

126 *The Good News just got gooder!*

Even at page 160 of Greg Boyd's 255pp '*Cross Vision*', I'm incredibly excited by what it's showing me. GB is a very theological chap, and this book, as I understand it, is a sort of lay person's guide to what he has written in his 1445pp, two-volume opus, '*The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*', based on his 10 years of study.

Here, I'll try to explain why I believe that GB's view is the *paradigm shift* that I've been looking for these past three years.

Our problem is that we're viewing things from 2020, and we already know, having seen Jesus' self-sacrificial life, death and resurrection, that God is incredibly loving, and desperately wants to forgive and heal and restore the whole human race. But it wasn't always as clear to see.

Think back 4100 years, and put yourself in God's shoes. You want to show people of all nations just how much you love them, and to draw them into a loving relationship with you. But you have a problem – a very BIG problem!

Ask any historian of religion about the Ancient Near East (ANE), and they'll tell you that every single religion saw God/god/the gods as remote, powerful, punishing and controlling, and the only way to have enough to eat and not have all your children die young was to make offerings to your deity, but if you didn't do as you were told, it/he/they would punish you.

You (God) want to convince people *what you're really like*, so you look around for someone who might be receptive to seeing things differently, and you spot Abram and Sarai, who have been trying to talk to you because, unhappily, they don't have any children (11).¹ So you ask them to leave their homeland (12), trusting you to show them where to go, and you promise them that they will become a great nation. Against all the odds, they trust you and step out in faith. Your plan seems to be working!

Sadly, they do a couple of devious things (12), and they have a few adventures on the journey (13, 14), but you send them another messenger, Melchizedek (14). Then their faith in you wavers, so you repeat your promise of making them a great nation (15). Their faith in you wavers again (16) and they try to manipulate the situation, so you again repeat your promise (17) – you even go and visit them yourselves (sic) as three visitors, but Sarah doubts again (18). They have some problems and there's a natural disaster (19) which, as true ANE people, they understand as you bringing punishment; and then they indulge in yet more devious behaviour (20).

It's really not going well! But you're incredibly patient and loving, so you persevere, and eventually, Abraham and Sarah become really relaxed in their trust in you; indeed, they are so relaxed that they finally conceive (21)!

In order for them to begin to see *what you're really like*, you have to wean them off their ANE ways, which is difficult because it's so ingrained in their thinking, so you tell Abraham to go off and sacrifice his beloved, long-awaited son Isaac as a burnt offering (22). What?!!

¹ Numbers in brackets refer to chapters of Genesis.

Why in heaven's name did Abraham – even for one *second* – agree to do this? (I wonder if he told Sarah, “I’m just popping out, dear...”!) This is just unbelievable, isn’t it? Well, maybe it’s not! It just goes to show that while Abraham had great faith, he totally accepted the ANE mindset. He still had no idea *what you’re really like*.

I can only suppose that Abraham thought, “Well, I trusted God and he gave me Isaac. If I continue to trust him, I guess he’ll give me another son to replace Isaac.” What an amazing man of faith! That’s why Abraham is so special to Jews and to Christians – and I guess to Muslims, too – because he pointed the way from ANE thinking towards a faith that is based on a loving relationship.

And it’s not just Abraham; the ANE mindset is there right the way through to Moses and beyond. You patiently try to wean them off, but it’s a long, slow, uphill battle, to change people’s views of *what you’re really like*, especially as you’re determined to do it only by loving influence.

What’s more, the story of Abraham and the story of your centuries of patient work in trying to wean people off a sacrificial, punishment-based view had to be recorded by *people with an ANE mindset*. (Serious problem!)

Your only solution (other than lobotomising the authors) was to inspire them in their writing, so you drop hint and after hint after hint about your love. Those clues, like a trail of breadcrumbs, are laid, ready for people in later generations to follow. OK, they are hidden amidst an ANE-centred view of God, but they are there for those with the eyes to see! Truly the Scriptures are God-breathed!

Imagine: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” ... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Hallelujah! Truly, this really is **Good News!**

All sorted now? Nope! Your job continues. All went well for the first two or three centuries, but as the church gained in power, gradually the ANE thinking began to reassert itself, and it has been used ever since to justify a punishment-based view of God.

And in the 21st century? Is it possible, like Abraham, to have *really strong faith* and yet still think of God in ANE terms? Sadly, yes, I did so for 50 years. I knew something was wrong; I was unhappy with my faith, and now I know why.

Food for thought?

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