and then to Onan, and they both died. And she should have been then the wife of the next brother, Shelah, and their dad never made that happen, partly because they were afraid she was, like, a bad omen. Whoever was her husband was gonna die. That was, you know, his next son. But, so, she was not taken in properly into the family and secured her future, or to have children within that family tribe, and so, she becomes a prostitute. She pretends to be a prostitute and has sex with her father-in-law and has babies by him, twins. One of them is Perez. Perez is the ancestor to, the, to Boaz. So through, so, it's, like, this story has a lot of sexual issues all the way through, and there's two mentions of it near the end of Ruth. One is where the townspeople, kind of, give a blessing. May your line be as productive as Perez's, and everybody would know, you know, why did they pick that particular, they could have gone back to Judah, you know, but they said to Perez. So, there's this playfulness, again, about this...

Karin Peter 30:13

You have figured out how to make this work, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:17

Right. And then there's this sexual uncertainty about the past, as well. And it's possible that Tamar was also a Canaanite. So, that again, tags, that whole story that, wait a minute, this is, you know, this whole line that leads to David is anything but pure. And so, it's, and it's, kind of, playful. And then, again, it, Perez is the one who's mentioned as the primary ancestor, and then it comes on down to Boaz. So, it's, and then to David. So, it's really fun to see all of these links into the bigger story of the Old Testament.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:02

So, that's the book of Ruth and, you know, if we're following our patterns here just some exploration. So, we'll do some exploration of Ruth, then we'll go back and pick up Esther. But, so, one of our problems with these stories is our tendency to repatriarchalize them and domesticate them, right? We turn Ruth and Naomi into models of whatever ideal womanhood is, when in fact, no, they are struggling to survive, and they're going to use whatever they can to survive in that cultural context.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:36

In spite of the patriarchal system. Or to spite, or to spite the patriarchal system.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:44

And how amazing it is that, here in the Hebrew Bible, we have a story in which two women really take an active roll creating a different future for themselves. Obviously, within the patriarchal construct at the time, they had, that they have no other options than that, but inside of the construct, that they're stuck with, they choose to create a different future. And that's a really powerful thing in the Hebrew Bible.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:13

And it's not just the future for themselves, but it's for all of Judaism. There is now the possibility of a David. So, it's fascinating.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:24

And then, we'll comment on this when we get to the book of Esther too, but it's similar in the Book of Ruth. Where is God in this book, right? And so, you know, elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, we're used to God being an active presence in, you know, whether in the dreams of an Abraham or Joseph, or active in bringing about the rise and fall of empires and the prophets here...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:52

Or more hands on, like a pillar of fire or cloud, you know, very concrete, thunder and lightning on a mountain.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:59

Here in this story, God is, God's presence is background presence, right. There's, there is a, if you know other parts of the Hebrew Bible, you can, apply the term "providence" here in the sense of God is using human decisions and working with human beings in a quiet, subtle way, behind the scenes, to do something, but that's very, that's not overt in this book at all.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:24

Right, and it's not like God is micromanaging, or marionetting. But that whatever the choices are, that people make, God is working with the outcomes of that, to keep directing things, as, into a better future.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:40

If we use, if I use some classical theological terminology, in Christian theology, God is both transcendent and immanent. Transcendent, meaning beyond and hidden, right, but immanent, present and active. And so, this is, the God of the Book of Ruth is a transcendent, behind the scenes God, not immediately present in anything. And so, both dimensions of God are present in books of the Hebrew Bible, and I think that's important. It's important for us as readers to know that, there's some that you can't, you just can't find God behind every leaf that falls on the tree, right, and from a tree. And so, in other words, God's activity within the world is mostly hidden from us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:26

And something really dawned on me just now, and that is that that presence of God is most commonly understood in these books that have women's names on them, whether it be Ruth and Esther, or Judith, that since they are not the people who have power in the culture, there's the sense that God, they're still assuming God's presence with them and that God can use what they do. And I think that's one of those strong messages that comes through is, God is using these people who are way, way, way down, whichever patriarchal society you're looking at, whether it's the Hebrews or the Jews, or the Babylonians, or, you know, later, the Greeks, the Assyrians, the Romans. Women are always down at the bottom. And yet there's the sense that even those people at the bottom can count on God using their best actions and decisions, if they're willing to let God do that. So, I hadn't really thought about

that, but it's another way of saying even though women, you know, aren't going to become queen, or, you know, in, over Jews, and have real power, 'cause Esther doesn't have real power in any way.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:56

Right.

Karin Peter 35:57

She's a beauty queen, she's not real queen.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:59

Exactly. But that God is using, is working even with those who do not have power, which I think, is quite, quite empowering and radical, but it's there, throughout the, these stories, because I kept asking myself, and I came up with several, some disturbing answers to why do we have these stories that are, at least part fiction, if not wholly fiction, where women are the heroines, where in the history, there are very few heroines, because women don't typically, aren't given power, but these fictional stories that become very popular, so popular that they end up in their scriptures, why are women the heroines? And there's some, as I said, some disturbing possible answers that my cynical self can come up with, you know, like, almost all these women have, are provocative sexually in some way. And so, it's like, oh, we have to have sex in a story, in a novel, if we want to sell it. So, there's that part, or that women's worth is determined by their beauty and their allure, you know. You could go with that. But you can also go with this awareness that the author may be saying, God is using anyone who is open to God's will in the world. So that's, and that's where, that's probably a good way to go. There's some other possible answers. But that was a good question is, why are these authors writing these novels or stories where women are the heroines when in their history that's not possible, in lots of ways?

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:59

Yeah, and, you know, interestingly, in these stories, God's activity, however hidden it is, is not determined by the structures, right? In other words...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:14

Right, who's king, or...

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:15

Right. There's...

Karin Peter 38:16

Right, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:16

Who has money...

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:16

There is the, there, these women characters in these stories, have the freedom to act in different ways, with, obviously they're bound in structures, but their actions open up different futures, even within those

structures. I think there's a lot to learn from that, because women are still trapped in structures, right. And structures often try to tell marginalized people, you're done. You can't act. We've got, we're controlling everything. And a story like the story of Ruth says, well, no, actually, you don't. And it's the story of Esther, which we'll get to in a minute, that also says, no, you don't control everything. Actually, we are able to make choices that can steer the future in a different way. So, I think that's quite, quite important.

Karin Peter 39:07

So, in it, as I am listening to this and thinking, that when we start stepping back and asking that question, why is this in here? We're talking about people, women, widows, in this case, who are absolutely, as you said, the, without power. These are situations where it's critical to do what you've been telling us all along in our episodes, is look at the context, because if you don't look at the context, you miss the absolute desperateness of the situation and you miss how without power women were in this time period. And in doing that, in missing that contextual piece, you absolutely cannot understand the importance of the, of including this story, that even the very least, in this sense, have a way to engage with God that makes that difference, that brings hope, even these people who have nothing to hope for. There's a way that God's participation brings hope in that, which is what happens at the end of Ruth. And we miss that if we don't delve into the context.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:24

And also, from these stories, you can see something that people involved in all kinds of liberation movements learn eventually. And that is, how to use the structures to subvert the structures. That's a theme within Ruth. It's a theme within the Book of Esther. It's also a theme within the Book of Judith, which is in the Deuterocanonical writings, but is a story we always have our undergrads read at the end of the semester of Old Testament because it's this strong woman character who actually turns out to be really good with a sword.

Karin Peter 40:57

Whom, I'm also wondering, Charmaine, if the reason that sex is the, kind of, underlying element in telling these stories, is a way to get men to listen to the stories so that they would get the point of the stories. I mean, I don't know, that could very well be what's going on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:13

Right, well, you know, you take people, where ever they are and draw them into the story. It works. But, you know, I think that, what you're saying is really important, because it does show that, in some ways, these stories are a kind of revolution. They're planting the seeds of change. And that's what a revolution is, helping people to see the choices they can make. Sometimes there's life threatening risks that come with it, but that there may be another way. And, anyhow, so, it's, they're fun. They're fun to go with there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:51

Well, let's back up and go to the Book of Esther, which is also a very fun book. It's a very, very fun book and very, oh, it's got all kinds of problematic aspects to it, I think. But, again, we're in the genre of

historical fiction. This is clearly a novella, 10 chapters long. You can tell that it's fiction, like, for example, the plot devices of reversal of fortunes, constant, constant, constant, then...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:19

The numbers that are used, there's seven of this and seven of that, and 10 of these. There's 10 banquets in the story. This, not very long story.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:29

And these banquets are like pig fest, man. They just go on and on and on. They're long banquets.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:36

But part of the setting here is Jews who are in the Persian diaspora. So, this, the setting is probably around 486 to 465 BCE, when the Persians run the whole area around the Mediterranean, and Jews have many, some who had been kicked out of Jerusalem at the beginning, and some who had stayed out in the Persian Empire in different places. And here are two people who are orphans, so Mordecai and Esther, who are cousins. And again, these are the dispossessed. These are the people at the bottom of the, they're foreigners. Though Persia was very multicultural, they were still seen as outsiders. They, there's very little identifying with Judah, or the temple, or those aspects of Judaism, but they recognize, they name themselves as Jews culturally, and it's insinuated, spiritually, as well, religiously, and because they do practice fasting, and these kinds of practices that would be seen as speaking to God, to seeking God's help.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:15

But God is definitely not directly mentioned in this book at all. And so, in some respects, it is, the Judaism is represented as a more cultural Judaism. It's not the Judaism, definitely, of Torah observance and of Temple worship, and, you know, but definitely you can pick up strains of, you know, for example, Mordecai gets, as the story gets going, Mordecai's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:43

Go with the story.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:43

Yeah, Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman, who's like this, who's been made, kind of, second in command of the empire, his refusal to bow down into obeisance before him, ticks Haman off. But a Jewish reader understands why. He's not willing to worship a human being. And...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:04

So, they're not that cultural. It's not that just a cultural Judaism. And it's also, there's other things that are deep in them as far as what they, how they think about the world.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:14

It's just that Jewish piety is more in the background in the book than in the foreground.

Karin Peter 45:18

But it's understood contextually. And so, we have to be willing to look at that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:23

Right, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:24

So, the stories develops that the King, who has a bit of an ego problem, the, he wants to parade the queen, Vashti, around in her robes and crown and everything, and she says, not today, you know. He just takes terrible offense, and she's gone. And so, then his managers, you know, his counselors and others in power, say, well, why don't you just go through the kingdom, all these different areas, and just pick out, you know, some of the girls that are interesting to you. And so, because, you know, you really deserve whatever it is you want. And so, he does that. And Esther, who is quite a beauty, draws his attention and is brought into his harem. And basically, it's like, if you sleep with the king once, and he's interested in you, you can stick around. Otherwise, but there's quite a long, you know, there's a lot of young girls who are coming in, that he's trying out, to be crass. That's the story.

Karin Peter 46:39

Usually, crassness is my contribution to the discussion, Charmaine. I'm so proud of you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:44

This is like the Miss Persian Empire beauty contest, only...

Karin Peter 46:49

That Donald Trump runs. That's what it is.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:51

Yeah, exactly, only the judge gets to sleep with all of them.

Karin Peter 46:55

Okay.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:57

So, Esther goes, is part of this process again. There's a patriarchal system, and she could have chosen to not be seen, visible, but does, and Mordecai, kind of, makes sure that that happens. And then Mordechai is there. He's outside the palace. He comes around. He's, kind of, trying to keep an eye on her. He's, kind of like, an uncle, older and trying to care for her, and in that process, he overhears a plot to kill the king. So, he tells the king's folks that there's this plot, and it's stopped, and so the king is fine. And then Haman, who Tony mentioned earlier, is plotting to make sure that he gets as much power as possible in the shadow of the king. And so, he does this whole thing where people are supposed to give obeisance to him, bow down, acknowledge that he is superior to them, and Mordecai was outside the gates of the palace...

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:19

Susa.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:20

...in Susa, outside, on the edge of Susa, actually, refuses to do so, and this really ticks Haman.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:27

So, Haman basically plans out a genocide against all Jews. We wish this were, I mean, in the storyline here, it's fiction. We wish it were just fiction, but it's not, that's not historical fiction at all. And so, Haman, out of his rage and vengefulness, wants to just have all Jews killed and so he manipulates the thing with the emperor to have it, you know, to set up the day in which there's going to be an empire-wide pogrom against Jews. And so, that's where the action starts getting very interesting in the book where, you know, Haman, Uncle Haman, let's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:13

Uncle Haman? Uncle Mordecai.

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:14

I'm sorry, Uncle Mordecai, let's Esther know what's going on and says to her, don't think you can hide. You're Jewish too. And so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:27

Basically saying, you have a choice here. You know, will you make it? And so, she then says, have all the Jews in Susa, bring them together. Have them fast for three days. I'll be doing the same with my maids, and then, I'll take my chance. And her chance, here, is to gain the ear of the king, which is a dangerous thing to do, because you can't go into the presence of the King uninvited. He has to invite you with his scepter, acknowledge you and then invite you in. And, as a woman, to be that presumptuous, to assume that she should be in his presence, even though he has, in the intervening time, been so pleased with her, that she is the queen, and she has a crown and robes and all of that. But she knows that if she tries to get the king's attention, and pushes too far, that like Vashti, the previous queen, she could die. She could be out of there. So, she's, she knows the risk she's taking. And this is really interesting, because what she does is actually what the men in the kingdom do. So, where the king sits in his big room, there's a doorway opposite of him, and he can see out into the courtyard. And so, Haman does this a little later in chapter six, before, after she's done it, but just seems to be what men usually do to be recognized by the king, and you place yourself opposite of that doorway, so that if the king wishes, he can acknowledge that you're in the courtyard. And, but, again, being a woman, making any kind of demand on the king could be unhealthy. So, she, as the commentator in the *New Interpreter's Bible, Study Bible* says, this is the first occasion in this book where a Jewish character takes on power, exercises power. So, she gets dressed up in her robes, and with, you know, all of who she is, she goes and stands to see whether or not the king will acknowledge her. Because here, this isn't just will she be ignored by the king, and told that she's nothing, there's also the personal part. Will she be ignored personally, and what that does to people when they are dismissed or invisible? And he acknowledges her. He recognizes her, and she comes into his presence, and he's saying, oh, it's so good to see you, you know. What do you want, half my kingdom? I could give you that. And she, she's, shows this wisdom. And she says, oh, I just wanted to invite you and Haman to a banquet. And so, why don't you come? She must be a good cook, because he goes

right to Haman and says, oh, quickly, quickly, let's go and, to Esther's banquet. So, they do that. And he again asks, well, what do you want? And she said, I want you to come back again tomorrow for another banquet, and then I will do as you say, and I will tell you what I want. So, she's couching it all, and she's doing what he wants, which is, he wants her to tell him what she wants. So, she's, kind of, building on this sense that this is going to be his idea when she finally asks for it. And so then, what is revealed is that at that next banquet, is that Haman is trying to wipe out her people. And so that becomes revealed. And whereas, as Haman had planned on getting rid of Mordecai, it ends up with the king getting rid of Haman, and Mordecai takes this role of being the second in command in the kingdom. And...

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:21

And so, then what happened, subsequently in the story, is that there's a reverse pogrom. The king gives permission to Jews to wipe out their enemies anywhere in the empire. So that, I mean, there's a lot of violence in the story, obviously, but the, you know, that whole theme of reversing of fortunes, and of using what you've got, whatever that got is, using what you've got to make a difference for the security and welfare of your people is, it comes through very strongly in the story. It's so interesting, the name Esther. She has two names. Her Jewish name is Hadassah, but in most of the story she's called Esther which is connected to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, who is the goddess of sex and warfare for the Babylonians. And scholars will also point out there's also a related Persian word which means "star", right. So, it's not clear whether Esther is meant to be Ishtar or Star in the Sky or whether it's a combination of both because these religious symbols tended to blend, but interestingly, while retaining her captivity name, Ishtar, she acts on behalf of her Jewish identity. And you see a similar theme in the Book of Daniel where Nebuchadnezzar renames Daniel and his three friends, gives them Babylonian names. But even with their Babylonian names, they also act on behalf of, they're faithful to their Jewish identity and faithful to their faith in the one God. So, part, this seems to be a theme in some of this later Old Testament literature that, you know, whatever the culture says you are, you get to be what you want to be. You get to be what you're called to be, regardless of what the culture calls you, right? So, you might be called Ishtar, whichever, which everybody in Persian Babylonian culture knows is a goddess, but you get to be Hadassah, if you choose to be. So, I think that's an important theme for us, that whatever one's culture tells you what you are, there is a freedom to say, no, I'm actually not that. I'll wear that, but I'm not that. So, I think that's, kind of, an interesting theme in this book.

Karin Peter 56:45

Which would have been really important to Jews who were living in a place that was not part of their identity and culture.

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:54

Yeah, absolutely. And where you might not have much control over that, but you do have control over what you will make of your identity. Traditionally, a lot of scholars think that the Book of Esther might have been written to justify a Jewish feast called Purim, the Feast of Lots, which is of uncertain origin. Some scholars think it was a Babylonian festival that Jews in the Persian Empire adopted. But the lot, the casting of the lot, is an important feature in the story. That's what, Haman casts a lot to decide what day on which to have his pogrom against Jews. But then, of course, this is all turned back on him. But Purim is a, an important Jewish festival to this day. The thing is, I don't think you can say that this book

was written to justify that, to explain that. I don't think that's adequate to say that this book came into existence to justify

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:51

it ...promoted. I mean some scholars some

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:52

To promote it. Yeah.

Karin Peter 57:55

Yeah. Yeah. So, you can go on, you can Google it, or go on YouTube and see Purim celebrations. It's a children's holiday, most now, and celebrated with dressing up as beauty queens and having the king select his favorite, being Esther, and you have Mordecai, you have Haman, you eat a certain kind of cookie. I mean, there's all kinds of fun. It's like a, it's an established celebration in a way to tell it that children begin to understand or rehearse the story of their identity, even in captivity.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:32

And it's, but it's a fairly secular.

Karin Peter 58:34

Very much so. And again, YouTube. You can get all kinds of fun, get all kinds of fun things to watch on that, of Purim celebrations around the world.

Tony Chvala-Smith 58:44

And all I was trying to say was that in relation to the Feast of Purim, I don't think you can simply reduce the book to being a story about that, though it's connected to it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:53

It's kind of like an ideology. Why is it that we have the Festival of Pu'-rim (or Pu'-rim') and so, but it can't be that, but it could also be that the story then promoted that idea. The story might have come first and then the celebrating of that came after. Could be the other way around but...

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:14

But there's such a strong element in the story of acting within whatever situation you find yourself to protect and preserve the identity of your people, that certainly was not outside of the purview of the author of the story, right. So, in other words, the author had multiple motives for writing the story.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 59:36

And if we look at those, these two books together, we begin to see some kinds of messages that come through them both. One is, wherever you find yourself, whether you're on the inside, like Esther, or on the outside, like Ruth, whether you're comfortable, like Esther got there, and or destitute, like Ruth, hang on to loyalty. If you're under patriarchy, and who isn't, use it to your benefit. And you know, you notice in the stories, the men are, kind of, quite driven by their ego needs. And so, it's quite easy to manage them, in both of these. So, it doesn't really high view of how, it shows that there's plenty of

room to work within patriarchy 'cause it's not a foolproof, obviously, organization. The other is, another message is, claim your allegiances boldly. Esther, approaching the king for the sake of her people, Ruth, accepting Naomi's God and family and choosing to separate herself from her own world, both tell stories of women who make a space for themselves in an unpredictable and unfriendly world. But even there their faithfulness, and in both of these books it's hard to tell, is that faithfulness to family, to tribe, or to God, or maybe all three? But it creates a space for something else to happen. And that's, again, the idea of providence, that God can use that something else, or that space, to create something else. So, I would say there's some, five good news pieces in these books. Your status, whether it's an orphan, whether it's a widow, whether it's an outsider, that does not determine your worth, or your future. And then, seeking personal comfort or following the rules, or being a nice, quiet girl who lets men make all the decisions, it's not an option, if you are to survive physically and spiritually. The third one is, though you may have few choices, choose risk and change for the sake of love, loyalty or faith. So, it's, you can do this. And fourth, be who you are. In this case, unapologetically be a woman, physically, mind and Spirit. Let all of who you are be and act. And then, the, welcome the help of others. For Ruth, it's Naomi, and eventually Boaz. For Esther, it's Mordecai, and then her maids, and people who are supportive of her, who are fasting with her. And then, trust yourself and others selectively, and God. And then, the last one, the good news is food, food, food. Because in Esther there are 10 banquets, and it's at the banquets were some of the important plotline, the things that move the plotline forward, happen so, and food. If you think about Ruth again, food greases the wheels of possibility. Esther's two banquets, where she gets the king's interest and ear. It's, the food is what drives Naomi and Ruth back to Bethlehem, but it's also Ruth's gathering grain, and Boaz's giving food and caring, as a sign of caring, and sending grain back with her. All of these, food is everywhere in these stories. And I think that's something that we sometimes, yes, it's part of generosity, but it's also something else. It's about what is it we say about maintaining each other? What does it say about the source of where things come from and who's involved in it, in the making and the offering. It's a, kind of, connector that we often don't think about. And these stories, and actually, in Judith as well, food plays a very prominent role. So, just a fun little piece to think about. I'm going to share just for the experience part, and here again, we know that scripture has been used to harm people, and so we're wanting to provide a different way of approaching scripture. And so, the way that we do this, and these, in this experience part of these podcasts, is to find ways to identify with the characters and then see if there's anything that's happening in the character's life that fits for you. And let that be the invitation into the scripture, rather than in some of the other ways that they may have been used as a power tool against you. So, this passage from Ruth, this is that place that I was mentioning earlier. This is where she's trying to go back to Bethlehem and spare her daughters-in-law. And she says, "No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." So, we get the sense that part of what she's saying is, go back to your families. Hanging around with me is only going to get you more sorrow, because God's, my God's turned against me. And that would have been part of the theology of the day, is that if bad things are happening, it's because you did something wrong. And so, "...they wept aloud again, the three of them, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said," meaning Naomi, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you, or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go.'" And so, we see, again, that the, that this is love, this is choice. And it says, "Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." So, where I would like us to go is to think about who in your life have you hung on to or stayed connected

to, even though they, or others, were convinced that God had rejected them, or turned against them? Who have you hung on to who is convinced that God has no room for them, and that God may even be punishing them? And then, think about how did this change their circumstances? And how did it affect your connection with God?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:17

And then, one more. When have you, like Naomi, felt deserted by God. And for many of us, there's going to be those times, one or more times in our lives. And who, if anyone, chose to accompany you through that dark time, and to remember and write down their name, and spend a little time with that thought in the next little while. So, go on to Esther. And we're going to just pick up in that part where Esther says, "Go, gather all the Jews and fast on my behalf," basically, so that I'll know what's the right thing to do, or have the courage to do it, and I'll do the same. And, "After that I will go to the king, even though it's against the law; and if I perish, I perish." And, "On that third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's Hall. And the King saw her, and she won his favor, and he held out his golden scepter, and she approached." And that's when she invites him to the banquet, the first of the banquet and asks him to "Bring Haman, bring him in quickly, so we may do as Esther desires.' So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? It shall be granted you and what is your request, even to the half of my kingdom it shall be fulfilled.' Then Esther said, 'This is my petition and request; if I've won the king's favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and I will do as the king has said.'" and so, then the rest of the story unfolds. But here's a question, a thought and then a question or two. So, Esther uses her robes, her dignity, you can imagine her standing there, her wisdom, her position, her cooking, and her courage to take the next step for the sake of others. Think about those in your world who need someone to stand for them or with them right now, and write down their name or names, or if it's a group, write that down as well. And then consider which of the gifts or tools Esther employed are also available to you. Which will you use to save those, you know, need your help? Alright.

Karin Peter 1:10:30

Okay, so those are really lovely ways to experience those passages. Charmaine, I want to thank you for those, because we can get really caught up in some of the detail of the stories. And it's good to step back and look at how they can inform and affect us in our discipleship, particularly as women, and maybe even more so, as men who sometimes forget the reality of the powerlessness of women, even in our age now. Important, really important. So, having looked at these as our second "She'brew", do you have any last thoughts or comments you want to share about these texts before we go?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:23

I have a couple thoughts about these texts, sure. One is, that hope is a verb. It's not a feeling, right, and hope is acting for a new future, regardless of what you think you've got, or don't have. And, that's clear in both of these texts. And there's another thing that struck me as, especially as I was thinking about the Book of Esther. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, this great 20th century German theologian who was hanged by the Nazis, he said, he came to this realization that we have to, we as Christians, have to act. And this is, these are his words, "...as if God were not given,

as if God were not present. We, waiting around to see what God wants us to do, sometimes is the very wrong thing to do.” And when, what we...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:12:22

When we probably know what God wants us to do, or what's right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:12:24

Right, and what, we probably know what was just and right to do. And so, we have to act for justice on the basis of the best we know, in the circumstances we are, and justice here would be that which upholds those who are weak, or the least, or the marginal, or those who have been degraded, or dehumanized by others. We will find God as we act for them. And I think, in these books that scarcely mentioned God, both of the characters, both of the main characters, are acting on behalf of God, but acting out of their freedom, as if God were not given, that it's, in some sense up to them. So, I think that's another lesson I learned from these texts, both of these books, ethically. And you also can use, learn that lesson from the Book of Judith too which has similar situation.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:13:24

I think the last thing I might say is, wherever you find yourself in the world, and I'm probably saying this particularly to women, whether you find yourself in a time of mourning and despair, like Naomi, at times, where she's given up and she says, don't call me. Don't call me by my name. Call me from my sorrow. Call me a different name because I have no joy anymore. Or whether you find yourself in a place with opportunities that you couldn't have expected, or if you find yourself provoked, or called to take a risk to make a change, to stand for those who most need you to stand with them, to be okay, with, which, wherever you might be on that spectrum, God is still with you, wherever you are.

Karin Peter 1:14:26

Thank you. So, with that, I want to let our listeners know that we will act in hope as a verb and not a feeling as we continue in 2022 with our podcast. But we're going to begin to explore the New Testament, starting with the gospels and the Book of Acts in January. And so, we hope that you will tune in and listen or go to the YouTube channel “Latter-day Seeker Ministries” and watch the video of these podcasts. So, I do have a closing thought that I found that, kind of, fits in with the comment of acting and hope but also the comment of women working within the system for, to accomplish change as best they can. So, this comes from the Reverend Mona West. “As each character makes choices that go beyond the letter of the law,” and she's referring to the Book of Ruth, “that character moves toward more authentic existence within the narrative and within society.” And so, we can thank the Reverend Mona West for her comments there. And until next time, with our episodes for the New Testament, we will close. I'm Karin Peter. This has been “He'brew” with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. Thank you so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:16:01

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