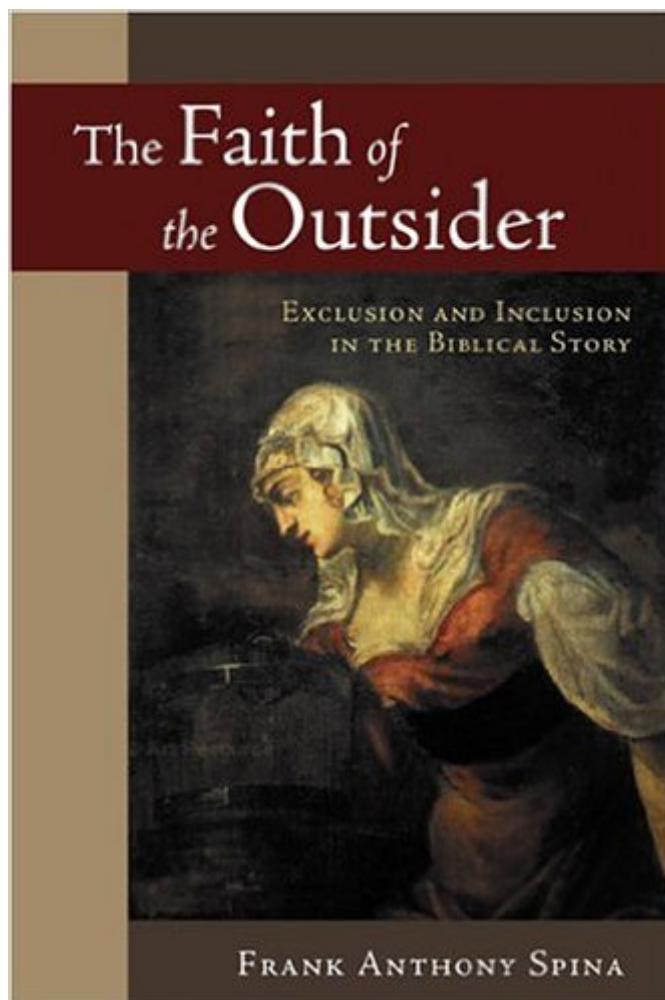


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The Faith Of The Outsider: Exclusion And Inclusion In The Biblical Story



Synopsis

This book offers a probing, insightful look at the "outsider" motif running through the Bible. The biblical story about God's covenant with "insiders" -- with Israel as the chosen people -- is scandalous in today's cultural climate of inclusivity. But, as Frank Anthony Spina shows, God's exclusive election actually has an inclusive purpose. Looking carefully at the biblical narrative, Spina highlights in bold relief seven remarkable stories that treat nonelect people positively and, even more, as strategically important participants in God's plan of salvation. The stories of Esau, Tamar, Rahab, Naaman, Jonah, Ruth, and the woman at the well come alive in new ways as Spina discusses and examines them from an outsider-insider point of view.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For my mother's funeral one of my five siblings chose not to attend the services. After his divorce my brother married an African-American woman and he fretted whether our little church in small-town North Carolina would welcome them. I don't know if he was wise and perceptive in this regard, or projected his insecurities onto others, but the threat of exclusion and marginalization as an "outsider" is a potent toxin for most all of us. No one wants to be an outsider. In his book *The Faith of the Outsider* the Old Testament scholar Frank Spina makes a "close reading" of this insider-outsider motif in the Bible. He begins with the unpopular reminder that it is impossible to ignore the presence of what scholars call the "scandal of particularity" throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, Israel alone is God's elect people: "You only have I known of all the families of the

earth" (Amos 3:2). Israel is not only God's special insider community; as Spina notes, "it is the only insider community." All other nations need not apply. Similarly, in the New Testament the early Christians proclaimed that "no one comes to the Father except through Jesus" (John 14:6). If you excised this insider theme from the biblical narrative you would end up with a slender Bible indeed. But that is only part of the story, and one that is significantly enriched by other elements of the plot. When God elected a single community, Israel, His intentions were categorically universal in scope, that in Abraham "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Those same early Christians who proclaimed Jesus as the only way also imagined heaven populated with "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

Frank Spina belongs to that rare breed of writer who can spin a good yarn and fill it with scholarly gusto, who can keep you keep turning the pages and fulfilled academically. Spina's first of hopefully many more to come, *Faith of the Outsider* not only brings you deep into the mindset and drama of the OT narratives but also challenges more than a few traditional readings. Spina adds a good dose of imagination into his exegesis which, far from bring it closer to iesegeisis, actually brings us to a richer understanding of the texts. One of the primary tasks of the book is to reveal the incredible role that many outsiders played in the story of God. Some of them not only "saved" the chosen family (e.g. Tamar) and served as a character-contrast to the insider (e.g. Rahab) but also demonstrated greater faith in the face of adversity and in response to divine blessing (e.g. Namaan). This book is also a wonderful introduction to characters like: Namaan the Aramean general who asked for two donkey-loads of Israeli soil as a reflection of his desire of genuine worship of Israel's God even as he has to continue his socio-political role as a pagan. Rahab the Canaanite hooker who bargained her way into Joshua's protection and into the people of God. Ruth the Moabite daughter-in-law who demonstrated the kind of love and faithfulness that Naomi forgot could be forthcoming from Israel's God. Jonah the prophet to Nineveh who got a lesson in 'practical theology' from the sailors and the very people whom he wanted (God!) to abandon. Esau the cheated brother who taught his conman brother, Jacob, how to forgive unconditionally.

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