

### 347 Do we learn from history?

Have you ever experienced the love of God? I'm sure you have, or you probably wouldn't be reading this; I certainly have in the past few exciting years. Do you want to share that love with others? Who wouldn't?! Do you experience any barriers to sharing that love? How about (1) the image of God in the OT and (2) the image of God that Christians have portrayed over the centuries by their (our!) behaviour?

I've argued previously that the OT is essential because Jesus came to fulfil it, and it was the only documentation the early church had when God used them to turn the world upside down. When Jesus came into the world as a vulnerable baby, lived and died, and was raised, the way they viewed the OT changed. But the Pharisees (including Saul, before he became Paul) still thought it was about what you have to do to be acceptable to God.

The OT is a collection of various sorts of literature: I still believe it's all inspired by God, but I now see it more as the history of a developing relationship, from the loving start – which went horribly pear-shaped (apple-shaped?) – through many centuries, as God led the people and they demonstrated 101 ways to mess things up.

I know that 'what we learn from history is that we *never* learn from history' – but we must!

So in the OT I see a *developing* view of God, from a war-like figure in Abraham's day. And the fulfilment was Jesus showing how self-sacrificing love conquers evil, the realisation that set the world alight.

From personally knowing God-Jesus they must have realised that things like, 'God told them to go into the land and kill every man, woman and child' must be a reflection of the writer's view of God, not a literal account of a voice from heaven.

God was inspiring the writers, yes, but you can't change people's minds overnight; as history shows, change is glacial. We know what the OT *says*, but what was God wanting to *communicate*?

My second stumbling block, the really bad behaviour of Christians (then and, sadly, now), is linked to misinterpreting the OT. So the antidote to an over-literal view is to interpret it in the light of what Jesus is like, e.g. spirit, not letter.

What I was taught as a new Christian [caricature alert] was that the resurrection *proves* that what Jesus said was true. He said he fulfilled the OT, so the OT is 'true'; we then have to convince others of this truth.

I now believe in, have faith in, trust, the person *behind* the Bible. And I seek to learn from the way that relationship developed throughout history; and that must form my mind as to how best to relate to God and to one another today.

To me, the gospel is the (his)story of Jesus in fulfilment of the history of the people of God – we must learn from that.