

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**Episode 31****Tell Her Story: An Interview with Dr. Nijay Gupta****September 5, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

In this episode, Matt talks with Dr. Nijay Gupta, a biblical scholar at Northern Seminary. They chat about his latest book, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church*. In his book, Nijay does a fantastic job showing how the Bible depicts women taking up the mantle of ministry, faithfully proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah. In this conversation, Nijay discusses the Old Testament's depiction of Deborah as a judge of Israel, the New Testament's portrayal of Phoebe as a deacon, Junia as an apostle, as well as the so-called "household codes" within the context of the Greco-Roman world.

Purchase *Tell Her Story*: <https://www.amazon.com/Tell-Her-Story-Taught-Ministered>

About Dr. Gupta: <https://www.seminary.edu/faculty/nijay-gupta/>

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Transcript:

0:00 Hey friends I'm excited to share this conversation with Dr Nijay Gupta. He's a professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary the author of several books, including this book right here, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught and Ministered in the Early Church*. A wonderful book, a fantastic read. And so in this conversation I chat with him about a few things in his books, some topics that he addresses some issues that he covers. And it was a delight to sit down and chat with him. I know that you're going to be encouraged by this conversation.

0:30 MH Well on the show today we have Dr Nijay Gupta, who is uh who has written a great book *Tell Her Story*. And it's a fabulous book I've just read it. Let me see there's a subtitle too, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught and Ministered in the Early Church*. Super excited about this conversation.

Hey thanks for joining us today.

NG Thanks Matthew. Great to be with you.

MH Absolutely. This is a great book. I finished it yesterday, in fact, and it was a fun read. It's going to be a resource that I recommend to my students and recommend to friends and family, because I think

you've done a good job in taking very important topics and subjects and putting them in in words that are easy to follow, easy to understand. I think that's a huge asset here because there's a lot of things in this topic that scholars debate all the time. But it's always fun to bridge the gap between the scholarly realm and the pew. I think you've done a great job in in doing that. So thanks for your work on this. I'd like to ask you; tell me the Genesis of the book how did how did the book get started. Why, what, prompted you to write a book on this topic?

NG I mean it depends on how far back we want to go into my psyche and my history. But you know one part of the story is my own Journey. I became a believer in high school, pretty conservative in a Baptist Church. A great church, but very traditional in terms of gender roles. And you know, only male pastors, only male preachers, only male elders. I didn't think anything of it really. It didn't strike me as odd or strange I just assumed something in the Bible about this and I trust these pastors that they've sorted all that out. I always got the message from my pastoral team at my home church that they love the Bible. So this just must be just the way it is. I went to college; similar experience with para-Church organizations like The Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ. The women are involved, but men, you know, buck stops here. The men are really in charge. And if there are "behind closed doors", men are going to be in that room and not women.

Then I went to Seminary and that really exposed me to a lot of other Christian traditions: Lutheran and Episcopal and uh ACNA and uh Pentecostal, all kinds of stuff. I just realized my thought world was so small. And you know I think some people might think, oh you got exposed to Liberal ideas, Global ideas, but I actually got exposed to Evangelical biblical scholars who believe in women in ministry. Before that I couldn't have put those things together. I would have thought Evangelical means this, and you couldn't have women pastors. But then I started to read Gordon Fee and Ben Witherington and Craig Keener and Linda Belleville and R.T. France and Dave Scholler. I just uh started to realize, okay this isn't about letting go of the Bible, or letting go of the early church, and what the early church believed. it's not about giving into culture giving into liberalism. You know, it could be so politicized, polarized and so I just was challenged to study for myself. So I spent a couple years in seminary digging deep. You know, I knew Greek I knew Hebrew I knew Aramaic, and I just wanted to dig in. And what has happened Matthew is not that I just had some epiphany, you know, one day as I was reading. But it was really almost like, I kind of think of like a big Jenga Tower, and I believe this one thing about male pastors only, male elders only, male preachers; and as I read all the scholarship pieces started to come out of the Jenga Tower. There were little pieces, like you know, man was created first and doesn't that make man more, you know, give more gravitas or something like that. Or Jesus only had male disciples. And I started to as I started to read the Bible in depth, I started to learn some of these things are kind of half-truths. What do you do with Mary Magdalene? What do you do with, you know, Joanna and all these other people? Susanna?

So I went through kind of a change of mind in seminary. I went to a conservative Evangelical Seminary. it wasn't my professors who were prodding me trying to get me to change my mind. I would say probably majority professors were on the right, you know "leans right" and on that issue, but it's really just saying a combination of things. You know, what's the spirit of scripture? I mean obviously I want to follow the letter as much as I can. I'm not going to, you know, renounce braiding hair or wearing jewelry. So we realize there's things in Scripture that aren't universal, but I want to follow the spirit of scripture, the theology of scripture, the truth of scripture. And sometimes that means you don't actually follow the letter of scripture in the same way. We don't take medical advice from Paul when he tells Timothy to drink less water and drink more wine. It's always good to drink water.

So that was, I think that was probably the beginning of the beginning. And then probably the... you know that was 20 years ago, probably the beginning of the writing of the book... I would say is a combination of my wife, who's a pastor, and her ministry, in supporting her ministry.

But also in 2019, Beth Moore - there's the incident with John McArthur where he was at a conference and someone asked him with a microphone, 'what are two words that come to mind when you think of Beth Moore?' He said, 'go home.' It's hard to know exactly what he meant, but it meant something like you're making trouble, you're criticizing Southern Baptists, and I think there is a layer of you're a woman and woman belongs at home. And as a professional biblical scholar, Bible translator, New Testament scholar, I have some concerns with John McArthur's reading of scripture. I think he has a good heart. I think he loves the Lord. I think he has some great aspects of his ministry, but on this particular issue I think he's missed the mark. So that kind of got my blood going in terms of, okay I need to clarify some misinformation.

And you know the main thrust of the book is, I couldn't name 10 Christian women when I before my before I went to Seminary. And the reality is there's lots of Christian women in the Bible, doing lots of important things that we would call ministry and ministry leadership. And we can kind of split hairs and figure out what's an elder, and what's this and that, which I try to get into. But the bottom line is, women were out there doing ministry. So the tagline I used for the book when I'm talking about it is, 'we sit around saying what can women do, but when we look at scripture women we're actually doing it' and that should be the starting place.

7:45 MH That's really good. I think you and I might have similar stories because likewise I cut my theological teeth on, you know, very conservative typically Baptist thinkers, pastors, scholars. And very complementarian and very conservative in that respect. And the thing that got me into looking more into egalitarianism and finally subscribing to it, was not merely the arguments for egalitarianism, but by paying close attention to all the assumptions I have been making for complementarianism. And when I began to look at the text and what the text actually said, there were some inconsistencies in the way it was applied. You know, if Paul's telling all women everywhere in all times and places to be silent, did he have a change of mind from before when he's telling you know he's okay with women you know prophesying or whatever. And, just from a canonical perspective, I mean and you mentioned Deborah in your book. It's not just New Testament, right. So I think once the assumptions that undergirded the complementarian position begin to break down and began to not have full explanatory power. That's when I began to look at other scholars and what they're saying about egalitarianism. And it just made... it had... to me, it just has more explanatory power. Is that similar to along the lines of the way you moved from one party to the next, I guess you can say?

9:22 NG With a clear conscience, we often say I want scripture to guide me and not personal experience. It's kind of both. I mean, that's the way we engage. Reality is for example warfare. You can use a lot of stuff in the Bible to justify violence. And warfare...but you know it's the spirit of scripture in our experience of who God is. As the God of Peace, that tells us this is wrong. I've been tracking a lot of conversations about slavery, the abolitionistic era you know 19th century, UK, US, and when it came to quoting Bible verses, the pro-slavery people had an easy path ahead of them, right? You can quote stuff from the Old Testament. You can quote stuff straight out of the Gospel, straight out of Paul, the household codes, Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles. It's all there. And so I've been really interested in how the pro-abolitionists actually won. And they won on the basis of human dignity. They won on the basis of Galatians 3:28, on the basis of Genesis 1, and the way that we look to certain clues in scripture to see

the universal truth of what it means to be human. And in the case of gender issues, what it means to be man, what it means to be woman. And so I think for many people including myself the beginning is that dissonance we feel when sometimes people say, 'oh women make terrible leaders, or women are terrible preachers, or women are gullible,' And that argument was very common before the 1960s, before the Civil Rights era. But now that you have women CEOs, women senators, women academics who are achieving great things, women pastors who are doing great things. And great women preachers, just like they're great male preachers. And it rings hollow. And then you go back to scripture and then you say 'what does it actually say?' And is there more than one way to look at it. And that's not trying to twist the arm of scripture to get it say something else, but to say maybe I didn't have it right in the first place.

And we see this over and over and over again, with flat earth. You know, we at some point in history, Christians realized that we shouldn't take literally the language in scripture about a flat earth. And so it's not, you know, sometimes the arguments made and pushed back against me is, 'why are we just now discovering this?' About women, 'why are we defying Church tradition for so many hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years?'

And that's why I start the book off with the um illustration of the American book, *Hidden Figures*, which is about these women. African-American women, who were "computers". They were engineers, scientists who were part of the Great American space flight achievements. But we didn't know their names until their identities were kind of recovered and amplified. And now we realized they weren't given the credit they were doing. I'm trying to do that in my book, *Tell Her Story*. I'm not trying to put things in there that aren't there, but to recover and amplify what's already there. To say, 'hey maybe what you learned as a teenager isn't everything that you need to know about men and women in scripture, ministry in the church.

13:00 MH yeah and I resonate with what you're saying because I suppose that somebody could respond to you and say, 'well, you are using your experience to go back and reread scripture afresh. It is impacting the way you read scripture.' And some could point to you and say, 'see, that's your problem.' But what's interesting is, what I've observed and many have observed in complementarian circles, is that they do the same thing. Kind of a post-industrialism view of the family where that impacts the way that they read scripture Such that men go to work, they leave the house, to go to work. Women stay home. But that's a post-industrial phenomenon. That wasn't true of all history. Families, a lot of families, worked at home together, and there were shared responsibilities between. So anyway, my point is we all we all read scripture based upon our experiences, based upon our heritages and traditions. and I think that's just a good point to say, because what ends up happening, at least again in my experience, complementarians tend to want to take the 'high ground' by saying, 'we're reading it literally, but you're bringing filters.' That's not always that's not a fair statement.

Hey, a question. Let's, if we could, jump to where you begin in the book in the Old Testament with Deborah. How would how would you address the charge (we've all heard it), that the only reason she gets to be a judge is because there was lacking male leadership. There was lacking male, virtuous, godly man. I've heard that before, and so the idea is, 'yeah scripture permitted her, a female, to be a judge, a leader of Israel, but only because of a bad situation. How would you address that?

14:48 NG Yeah, I mean if anyone's actually sat down and read Judges everything about that question is wrong for several reasons. So let's...you know, I taught a course on judges about 10 years ago and that was really the first time I had really sat down and read Judges cover to cover. It's actually very important book in the history of Israel because it sets up the need for the monarchy. So first thing you need to know is Judges is the darkest, one of the darkest periods of Israel's history. And the whole point is they lack durable, virtuous leadership, but they have they have the opportunity for good, temporary leadership. So

for example, Joshua and after that Samuel. But during that period. So the question is, 'okay if there's no virtuous man, put the woman in. You know, she can be put in the game kind of second string, third string.

Here's a challenge with that. Let's talk about the judges that get more than one or two verses. You got Gideon, you got Samson. They both have massive character flaws. Gideon is cowardly like the Cowardly Lion. And Samson breaks pretty much every rule in the book. He is the anti-judge. He takes Nazarite vow; not supposed to cut his hair, gets involved with a Canaanite woman cuts his hair, right? Has his hair cut. He's not supposed to touch a dead body; hungry, sees a lion with honey in it, touches that. The dead lion with honey in it. And he's not supposed to have alcohol, and he and he's at this Vineyard. And there's kind of an assumption that he partakes given what we know about him. It's a pretty good assumption. So when it comes to who God chooses to be judge, it's clearly not a game of the perfect Israelite.

And look at the Kings. Was it any better for the kings? I remember seeing a chart I think from Logos Software about good kings versus bad kings there's like two good kings and then the rest are bad kings. So God's not in the business of only choosing perfectly righteous people for leadership. I think it's kind of like leaders today. Churches or politicians, some are good, some are bad, and God lets it happen. And we leave that to providence into God's choice.

But let's look at Deborah, though. A couple interesting things about Deborah. Number one is she's the only one that's mentioned as a prophet. And what we know about prophets from the Old Testament is they are spokespersons for God. They speak on behalf of God because they have - they're kind of tuned in to a special frequency with God. And why her? I mean it's a, I would say, it's a check mark in her favor, let's put it that way. It's a check mark in a favor.

Secondly there's certain patterns. And I have this in my book. There are certain patterns of how Deborah's talked about that is meant to point back to Moses. So Moses sits on a seat of judgment, she does as well. And this is kind of funny and most people don't think about this. And it just kind of one of my colleagues made me wear this. The word judge literally means someone who judges court cases, but in the Book of Judges it tends to refer to military leaders like Samson and Gideon. But Deborah's the only one that actually rings true to the term judge. So the book is called the Book of Judges. She's the only one that actually does that. And there's no indication at all whatsoever that she makes any mistakes or does anything wrong. She also points forward to Samuel who also has a similar role in Israel. And Samuel seen as the great forerunner to the kings.

So, first thing to say just summarizing really quick, is there was no standard for perfect judges. God was often choosing people who were, who had military experience or strength, who just seemed kind of strong. And who could lead an army. Or in Gideon's case, who *should* lead an army whether they're good at it or not.

So second thing I'd say, and I feel like this is kind of the first place I would go if I were to trump somebody who was saying that, is scripture actually tells us exactly what it thinks about Deborah. Because she's the only one that gets a victory song sung in her honor. Now it's her and Barak, which is the military General. But even though they sing it together, the focus is on her because it says Israel is facing all these problems until *she* arose, a mother in Israel. And you know that a judge has done the work they are called to when they institute a period of peace. And in that song says that about her, so it's true of her.

Now on the issue of there were no men available. Let's say all the men were out doing whatever. Here's the issue. Barak would have been the absolute perfect choice for judge because he doesn't have to be

righteous. He has to have military experience, or at least the potential. So he would be actually the perfect candidate. So why Deborah then if there is a man ready and available? Why choose Deborah? She's a prophet. She's good at judging. She's successful, if you ever - if you actually read the song of Deborah - and it's called the song of Deborah even though it's Deborah and Barak. Weird thing, it's a military victory song and normally in that time period military victory songs are sung about men. What's fascinating about this song, and you have to read carefully, it's actually about three women. It's about Deborah, it's about Jael, and it's about the mother of the enemy leader Sisera. And she's waiting for her son to come home. She's excited. He never comes home because he's dead. For a military victory song to be about three women is absolutely unheard of. Unless like the Amazonian women - that would be the only thing you think of. Those are indications in the Old Testament that she's a great leader. There's no reason that God shouldn't have chosen her and she's the best of the best. That's good, that's really good.

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22:18 MH Jumping to the New Testament. You know a lot of people will say that women cannot be preachers or teachers because of household codes. Where it says that women must submit to men. That's actually not exactly what it says, and I like how you expand on household codes in your book because you talk about the relationships between the classes. In ancient world and with household codes, it's not easy. It's not so simple to say that in all cases, everywhere, women were supposed to submit to men. Because you could actually have the reverse whenever you had someone have a higher class. A woman, and say a servant in a lower class, the servant male would be expected to submit to the woman. And so could you expand on some of that? Like how are we misreading the household codes? How has it been sort of hijacked, I guess I could say?

23:28 NG Yeah I can't tell you how often these texts are used to kind of say women should not push back against their husbands. Or not speak up for themselves and all that kind of stuff. It's important to know where the household codes come from. If you're listening you don't know what I'm talking about, this Colossians 3:18 to 4:1 this is Ephesians 5 and 6. First Peter has a household code as well. And you might guess if you didn't know, that this comes from the Old Testament. It actually doesn't. It comes from Aristotelian political philosophy. This is not a guess this is pretty much fact. All Scholars no matter what persuasion; complementary egalitarian, Mainline Catholic. All Scholars will agree that the household codes are Christianizing a Romanized Aristotelian political ideology. Then the question is why? Why would they do that? What Christians were doing is saying, 'hey listen, this is the political philosophy of how a household should operate in the first century Roman Empire.' And basically, the apostles in agreement, were going to maintain this system.

So first I want to ask answer the question why, and then I want to answer the question how rigid is it. So why would they do that? I think a big reason is, there's no reason right now to change the system. I think the early Christians, getting Christianity off the ground, they're trying to expand, they're trying to find their footing, and what they didn't want is anarchy and chaos. I mean, think about bailing out another country who is war-torn and getting in there and freeing the people. If you don't help them with a regime change, then it's going to be chaos, right? We know that from experience. And it's the same thing I think with the early Christians. They were a people group; they didn't have a land. So they were just trying to figure stuff out. And I think the household codes are there to say, 'let's modify the system we have instead of just collapsing into chaos and anarchy.' And the system they have legally, I mean, this is the Roman Empire. This is Caesar. Legally, is that the Potter familias, the head of household, has legal control over the household. It wasn't really a choice. It wasn't like. 'Yeah we're gonna let the kids to be in charge.

'We're gonna do this mutual thing.' There were actual inheritance laws involved, their marriage laws, there are all kinds of laws involved. And so the I think the efficient strategy was, 'let's maintain the structure but let's transform let's modify the DNA by injecting Christ into this and the relationships will naturally change.' So I think that's what was happening.

We look and we say slavery. Really Paul, you're gonna say slaves obey your masters? But look at Paul's letter to Philemon. He wants a transformation in relationships with, actually even though on paper there's still slave master, in practice they treat each other with the kindness and generosity of Christ. That's going to make the relationship look a lot different. And so even though on paper a slave is still a slave and submits an obeys to the master, Paul says treat Philemon, treat Onesimus as more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

I think a similar thing with marriage relationships. Okay for this household structure which is kind of like a small business, for that to function, you we need to stick to the to the system we have legally. But, let's transform it from the inside out. Okay one of the things I discovered in my research was, there are all kinds of exceptions even legally to this. So for example, a woman not only could be the head of her household, but in about 20 to 30 percent of cases, households had a female head of household. In that case, she would have no husband to submit to. The slaves would be obeying her. Her children would be obeying her, and she might have 100 to 500 people that work for her. And it's not crazy. You got Lydia in the book of Acts. You have the mother of Mark, where people gather, Christians gather there. You have Nympha mentioned in Colossians, who, what I think of as a solo head of a house church. What we would call a pastor.

Part of my book is that we have to get into a time machine and go back to that time to understand the terminology they use. The cultural dynamics in order to understand little, sometimes subtle things, in Scripture that indicate cultural dynamics that just don't translate to us. Like you're talking about the house... I work from home full time, so when you're looking at me, which you are right now, if you can see me on video you look at me, I'm in my home, but I'm also working. So this is my home, but this is also my office. In the ancient world, homes were also places of business. Not always, but in many cases. And so to say to somebody, 'oh a woman has stayed home', that doesn't actually mean anything about her domestic duties. The idea of women being home didn't mean a lot because many people had slaves and the slaves did a lot of domestic work. So all these kinds of features play into my book of saying, we really have to understand what women were doing. And these household codes don't tell us the whole story.

29:05 MH That's really good. I think that, again going back to what I said earlier, a lot of times we bring our own modern assumptions about what it means to be domestic. Like you mentioned back to the text. And even if you want to take the household codes, you know quite literally, I've never seen those who take them literally, you know... I guess I just I grew up never hearing the background stuff. I never heard the background stuff. I never heard you know about the exceptions. I never heard about why the household codes were even dealt with. But do you think that? And you kind of hinted at this, but do you think that even though they're using the structure of the household codes, that the early Christians are wanting to subvert the patriarchy subtly? And I'm thinking of say Ephesians 5:21. Paul says, *wives submit to their husbands* but in 5:20 he said submit to *one another*. So that's a subversive element. And I know there's a lot of text critical issues between those two verses, and I think the ESV separates them with a nice little heading. You know, not all translations do, but it's clear. It seems like to me that 20 and 21 go together. And so whatever a wife's submission looks like, it should be interpreted and probably in light of mutual submission. And then you have also Paul telling the husband to lay down his life for his wife.

Which is an act of service, an act of submission in a sense. But do you think am I on the right track here? Are their built-in subversive elements there, such that, the Apostle Paul and other early Christians anticipated of this to be carried even further? Such that you don't have the household codes anymore because as you said they didn't come from Torah; they came from the culture. I don't know am I on the right track here or what would you say?

30:58 NG Yes and no. I think there's a level of yes or no, and I think this goes back to Christians need to, today, to be taught how to handle the Bible well. And the way we don't handle it, is by just collecting a bunch of commands and shoving them together, or you're going to have slavery, you're going to have all kinds of stuff. I think Paul did give the household codes for multiple reasons. I think one is stability. I think another is culture within the church. I don't, I subvert, may not be the right word, but I kind of translate that language of mutual submission - if you took that to its extreme it's nonsensical. You can't...I don't want to submit to my kids. To be honest, that would not be healthy. But I translated, I've been working on some translation stuff of Ephesians. I translate as, *defer*, because even though he uses this; even though he uses the language of submission, he doesn't actually imagine that a master is going to submit to the orders of a slave. Because then he wouldn't actually later say, *slaves obey your masters*. What I think he means is, *defer* to one another. Put the other person first. Treat them as a human.

I remember there's a guy named Howard Marshall. One of my favorite Scholars, passed away a number of years ago, New Testament scholar. And he said, if complementarianism followed the ethic and personality of Jesus Christ, it would actually look like egalitarianism. You wouldn't have to argue for 'buck stops here', or a 'man makes the decisions' because you're going to love your bride as Christ loved the church. And so I think I think Marshall is right. That if we're trying to be like Jesus, then you're not gonna do anything heavy-handed. And then you're not going to end up being in a 'I'm the boss' sort of situation. And that automatically, when you are in that situation, kind of presumes a higher intelligence. I think that's one of the big problems I have with the complementary argument. And I don't think people are willing to admit that, but I don't think there's another way out of it. That if you take complementarian to its...If you strip away all the language take it to its essential form, men are greater than women. It's just is. You can't have 'buck stops here', unless it's completely randomized. Unless God just flipped a coin and said, 'we're gonna go with men'. I don't know why he would do that. It's not the way he works in other areas. But then it must be some essential superiority. And I just don't see that happening.

So what I think is, I think the early Christians thought, end of the world is going to happen pretty darn soon, there's no reason to change the systems, but let's you know let's infuse it with Jesus and then lives are gonna change. Lives are absolutely going to change and they did. I mean Paul's hopes for Onesimus and Philemon as slave and master, they actually live as brother and brother. I mean it's crazy. It was unprecedented. It could be subversive. I don't I don't think they're trying to be politically subversive, but it is radical. It is radical and innovative, and it is Christian.

You know, think about this way, is democracy better than monarchy? I think 99.9 of Western Christians would say yes without a doubt. And there's really no precedent for that in scripture. Zero. Now you could say Galatians 3:28, and you could come up with stuff. But then what are you doing? You're operating from a biblical theology that points in the direction of a greater reality that the biblical writers could not have imagined. That's what we're doing with women, and we do it all the time. Is capitalism and free market economy superior to a plutarchy and monarchical economy? We would all say yes. But none of that's in scripture. So we get to that by way of just good sense. The good sense the good Lord has given us.

35:35 MH Yeah that's good. Yeah, I had never thought about you know the democracy analogy. But it's pretty good. I mean it's essentially an egalitarian argument that scripture doesn't envision. And I do like this part of your book at the end. You talk about what you're saying here about, I guess, the apostles, the early Christians really had no way of envisioning these things. They existed within their own horizon of understanding. They couldn't see past it, and so we have to be careful. We have to be mindful of that. I think that's a really good point. I still think... I mean I think for Paul, and the others... I don't... You've given me a lot to think about.

I think subversion still is probably helpful. Not like politically subversive. I don't think they're active in that sense, but I think in a sense of um culturally and wanting to question the system by working within it. Well like you said, putting new DNA into it. You know and giving it life. Anyway good stuff.

Well I want to switch to Phoebe. So this is somebody that everybody should know about, but nobody really does. Roman 16, she's called (well it depends on what translation you use); sometimes she's called deacon, the New Revised Standard Version. I think the ESV calls her servant. Let's unpack that a little bit. What's going on there? like why can't people agree on what to call her? What's the word behind the word?

37:02 NG The word is *diaconas*. And if you just had to bring it down to its really basic meaning, it means servant, or minister. But there's, I you know I teach Greek, and there's a difference between denotation and connotation. Denotation is the dictionary definition. Usually etymology. Connotation is how it's used with particular weight culturally, or in a particular situation. So if I say I serve on a Board of Trustees, it doesn't mean I'm a servant in any kind of lowly way. I'm using the word serve in a very prestigious way; I serve as Governor; I serve as president of the United States. So and then you could say, you know, I serve hamburgers at Wendy's. I mean you could you can use it all kinds of different ways. I think it's the same way for this word *diaconas*. So I actually came up with my own terminology which I use in the book. I'm testing it out. And the phrase I use is *ministry provider*. In the same way we talk about health care or medical providers today, where they provide a service and that way they serve us, their servants. But we attribute to them training and expertise. And I think it was that way for Christian leaders that were called *diaconoi*. They were servants, but we would call them ministers, or ministry providers. And we're attributing to them. Paul is using of this language of Phoebe in a context where he's commending her to people that don't know her. So he has every reason to give her a good introduction that's going to make her sound important. It's just the way you talked about people in the same way that you might talk about me in the podcast. To say, Nijay is Professor of New Testament. Why would you mention that? You are giving people context for who I am and why they should listen to me. And I think that's what Paul's doing. He's, it's called commendatory speech, he's commending her as a leader. He's not just saying she's a servant. He could do other things to say that. This was a known term. It's used at the beginning of Philippians to the Philippians along with overseers and deacons. Or you know, Bishops and deacons. So he's commending her as a leader. We don't know exactly what she did, but the fact he's sending this letter; his letter, he's written to the Romans, with her, (which most Scholars think he is, and there's all kinds of uh evidence for that) means that she's really, really, really, really, really important. And she's not just someone dropping off a package. She's basically a representative of Paul, which is a big deal.

39:44 MH And as the letter carrier, you mentioned this. And a lot of scholars have talked about this. But she most likely would have been the first interpreter of Romans, filled in questions, because she is the link between the writer and the recipient. Do you want to expand about on that a little bit, about her being an interpreter?

40:02 NG Yeah so, she's traveling from Cenchrea which is near Corinth to Rome. I don't know how long that is. A long journey when you don't have a car or an airplane. And she's going by herself or she's the singular representative of Paul. She may be traveling with servants and slaves, who knows. But she goes there; and Paul says she's going to set up shop, give her whatever she needs. Give her Hospitality. She can be there for a while and we know, because of human nature, she's gonna come back. She lives in Cenchrea. So she's going there and she's going to come back. Just by virtue of that, if they have anything they want to say to Paul, like 'hey how dare you say this in Romans 15 or 16. Or you know, 'we don't like what you say about Jews and gentiles in 3 and 4.' They are going to send that information with Pheobe. It just makes sense. And so she's acting as his proxy. She's acting like Paul from a distance. You know we say 'don't shoot the messenger'. We say that for a reason, because people want to shoot the messenger. She's the messenger. She's gonna go back. They didn't have a postal service for private communication. And this is a really important document. Think about the lives its changed over the last 2,000 years. So Paul is going to send it with someone trusted. And he's going to make sure they understand the letter, because she's going to be the person delivering it. And she's gonna... some people think she read it. I'm not sure. Maybe. Maybe not. But for sure they're going to complain to her because she's going back to Paul. So that makes it really important you have to think about a world where there's no Yelp, and there's no Amazon reviews, and so everything is staked on reputation. Right? Paul's only going to send a person that he knows for sure is going to represent him well. And he's going to train her to do that.

There's this guy named Randy Richards who does a lot of work in letter writing in the ancient world. And he gives an estimation. He has a lot of calculations for this. That to send a letter like Romans, would cost two thousand dollars in modern terms. In terms of preparation, supplies, travel all of that. It's an expensive endeavor. It's not as easy and convenient as sending an email. So this is a massive weight that's on Phoebe's shoulders. And for him to... and what people don't think about, is he's in Cenchrea, which is kind of a suburb of Corinth. He has seven eight, nine men that are named in First Corinthians that are trustworthy male leaders like, Stephanas Gaius, Achaicus, and so forth. He could have easily sent men. Easily, no problem. He does it all the time. Epaphras, and Tychicus, and Timothy. I mean, he sends men all the time. So to send a woman I think is a big deal. It's noteworthy. And she is one of his reps.

43:05 MH So Paul tells Phoebe not to go home, but go to Rome, which I think is pretty interesting. I mean in some versions of complementarianism, what Paul has done here and the other stories that you talk about with women, their ministry service, it just wouldn't have been it wouldn't be intelligible. Because in some complementarian circles, women are supposed to stay home. Now some aren't supposed to have jobs, except at the home.

A couple of other quick things. Can you talk just very briefly about 1 Timothy 2, and then I have one last follow-up question. You have two minutes to talk about 1 Timothy 2 (laughing).

NG We should have led with this. (Both laughing)

MH We should have! Is it Universal? is it situational? what's going on there?

43:55 NG Yeah so for the uninitiated, people point to 1 Timothy 2. Paul says, *I do not permit a woman to teach* or something... often translated, *have authority over a man, she should be silent* and then some stuff about Adam and Eve. One of the things that prevented me from writing this book for some period of time was the hurdle of having to address 1 Timothy. Because on just a quick read of 1 Timothy 2 in most translations, it's an open and shut case. I've emailed. I've had emails from people saying, 'if Nijay just

read this text', as if I've never read it before. And you know, so let me say a preface and then I'll just give a quick 30 second.

So preface is, I kind of think like interpreting the Bible with a big issue in mind, is kind of like walk into a crime scene trying to figure out what happened. Like a CSI. I used to love that show. And what you're looking for are the best clues. And the best thing is murder weapon with DNA on it. Like that's just a gold mine. So this 1 Timothy 2 seems like a murder weapon with blood on it; with you know, with fingerprints on it. That would be great, right? That's what you want, but you don't stop there, right? You look around and say is there more evidence? Is there another weapon? Does the person have an alibi? Are there witnesses? Well, if the witnesses point to someone completely different, you know, are there fingerprints somewhere else? Could it be a setup? You have all these questions to answer. You don't just pick up the knife and say everybody clear out we're done. And when it comes to one of these big, hairy issues whether it's warfare or environmental stuff or whatever it is, you can't stop by just pointing to one text. Because the Bible doesn't work that way. It's a big book with lots of stuff in it. so I will say this is a hurdle that we have to cross, but so is Deborah. And for me you can't have 1 Timothy say women can't have authority over men, and then have Deborah, who's in charge of the whole nation. And people are bringing their supreme court issues to her and she's adjudicating it based on Torah. I mean to me; you can't have those two things if 1 Timothy means women can't be an authority over men. God has contradicted himself, and that doesn't make sense.

Okay really quick, a couple things. One is what does have authority mean? It's the Greek term Paul uses and I don't try to play Greek gymnastics very often, but this one's tricky. Paul uses a Greek word *authenteo* not his normal word for authority. It's used extremely rarely in the ancient world, and rare terminology usually means something weird is happening. I have a chapter on this in the book. I go into depth. I think it doesn't mean *have authority*. I think it means some kind of domineer, or to oppress, or to usurp authority. Some kind of negative action with authority. How do we know that? Go back and read the King James Bible. King James, I think, gets it right. The Bible translations of today the NIV the ESV and so forth they're following certain patterns of thinking which I think will be overturned in the next 20 years. I think in 20 years - here's what I'm saying, my prediction, write this down - in 20 years, the majority of English translations including the NIV and the New Living Translation will switch to a different interpretation of this because the scholarship will have now become widespread that this was wrong and needs to be corrected. You can quote me on that. Check back in 20 years.

47:20 MH That's good (laughing).

47:22 NG Okay one more quick thing is, situation. What's going on? I'm not 100% sure, but we know there are false.... I'm not 100% sure what the false teaching is. We know there is false teaching in Ephesus where Timothy is. We know it preyed on women, and we get the sense that women were trying to usurp power from men. And so I kind of think it, like the pandemic lockdown. When you lock down, you're going to create restrictions that aren't normal. And I think Paul is doing that. He's creating restrictions that aren't normal which is why it's still okay to have a Phoebe, and a Junia and a Nympha and Priscilla. Because he's dealing with an issue in Ephesus. He's putting out a fire. Once that fire is out, he will lift the restrictions. That's what I got on that in 30 seconds.

48:10 MH That's super good. Yeah, it goes back to explanatory power. I think that view whatever was going on, you have to you have to say it's situational because that's what gives everything explanatory power. If you say it's not situational, but it's universal then you have contradictions. Which is something you said. And I forget the name of the article, Linda Belleville's older article, you know what

I'm talking about. Yeah – 1 Timothy 2, that was really helpful. Yeah, yeah I read that and she goes into all the history, of even translations. And you mentioned that in your book actually. Super helpful.

Okay last question here. Before I read your book, I mean this is, I don't even know, a couple months ago or something, I can't remember. But I was I think it was one of those days I was doom scrolling through Twitter and somebody mentioned... I guess they had read your book and they counted up all the times (and they took this as a criticism) they counted up all the times we've said, *perhaps*, *maybe*, *most likely*. You know these types of words and they said, see... well, I can't remember what he said, but it was the insinuation...

NG yeah, yeah, yeah...

MH You did not - you're not confident or something like that. Or that your argument is weak. And I remember thinking, 'Oh how refreshing. I'm gonna really like this book.' Because one thing I've just grown nauseated about, is in many debates, whether it's this issue or others, (and I have a bias because I grew up in more conservative Evangelical type circles), I just I got tired of the certainty of everything. You know what I mean? And I just want to I just want to compliment you on this. Not that you need me to do this, but like I it. What it doesn't...

NJ I take any compliments.

49:50 MH I wrote down in my notes, this is a very honest book. And honest because I felt like you were very transparent. You were very kind all the way through. And I loved the *perhapses* the *most likelies*, *the maybes*. Not you know, I love that because I thought yeah this is somebody who's addressing the issue honestly, as opposed to those who are so confident about everything that they can like speaks a certain... I don't know, I don't know where I'm going with that other than to say thank you. Do you want to expound a little bit? On that? You remember the Twitter thing?

50:20 NJ Yeah, yeah I do remember that. And it was a certain term for it, but they make it seem like I lack a real argument because I use a lot of *maybes* and *perhapses*. What I would say is the other side should also use *maybes* and *perhapses*, or else they're trying to pull the wool over people's eyes. And I will say too, I wrote this book as what's called a crossover. Which means it's an academic publisher imprint, but it is pitched also towards a popular mass market. And that means I'm an academic writing as an academic, and we use *maybes* and *perhapses* because we're going to be vetted. The book is going to be vetted by academics internally, and in reviews. And so you can't just say stuff that isn't true and if it's *maybe* you have to say that. So I think there are just a lot of books out there that flex on a false sense of confidence. And I didn't even strike me or the publisher, as something we should explain, or should limit because this is mostly how academic books work. So I've gotten a few reviews that 'he operates in speculation'. This is what academics do. We operate speculation. Some of your evidence should be solid. I love lawyer shows and movies. Some of your evidence when you're making a case is going to be pretty solid, but you're also going to use circumstantial evidence in your favor. And you're going to open people's eyes to other options. You're gonna start to introduce doubt about the other side. That's what you do. It's it's...watch any lawyer show. So I think partly it is just the way academic books work, Partly, I want to be honest. And I'm building a cumulative case. And to be honest, I tell this freely to people, I don't know I'm right. I think I'm right. I feel strongly about it, but I could be wrong. And I want to be clear about that because I don't want to give any Christian in any area, a sense that we know things perfectly. Even my faith in Jesus. Jesus has complete confidence in me. I don't have complete confidence in Jesus. Help my unbelief, Jesus. But you know, I think it's important to have open ongoing open discussions. And I want this book to be an invitation a conversation. And it's certainly not the last word.

52:38 MH Wonderful. Well the book is called, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught and Ministered in the Early Church*. I highly recommend this book to everyone without any reservation whatsoever. It's a great conversation starter. Lots of good information and I think it accomplishes what you've set out to do. It tells her story, and their stories. And so thank you so much. Thank you for being on the show today.

NG My pleasure. Great to be with you

53:00 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a Patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.