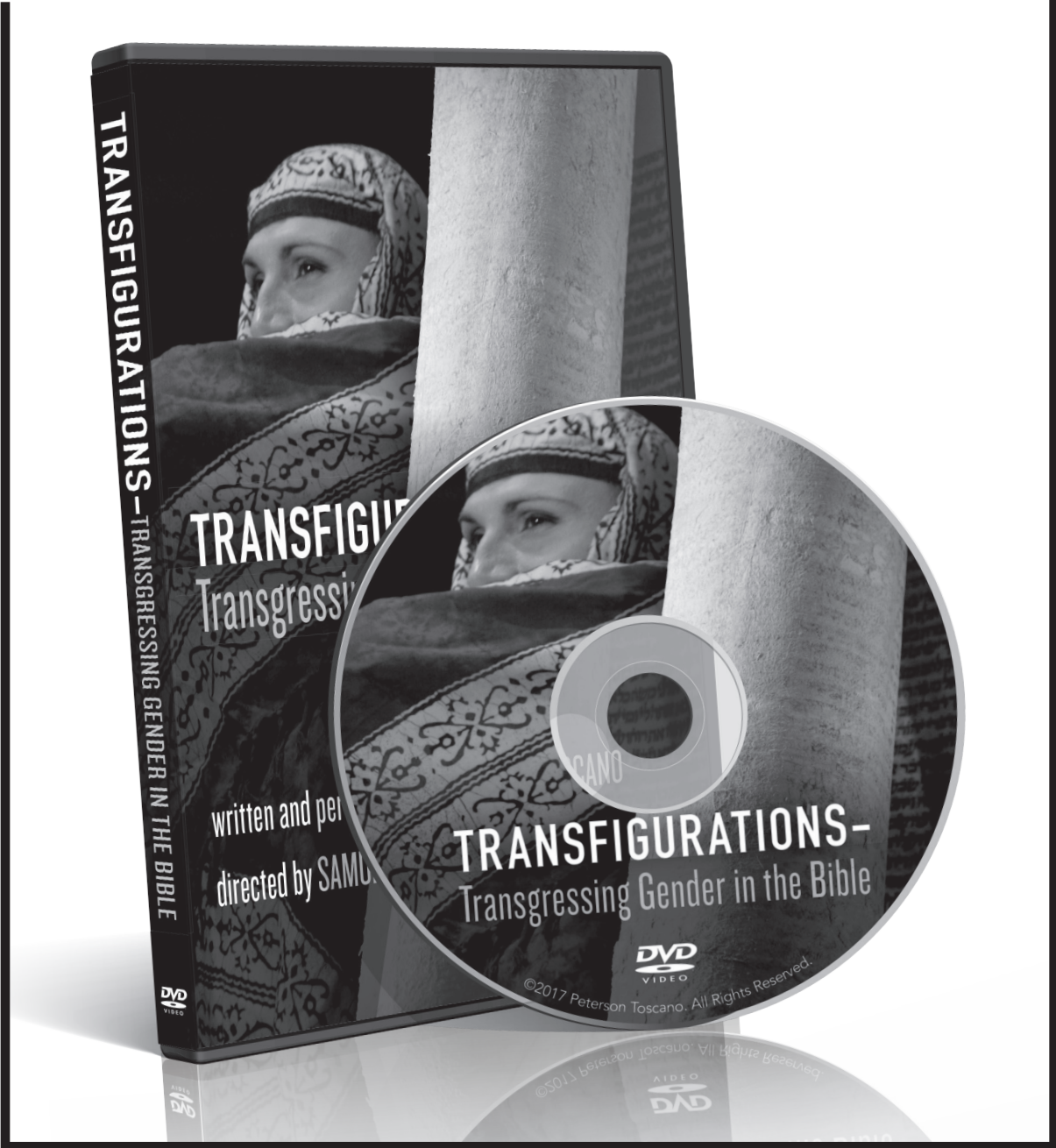


# TRANSFIGURATIONS

## STUDY GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

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What do the words “transgress” and “transcend” mean to you?

In what ways do you transgress or transcend social expectations?

Who do you admire (Biblical or others) who transgresses or transcends gender?

What traits do these admirable people share?

# DEBORAH Judges 4-5

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How do these characters transgress/transcend gender expectations?  
What are the results of these transgressions?

Character	Is expected to...	But instead...	The result of that transgression is...
Deborah			
Barak			
Jael			

## DEBORAH Judges 4-5 (cont.)

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Glory, and the question of who gets the glory of the victory comes up many times in this passage and monologue. It's also important in most military epics. How might the different characters feel about getting glory?

Deborah:

Barak:

Jael:

What does glory mean to you?

# ESAU Genesis 37

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Why do you think Peterson chose to tell the story through Joseph's Uncle Esau?

What do you learn about Esau through his words and through his body language?

Esau initially suggests it is manly to pursue revenge and weak to forgive. He reminds us that gender expectations aren't just who is allowed to wear a princess dress but may include fundamental values and responses to conflict. Considering that, what other Biblical figures might be gender transcendents?

Esau shows us that gender expectations aren't just about who can wear a princess dress, but inform even our core values: according to Esau, men are supposed to value vengeance over forgiveness, keeping honor over keeping family. But now he feels a conflict between these two values as a man's forgiveness has saved them all. When have you experienced or witnessed a clash between two values because of the gender expectations woven into those values?

In talking about Joseph and the princess dress, Peterson references the story of Princess Tamar, King David's daughter. Joseph and Tamar both wear a *ketonet passim*. What are other similarities you see in the two stories? What are differences?

# HEGAI Esther

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Hegai takes on multiple roles as a eunuch in the royal court.  
How would you define Hegai's relationships:

With Esther:

With the king:

With other eunuchs:

With non-eunuchs in the court and outside of the court:

## HEGAI Esther (cont.)

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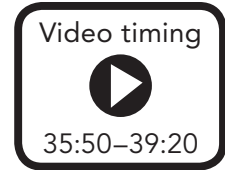
As a eunuch, Hegai (and the other 11 eunuchs mentioned in the book of Esther) are not seen by others in the court as fully male or female. Today they might identify as gender non-binary. Because they live in an “in-between” space of gender—not male, not female, what advantages and disadvantages do they face in a world that is gendered binary, male/female?

We do not learn anything about Hegai’s childhood and birth family but know that eunuchs were castrated and taken from their families. How might the trauma experienced at an early age influence the roles and goals a person takes on in later life? How does this help us understand Hegai’s choices and roles?

Hegai is instrumental in stopping a Hebrew genocide but rarely gets much notice. Who else has an important but overlooked role in the Bible? Is there an important but overlooked Biblical figure who has been important to your faith journey?

## EBED-MELECH Jeremiah 38-39

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Ebed-Melech is a double-outsider—a foreigner who is a sexual and gender minority, existing at the intersections of multiple discriminations/disadvantages. Still this Ethiopian eunuch influences the king. What challenges might being a double-outsider pose to a person in our society today?

God gives Ebed-Melech an untraditional blessing, offering a blessing to him directly instead of giving the traditional blessing of his household. Why is it significant that a Hebrew Testament hero could be blessed by God without having children?

As a eunuch, Ebed-Melech experienced the physical trauma of castration. Later in life in saving the Prophet Jeremiah, Ebed-Melech demonstrates thoughtful consideration of Jeremiah's body and physical well-being during the rescue. How has past trauma and suffering influenced the ways you care for others in your own life?



## THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH “DESTA” Acts 8, Isaiah 53

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This eunuch in Acts 8 reads from Isaiah, one of the Jewish prophets. In what ways does Peterson connect the suffering servant in Isaiah to the Ethiopian Eunuch reading the passage in Acts 8?

In the performance, the disciple of Jesus telling the story never uses a pronoun (he or she) in referring to the Ethiopian eunuch, but rather uses the gender neutral Ethiopian name, Desta, which means destiny and happiness. The writer of Acts does not provide a name for the eunuch; how do you feel about Peterson inserting the name, Desta, into the story?

The dialogue between Philip and Desta is conducted in questions.

*“Do you understand what you are reading?”*

*“How can I unless someone explains it to me?”*

*“Does the prophet speak of himself or someone else?”*

*“What is to stop me from being baptized?”*

How does tone change the meaning of these questions?

## THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH “DESTA” Acts 8, Isaiah 53 (cont.)

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“This story sounds familiar to me.” Why do you think the author of Acts chose to highlight this story of a gender and sexual minority as the first recorded baptism of the early church?

After converting, Desta is “surrounded with sons and daughters” even though Desta cannot have biological children. Family metaphors, of our heroes as parents, as fellow believers as siblings, are present in every part of the Bible (and also in *Transfigurations*). Earlier in *Transfigurations*, Deborah refers to herself as “Mother and Father” of the people. Hegai also serves as a parental figure to the orphaned Esther. Peterson states that Joseph serves as patriarch to his family.

What qualities of parenthood do these characters express?

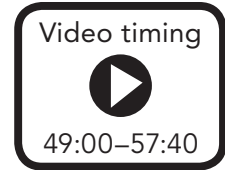
Besides biological parents, who has served as parental figures in your own life?

“What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8, 38). Desta has a revelation that eunuchs too can be part of the family of God. What if someone who looked and sounded like Desta showed up at your place of worship? What might this person experience?

# THE MAN WITH A PITCHER OF WATER

## Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16, Luke 22:7-13

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The Gospels reveal almost nothing about the identity of “the man with a pitcher of water,” yet this person is instrumental in one of the most important moments in the story of Jesus and the disciples. Peterson provides a backstory, and creates the Levi/Miriam character. What stands out to you about this backstory?

Some people enjoy working mostly unseen on the sidelines. Still many times in families and places of worship, key players do not get the visibility and recognition they deserve. Think of a time when you or someone you know was instrumental in an important event yet not fully acknowledged. What difference might an acknowledgment make? What might it look like?

The topic of family comes up again in this story. Like with Joseph and his family, Levi/Miriam experiences rejection. What are legitimate concerns and confusions Levi/Miriam’s father has that need to be addressed? What might you say to this father faced with an unexpected change with his child?

It turns out that by “emptying a room” Miriam has made room for Jesus. How have you had to “empty a room” in order to make room for those who appreciate the real you?

# CONCLUSION

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What are some takeaways you have from watching *Transfigurations* and the discussion about it?

In the addition to the characters featured in *Transfigurations*, who are some other gender-transgressors in the Bible?

Peterson Toscano would like to thank S.R. Davis, Eric Muhr, and Christine Bakke for their help in creating this study guide.

For more information about *Transfigurations*—the movie, visit [petersontoscano.com](http://petersontoscano.com)