

## EXCERPT



### ***Bearing God's Name*** *Why Sinai Still Matters*

Available December 10, 2019 | \$18, 192 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5269-7

Carmen Joy Imes (PhD, Wheaton College) is associate professor of Old Testament at Prairie College, in Alberta, Canada, and the author of *Bearing YHWH's Name at Sinai*. Imes is a regular contributor to *The Well*, and she serves on the board of directors of the Institute for Biblical Research. She is also a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature. She lives in Alberta, Canada, with her husband, Danny, and two of their three children.

## The Necessity of the Old Testament Now

In the opening to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C. S. Lewis crafts an arresting scene: Edmond and Lucy Pevensie are upstairs in their cousin Eustace's home, lamenting that they are stuck with him for their summer holidays rather than somewhere far more interesting, such as Narnia. Their grief is sharpened by a painting on the wall—a ship at sea that seems remarkably like a Narnian vessel. Eustace overhears the siblings talking and begins to mock them for their childish imagination. He thinks the painting is downright rotten.

As they stare at it, the children fall silent. Something peculiar happens. They can almost see the undulating waves, almost feel the wind blowing, almost hear the sound of the ship slicing through the waters, and almost smell the air of the sea. Suddenly, they are splashed with sea spray and water pours through the frame into the bedroom. In a matter of moments, there is no bedroom at all, and the children are gasping for air in a tumultuous Narnian sea.

Perhaps without meaning to, Lewis demonstrates the nature of Scripture. At first glance, the Bible is only a book, telling us of lands and peoples long ago and far away. But like the Narnian painting, as we look more closely, it comes to life and sweeps us into its story.

You're holding in your hands a book about Sinai, the mountain where the ancient Israelites met their God, Yahweh. It revisits their story as they trudge through the wilderness from a grueling past to a promising future. Chances are slim that you've ever been to Sinai in person, and slimmer that you are there as you read this. The people in this story lived over 3000 years ago, spoke a different language, and lived by a radically different rhythm, with different values, customs, and concerns. However, these differences cannot erase the fundamental connection between their ancient story and your own. My prayer is that as you read you will experience what the Pevensie children experienced on that hot summer day in England—that you'll be drawn into the biblical story and find that it is very much alive and that you're a part of it—that it's *your* story.

You may already be skeptical about the value of time travel to Sinai. You may be reading this book only because someone shoved it in your hand and said, "You need to read this." If so, I understand your hesitation.

The Old Testament has been given a bad rap for lots of reasons. Too violent. Too confusing. Too remote. Too legalistic. Too outdated. Oh, there are a few inspiring stories tucked in between the head-scratchers. These we like to pull out and hold up to the light briefly before high-tailing it back to the New Testament. But the rest? We might not be willing to say it out loud, but large portions of the Old Testament are not just boring, they're downright embarrassing. It would be easier to defend our faith if most of the Old Testament would just disappear.

An example of this ambivalence comes from Atlanta megachurch pastor Andy Stanley. He enjoys wide popularity, and for good reason. He has a special gift for communicating spiritual truths in a way that attracts the unchurched. He gets people in the door, and he holds their attention. He recognizes that the Old Testament is a significant barrier for many

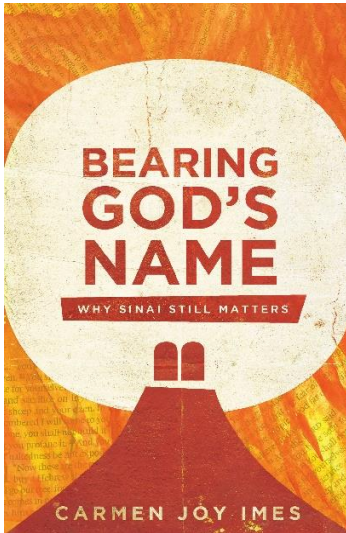


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who might otherwise want to follow Jesus. His solution to this problem is to set it aside. The word he used was “unhitch.” In a sermon on Acts 15, Stanley said, “[Early] church leaders unhitched the church from the worldview, value systems, and regulations of the Jewish Scriptures . . . and my friends, we must as well.” He claimed, “The Old Testament was not the go-to source regarding any behavior for the church.” In the same sermon he went so far as to say, “When you read the Old Testament, when you read the old covenant, when you read the story of Israel . . . you don’t see much [grace].”

But as I read it, the book of Exodus overflows with grace. It turns out that Stanley realizes this, too. In an interview with Dr. Michael Brown a few months after Stanley’s controversial sermon he explained that what he wants his listeners to “unhitch” from is not the Old Testament *properly understood*, but the Old Testament as people have come to imagine it. In other words, he’d like people to leave aside the Old Testament *temporarily*, just long enough to be captivated by the resurrected Lord. Once they’ve encountered Jesus, they’ll rediscover the value of the Scriptures Jesus loved.

With this book, I’m taking a different approach. I believe that we need the Old Testament as Christians, not later, but now. Rather than unhitching, I want to make the case that we should re-hitch to Israel’s Scriptures so that we can truly understand who Jesus is and what he came to do. Without some guidance, we might easily conclude that the Old Testament is a terrible burden to pull and wish to walk away from it. We need an experienced guide who can help us see the enduring value of the Old Testament for the life of faith. I’ve had many such guides who have helped bring the Old Testament to life, and this book is my means of passing along to you their most important insights along with my own. I hope it will change your mind about the relevance of the Old Testament for Christians.

—Taken from the introduction



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