

## 294 *Shining like stars III*

I was powerfully struck by Brad Jersak's chapter 3, 'Freedom or love?' in his *A more Christlike God*, and I tried and failed to write about it. Our group study of Philippians 2 then helped my thinking to move on. Paul is concerned<sup>[1-18]</sup> that Christians should 'shine' – their behaviour should be Christ-like = self-sacrificing love.<sup>[6-11]</sup>

Add to that 'if you've seen me, you've seen the father',<sup>[Jn 14:9]</sup> and <sup>[6-11]</sup> becomes not just a helpful example: it's an actual definition of **what God is really like**. And this gives us a firm foundation for asking of any Scripture, 'What's this all about?' because if our view of a given verse/verses pictures God as anything other than a self-sacrificing-Jesus-like God, then we must have misinterpreted it. (That's my view, anyway.)

Cut to the chase: some OT passages say things like, 'And God told them to slaughter every man, woman and child' = genocide, pure and simple! And those passages are there – so do we just chop them out? Or do we ditch the OT altogether? But if we follow the way of Jesus, we can't, because Jesus, who knew his Bible (OT), said that not the least bit should be removed and, 'I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them.'<sup>[Mt 5:17,18]</sup>

Here's how I see it. In Abraham's day, people were petrified of 'the gods' and tried to placate them with sacrifices. Even Abe really thought that God wanted him to sacrifice (kill: stick a dagger into and burn) his own son! Clearly, God-who-is-like-Jesus had a long road ahead to re-educate humankind. (I think theologians call it 'progressive revelation'.)

Sorry, but the OT writers all had an incomplete view of what God was like but, thankfully, God inspired them to also think and say things that would point us in the right direction. And they did write about a loving and merciful God, e.g. Moses: '...showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.'<sup>[Ex 20:6]</sup>

OK, along comes Jesus – pure, uncondemning love – no wonder people were irresistibly drawn to him because they (especially the down-trodden) had been brought up on a diet of, 'God will condemn you unless you...' from the (well-meaning) Scribes and Pharisees.

Long story short: Jesus dies, comes back to life, bodily disappears (ascends), and the disciples then try to come to terms with (a) what has just happened (wow!) and (b) Jesus' teaching, which they have been orally remembering and sharing.

Imagine their excitement ('Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the Scriptures!') when they realised that God-who-is-like-Jesus had seeded the OT with hundreds of verses that pointed to exactly what they had just seen with their own eyes. No wonder the good news spread like wildfire. This self-sacrificing-Jesus-God, who is now Jesus the King (that's how Tom Wright translates 'Jesus Christ'), is the self-same God of the OT. Wow!

(Oh, I've not got to Brad's thing. Sorry, I'll try again tomorrow.)