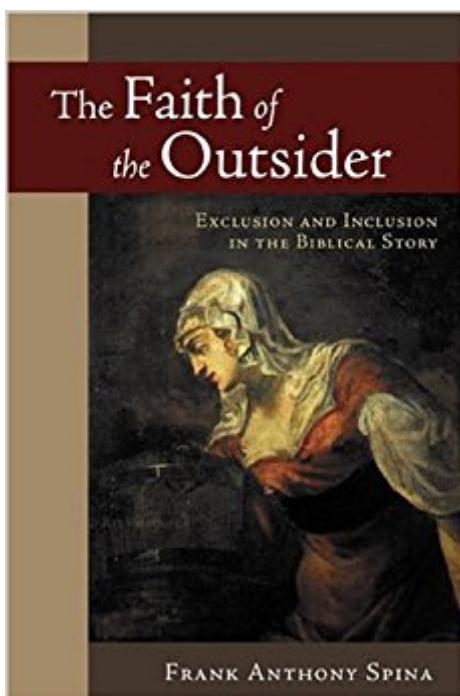


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# The Faith Of The Outsider: Exclusion And Inclusion In The Biblical Story



## **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**

File Size: 1926 KB

Print Length: 216 pages

Publisher: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing (March 29, 2005)

Publication Date: January 15, 2005

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B002AJ9AS2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #536,609 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #73  
in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Sacred Writings > Hebrew  
Bible (Old Testament) > Meditations #73 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality  
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## **Customer Reviews**

Fantastic book for anyone interested in biblical theology, and especially as it applies to the Old Testament. Spina does an excellent job of showing how even a lay reader one might creatively but rigorously engage the biblical text, and applies these methods around a pertinent and original theme, namely engaging "The other" or "Outsider". Plus its manageable size makes it an excellent

introduction to the subject before engaging longer or more difficult treatises on biblical theology, or the theme of the outsider. I would recommend it to everyone!

I really enjoyed this book. The author was able to bring some things to light that I had glossed over for years. Sure Esau wasn't the wisest in his youth but then again who is ? Awesome how God uses the most undesirable to fulfill his purposes. With his strong right hand and an outstretched arm his love endures forever.

The Esau chapter was especially eye-opening. I enjoyed reading it.

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 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 bringing it closer to *iesegesis*, 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 common brother, Jacob, how to forgive unconditionally. The woman at the well who demonstrated more sensitivity towards Jesus' Messiahship and the water of life than the disciples themselves (who seemed more concerned about their stomachs!) - no, Spina's book is not exclusively OT-focused. One of the best debut works around on a theme requiring much more discussion and thought.

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). When we read the Bible carefully we notice how often it features prominent outsiders. This inclusion of outsider stories, Spina argues, is "neither incidental nor haphazard in the biblical witness." These outsider stories often include a significant plot reversal in which the ostensible insider is cast in a negative light and the outsider is portrayed as superior in virtue or faith. In his book Spina considers seven of these stories where the outsider is mainlined and the insider is marginalized--Esau, Tamar (incest), Rahab (a whore), Naaman, Jonah, Ruth (a resident alien who remarries a Hebrew), and the woman at the well in John 4 who had married five times. This book will remind you of Miroslav Wolf's *Exclusion and Embrace*. While Wolf is a theologian, Spina is a Biblical scholar, and the goal of the so-called "close reading" that he undertakes is to read these stories as stand-alone objects with their own content, rather than as a subjective social constructions. We must attempt to understand them, in other words, in and of themselves, without recourse to outside sources, especially the trendy, chic, and politically-correct sources of the post-structuralists. I loved this book about such an important Biblical motif, and only wish that Spina had given us a final chapter that reviews and summarizes the themes in a comprehensive fashion, suggesting some contemporary implications and applications.

An excellent book that has both historical significance, as well as relates to the church and Christians today. I recommend it.

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