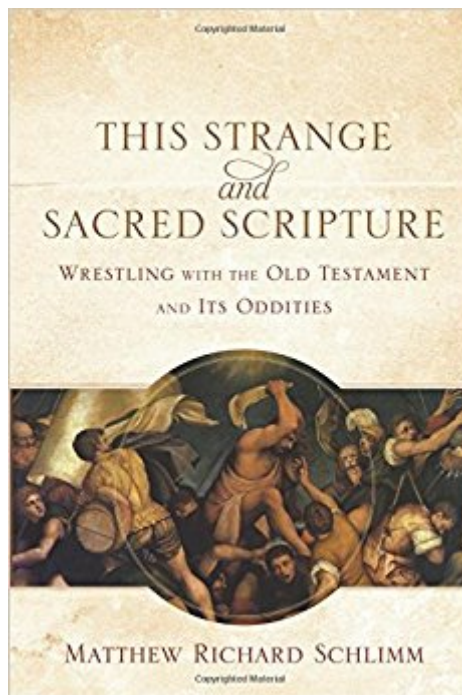




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# This Strange And Sacred Scripture: Wrestling With The Old Testament And Its Oddities



## Synopsis

The Old Testament can seem strange and disturbing to contemporary readers. What should Christians make of Genesis 1-3, seemingly at odds with modern scientific accounts? Why does the Old Testament contain so much violence? How should Christians handle texts that give women a second-class status? Does the Old Testament contradict itself? Why are so many Psalms filled with anger and sorrow? What should we make of texts that portray God as filled with wrath? Combining pastoral insight, biblical scholarship, and a healthy dose of humility, gifted teacher and communicator Matthew Schlimm explores perennial theological questions raised by the Old Testament. He provides strategies for reading and appropriating these sacred texts, showing how the Old Testament can shape the lives of Christians today and helping them appreciate the Old Testament as a friend in faith.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Baker Academic (February 17, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801039797

ISBN-13: 978-0801039799

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #75,834 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #91 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation > Old Testament](#) #212

in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Bible Study > Old Testament](#)

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## Customer Reviews

Named a bestseller in the 2015 Fall Books issue of [The Christian Century](#). "In short, Schlimm has not turned a blind eye to the oddities and problematic issues of the Old Testament. His treatment of the difficult issues will assist laity, clergy, and graduate students who struggle with many of the same questions." -Word & World "It certainly belongs in every church library."

-Presbyterian Outlook "College students and the younger generations will appreciate his candor, as well as enjoy his engaging style of writing.... The book is full of insights." -Review and

Expositor "New and Noteworthy." -Christianity Today

"Some of my friends say strange things and hold strange views, but because they are my friends I can't just dismiss what they say. Having friends who think differently from me helps expand my thinking and rescue me from the limitations of my current perspective. I give my friends the benefit of the doubt when they say things that are outrageous. Matthew Schlimm invites us to do the same with the Old Testament, helps us to listen to many of its notoriously outrageous statements, and also shares with us worthwhile insights from other people who are friends with the Old Testament (and from yet other people who would not see themselves as its friends)."--John Goldingay, Fuller Theological Seminary

"At a time when many critique and marginalize the Old Testament, Schlimm argues that we need to appreciate it as a friend--a friend who is at once odd, insightful, complicated, controversial, and realistic. He is not willing to give up on the Old Testament or its God. This Strange and Sacred Scripture creatively engages the difficulties that trouble interpreters. While some may disagree with the author at points, this book's tone and presentation invite readers to join the conversation about and with this unique friend we call the Bible."--M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas), Denver Seminary

Well written it is an easy read and very enlightening

Helpful.

Great read. Very though provoking!

This is an excellent book that deserves a wide readership. I teach Old Testament at a major school of theology, and I share Schlimm's impression that a lot of people in churches don't know what to do with the Old Testament -- they want to take it as sacred scripture, but are put off by its strangeness. They are distressed by things like the violence depicted in some of the OT, or the ways it has been used to oppress women or deny science. Helping people find better ways through that negotiation is one of the greatest challenges to the study of the Bible today, and Schlimm's book does it excellently. Furthermore, I don't think it has any competition in the market. I began reading it just to see what it was about, but I'm going to have to assign it in my classes. I think it would also function really well in a Bible study with educated participants. My favorite aspects of the book include: (1) its incorporation of multiple voices. The book includes breakout boxes intermittently with great quotations by major thinkers about the topic at hand. (2) Its conversational tone. The book does not

read like a textbook. Frankly, I wouldn't mind if it did, but I think students and lay readers will appreciate the feeling of being in conversation with a wise mentor who has spent years thinking about these issues.(3) Connected to the previous point, Schlimm brings a sense of humor to the topics, which could otherwise get very heavy.No book is all things to all people. This book takes Christian faith as its starting point, so although readers who are secular or of another faith would learn things from it, they may also be confused or left out at certain points. Also, buyers should note that Schlimm is a mainline-Christian scholar who got his PhD from Duke and teaches in a PC(U.S.A.) seminary. For me, that was all well and good, but buyers looking for conservative Christian apologetics will not get that here.All in all, This Strange and Sacred Scripture is an excellent piece of work that deserves its glowing endorsements from major scholars. Highly recommended.

Some people call it the "Hebrew Bible." Others call it the "First Testament." Unfortunately, both usages have problems. Not all the books were written in Hebrew because there were some whose origins were Aramaic. Calling it the "First" testament is also incorrect as it may cause confusions about origins among many. In order to avoid calling it anything that would place it under the same category of the Book of Mormons, author and Associate Professor of Old Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary chooses to keep the title "Old Testament" and to help us explore and to wrestle with issues. Issues like how modern minds can interact with odd events in the OT. How do we make of: A Talking snake? Abraham having multiple wives? Lot's incest relationships with his daughters? Why is the eating of pork forbidden? Violence and warfare? Why God judges Israel and also loves the Jewish people? Harsh judgments and killings in the Old Testament? Difficult ethical issues?The problem why the Old Testament are less preached upon and read is due to a lack of understanding of the issues and how to interpret these tough matters. At the heart of the book is to see the Old Testament as a friend, not a foe. It is to see it as a neighbour and companion, not an distant text. When we see it as a friend, we learn how it can dispel loneliness; how it is fun to be around it; useful; and it makes us better people. This perspective of seeing the Old Testament as a friend is crucial to how we view it. For so many people tend to view with suspicion the Old Testament stories. Others cut and paste passages depending on where their modern sensitivities lay. The question is: What if this friend upsets us? What then do we do about it? Schlimm gives us several tools.First, there us the genre question where we can ask about the type of literature or passage of concern. Is it an allusion or allegory? Is it a narrative or a parable that sheds light on the main point? Is it a symbolic representation or a historical statement? However, pointing out genre characteristics is not an easy task. There are also mixed genres. This

is especially so for Genesis and the creation narrative. Some see it as symbolic while others insist on a scientific or literal interpretation. Schlimm gives us the second tip: theological understanding of the texts is key. How does the narrative play into the whole counsel of God? How does it contribute to our identity, our worldview, and a way of life? The third tool has to do with making sense of the strange parts of Scriptures that are "R-rated." Make sure we know the difference between reading out from the text (exegesis) and reading into the text (eisegesis). We learn that the reality of life is involves the bad been mixed in with the good. It is also a laboratory of life to see how ethics of different kinds play in the arena. We see the world's limitations, the extent of sin, the nature of human imperfections, and God's grace in all of it. Fourth, making sense of the killings and violence involves understanding the purpose of the stories. It is not to tell us to copy exactly the character of interest. We must not simplistically imitate every little detail of what God did or the heroes did. Neither should Christians be compelled to know every answer to every question. Under the Sovereignty of God, we need to acknowledge that the stories prompt us toward humility, toward prayerfulness, and toward a commitment to keep conversing with texts that we may disagree strongly with. The author also shares with readers, Eryl Davies's five pointers are helpful when dealing with "morally problematic texts" such as Joshua 6-11. People dismissing these texts outright as "primitive and inferior" to New Testament. (Just because we don't understand it, does not mean we give ourselves permission to do away with it) Saying such texts are irrelevant today. (Just because it seems so ancient does not mean we cannot learn principles from it) Preferring other verses over the problematic ones. (Who gives us the right to rank them?) Applying only principles (Is the Bible a self-help manual?) Conversing and critiquing the texts when necessary (Davies's position)Fifth, we have tools on gender matters. How can we affirm modern sensitivities over gender equality without compromising on the Word of God which are largely patriarchal. For Schlimm, we should not reject these texts. Neither should we mindlessly use these texts prescriptively on modern settings. Instead, we ought to "recover neglected texts" and remain with the texts as a friend. The sixth tool deals with strange laws from dietary restrictions to rituals; severe punishments to bizarre occurrences. Avoid breaking them into some simplistic "Grace vs Law" distinction as if the old had been replaced by the new. While some of us may re-categorize the laws into what are relevant now and what are not, it is far better to learn to stay with the texts to keep considering them, to keep probing them, studying them, and not become too impatient as to rush an immediate judgment. Other tools include tackling the question of whether the law is engraved in stone and inflexible. Is the Old Testament law still essential today? What about the wrath of God? Are there many sides to truth? How do we make sense of Old Testament authority?I am thankful for this book.

Schlimm knows what it means to struggle with the difficult texts of the Old Testament. While many still verbalize their assent to the authority and infallibility of the Bible, they are still afraid to study the Old Testament as they do not know how to accept the oddities in the Bible with modern sensitivities. With this book, we have a way: "The Old Testament is Our Friend in Faith." Like friends, we do not forsake them at the first disagreement or the umpteenth argument. Neither do we cut away the friends we don't like and paste back only the friends that we like. Like friends, after we learn to journey through the rocky and pleasant terrains TOGETHER, we grow in understanding. We increase in appreciation of one another's perspective. We learn what it means to be friends. This metaphor of friendship is a really powerful way to help readers stay faithful to the Old Testament. I believe that if readers care to read this book, not only will they be given new eyes to see the Old Testament, they would be excited enough to stay with the texts, even those they strongly disagree, and to invite friends to journey with them. Rating: 5 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of Baker Academic and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

All surface discussion. Rarely goes deep into what the Bible (Old Testament) says in context == and why.

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