

OpenTheo

#9 Old Testament violence, Andy Stanley and Greg Boyd

March 12, 2019



Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Tom responds to listener Qs on Andy Stanley 'unhitching' Christianity from the Old Testament, the historicity of the Exodus, and the way that Greg Boyd interprets violent portraits of God in 'The Crucifixion Of The Warrior God'.

For prize draws, bonus content and to ask a question sign up at www.askntwright.com

For a 20% discount on The Bible For Everyone go to <https://spckpublishing.co.uk/the-bible-for-everyone> and enter discount code NTRIGHT at checkout.

For podcast listener discounts on Tom's video courses www.ntwrightonline.org/askntwright

For Unbelievable? with Greg Boyd & Paul Copan debating Old Testament warfare and violence:

<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Greg-Boyd-Paul-Copan-debate-Old-Testament-violence-and-Boyd-s-new-theology-in-Crucifixion-Of-The-Warrior-God>

<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Boyd-Copan-pt-2-debating-Amalekite-destruction-Ananias-and-Sapphira>

Subscribe to the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast via PodBean, iTunes or RSS Feed

Transcript

[Music] Welcome back to the show. I'm Justin Bryley, sitting down with Tom Wright once again to ask your questions. We began this podcast at the end of 2018 and I'm pleased to say we've already had well over 100,000 downloads of the podcast.

Many video views too over at the website. Thank you everyone who's been downloading the show, sharing it with others and I just got done recording some great further editions of the podcast with Tom. So we've got so much great material coming your way soon.

Just a reminder the show is brought to you by Premier in partnership with SBCK and NT

Wright online. I just want to say thanks to everyone also who's been rating and reviewing the podcast. We do have five stars out of five on iTunes and lots of great comments there.

Here are some of the recent ones. David said so grateful to hear such wisdom. I've listened to several of NT Wright's lectures.

Now here's the chance to get down to everyday Christian living. Thank you. Martin comments excellent podcast Tom Wright is always worth listening to.

Another says really superb, informative, inspiring and challenging in the sense of opening my mind to what the scriptures actually say and how to interpret them correctly within the context of their era. Highly recommended and Chris writes Tom Wright is always worth listening to and the podcast has excellent food for thought. What I didn't expect was that as well as shedding light on his view of scripture we learn more about him.

He plays Bob Dylan on the guitar and does so at the end of the first episode yes and he has done that on a few more episodes since and we've got more from the playbook of Tom Wright for you in coming editions of the programme. In fact Tom was joking with me that he may soon start running out of his back catalogue of material to share on the podcast but hey maybe we'll persuade him to bring his trombone in next time but I'm really looking forward to sharing some more great material here on the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast. Do leave a comment and a rating wherever you get your podcast from if you've time it does help people to discover the show and share it also on social media if you can Facebook, Twitter etc it all helps.

If you want more episodes updates or indeed any of the bonus content from the programme again AskNT Wright.com is the place to go plus anyone who's signed up to the newsletter by the end of March also gets automatically entered into the prize draw for one of three signed copies of Tom's translation of scripture the bible for everyone. Tom's translated the whole of the new testament and John Golden Gay has done the Old Testament which is quite relevant for today and you'll hear why. So do sign up now for the bonus videos the prize draw the newsletter and of course to ask a question that's all available at askNT Wright.com. Well it's a great joy to be joined again by Tom Wright, NT Wright as he's known in some of his more formal writings for another set of recordings where we're going to be attacking all kinds of interesting questions that have been sent in.

Tom thank you for coming in again. Thank you my pleasure to be with you. We're ready with our biscuits our fruit, our bananas our coffee.

It's all fueling us for what look like a really interesting range of questions and we're going to be covering all kinds of things in future podcast episodes including Genesis and science, pastoral questions, personal questions, the resurrection, loads of interesting stuff to come but we're starting it off with the Old Testament which I find especially among skeptics and people who have objections to Christianity often gets turned to when they want to say look at the god you worship. This comes up time and again on my other podcast show

Unbelievable Issues Around Old Testament Warfare Violence and so on. And there's a lot of questions that have come in from various people and we're going to get to some issues around a theologian called Greg Boyd who may be familiar to many who's written an interesting piece on this lately but let's start Tom with Gray in Charlotte North Carolina and also Alex in Los Angeles who both want to ask about Andy Stanley.

You may not be very familiar with him but here's Gray who says Andy Stanley a popular mega church pastor and author in the United States has recently published a book and given multiple talks to church leaders about the need for Christians to unhitch their faith from the Old Testament. He claims that we do not need the Old Testament in order for us to have a Christian faith because our faith rests on a historical event, the resurrection and not on the authority of an ancient book. What do you think about this proposal? Is this pseudo-marcianism and you can explain who Marcid is in a moment? And Alex also asked a very similar question.

What do you think of that new book by understanding irresistible calling the modern church to decouple or unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament/Old Covenant? So well first I don't know the book and I've actually never heard of this person until you sent me these questions so I can't keep up with all the different things that pop up in America and of course there's a sort of an equal and opposite because there are some churches in America where every last word of the Old Testament is deemed to be load-bearing theologically so it's kind of equal and opposite and it may be for all I know that this man who's written the book is in reaction against those who say that unless Eve ate the apple on a certain time of a certain day then our whole faith collapses and he's just saying look for goodness sake leave that behind and go with Jesus in the resurrection and of course Jesus in the resurrection that's what Paul talks about on the area of because that's in Athens Paul didn't go back to the Old Testament at that point however Paul himself when he sums up his gospel in first Corinthians 15 verses 3 and following he says the Messiah died for us since in accordance with the Scriptures and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and when he's explaining to the Corinthians what the resurrection is all about he draws on some 110 some 8 some 2 he draws on Daniel he's pulling together all sorts of scriptural resources my Ziah etc and particularly actually also from Genesis 1, 2 and 3 first Corinthians 15 has a whole lot of that there so saying you can uncouple that's pretty difficult that's rather like you know in the Merchant of Venice Shilocks being given a pound of flesh but he's then told he can't take any blood and game off is it pseudo-marsianism as well well sort of Marcian was the second century heretic based in war and Rome who taught that the Old Testament God was different from the New Testament God and that it's a form of dualism and one can see at a surface level why because there are bits of the Old Testament which don't look like some of what we find in the new will come back to that but here's the point Matthew and Mark and Luke and John in the very different ways that they write their gospels they tell the story of Jesus as the climax of the Old Testament you know they do it in subtle ways but it's there all through Matthew perhaps most obviously all this happened that it might be fulfilled if you try and strip that out of Matthew you won't be left with much which is why Marcian only had Luke and he didn't like all of Luke either and he

only had then had Paul and he didn't like all of Paul either because the early church is a Jewish movement whose whole resonant Etrus is that what's happened in Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture now it's not the fulfillment in the sense that Scripture gives you this great mountain and Jesus's just little can on the top it is something new which also challenges the way that Scripture was being read as we see with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus but Jesus doesn't say on the road to Emmaus oh foolish ones and slow of heart you were living in that silly old Old Testament let me tell you something news happening he said you weren't reading it right and that's the big difference and so I haven't read this man he may be being misrepresented by the question I may be misjudging him I don't want to judge him but I want to say the church has always struggled with living with the Old Testament different strategies for doing that have been tried from time to time but that struggle continues and I don't think it's going away we will come to some of those big issues around the picture of God painted in certain parts of the Old Testament in a moment but Stu in Australia has a different question he says I've heard many theories regarding the historicity of the exodus ranging from the account being 100% historical to 100% mythical and everything in between more recently he says Richard Friedman has proposed an interesting take that it was the Levites only that escaped migrated out of Egypt do you have a take on it do you think two million plus Israelites escaped Egypt and entirely replaced the local Canaanite locals do you think the number might have been less was it just the Levites love to hear your thoughts okay Tom we it is called ask and to write anything absolutely no these are great questions I should say professionally speaking I'm an ancient historian from 200 BC to 280 whenever the exodus happened it's a long time before that so I do not claim to be up to speed I haven't read the recent research on this I do remember from years ago running into questions about the date and the root and the numbers etc did they go this way that way how long was it and so on and there's no doubt in my mind that the account in the book of exodus has been written up with considerable theological and literary artistry but like the gospels that doesn't mean it didn't happen just that the book of exodus is not giving us and no serious readers should assume it does a kind of what you'd have seen with a television camera perched on the edge of the pyramids actually as I talked to watch them all go it's not that sort of a book but that doesn't mean that nothing happens we in our culture really struggle with this we we think it must either be all absolutely exactly as it happened or it's all a lie and people wobble on that and really you don't need to you need to learn to read the Pentateuch the first five books as a whole see the story that's being told and then the real focus is on rescue and law and presence and the rescue from Egypt it's very emphatic that the people of Israel know themselves to be the rescued slaves the freed slaves that's just deep in the Jewish DNA how that got there if there wasn't an exodus I have no idea but then also the giving of the law something happened which they all construed as a meeting with the one true god but the giving of the law wasn't so now you'll know how to behave it was because I want to come and live in your midst and for that you need to be sorted out because you're messed up at the moment and those things again are deep in the ancient Israel DNA long before the time of king David and Solomon and I'm not sure how they got there if there wasn't in fact something like this going on now that's a very general thing I do not know about the numbers I gather there

are different theories about what the meaning of some of these ancient Hebrew words for numbers may be I confess I couldn't count up to a thousand in ancient Hebrew if you put me on the spot I more or less recognize the words when I'm reading them but so I wouldn't claim to know about that but I think please let's look at what the story is actually saying and not at not getting stuck on the tiny details yes again I would recommend as well Stu for a bit more and for at least just one perspective on this from both a Christian and a skeptic I did a very interesting program with Ted Wright of epic archaeology unbelievable looking at different theories around the exodus and that sort of thing but I'll leave that in the night when I was originally studying I found Old Testament archaeology absolutely fascinating and for for a few weeks I thought wow maybe I should spend my life doing this and so I kind of look at that stuff rather like one one looks at somebody with whom one was fleetingly in love you know yeah that was really nice what does seem to happen they're rather like the New Testament from what I see archaeological discoveries tend to confirm rather than disconfirm yes that's that case can be overstated you know somebody gave me when I was young a book called the Bible House History the subtitle of something like archaeology confirms the book of books so we found the flood and we found this and we've gone that and the answer is yeah actually there's quite a lot of that but there are always more questions of course archaeology is only ever a tiny bit of the evidence you know I said to the students yesterday in my seminar we're still waiting for them to dig up two Philippians or three Corinthians I'd like to know what Paul said about such the the the the ending of Mark or something like that yes absolutely we can get there for like yes well we'll do that in a later podcast actually someone's got a question on that okay let's let's turn to this very serious issue which is the warfare passages especially violence in the Old Testament we'll come to the Greg Boyd sort of perspective on this in a moment but for now Coburne into Coma Washington asks what are your thoughts on the conquest of Canaan and the instructions from God to his people to kill women and children in the process I've always struggled to reconcile this what looks like genocide with the mission of God's people being to love and serve the world loved to hear how you've wrestled with that and what wider lens context or perspective you might have on the matter and John asked the similar question in it briefly how do you explain the horrific Old Testament accounts of God's judgment in the light of the New Testament change of emphasis yeah yeah I wouldn't quite say the New Testament change of emphasis because that rather implies that what you have right through the Bible is a set of moral examples and it's quite clear in many parts of the Old Testament that the story is not being told in any way as a moral example as this is how you ought to do it goes and that of course that comes to a low point at the end of the book of Judges with those horrific stories which one hopes that nobody under the age of 21 would ever read but I'm sure they do and so it's partly a matter of learning to read the Bible in terms of the whole sweep and then it isn't a matter of oh well the Old Testament says it's okay to do genocide and then Jesus says it isn't it doesn't work like that and I think all of this comes down to the fact that when God makes the good creation he calls humans to be his partners in making creation what he wants it to be and that's kind of built into Genesis one and two this is a world designed to work when humans are reflecting God's stewardship into the world when the humans rebel God doesn't say oh well goodness now that they

rebel we can't have humans involved with my plan I have to do something quite different God sticks with the original plan which means that when he calls Abraham Abraham as he still is then God calls somebody who he knows God knows and the narrator of Genesis knows is a very mixed up character I mean the story of Abraham oscillates from great moments of faith and obedience to disastrous moments of getting it wrong and cowardice and getting everything upside down inside out so faith one minute and apparent unbelief the next and then back to faith the next and so the idea that Abraham is this great hero of faith you know when I was younger people would give me books on the great men of faith and women of faith in the Old Testament as though the stories were all simple yes going from one heroic thing to another and you only have to think of David and Solomon and so on to see no they're not like that actually so that right from the start God's Israel shaped plan the Abraham and onwards plan if you like has built into it the fact that odd things are going to happen which is something which God is eventually going to have to take responsibility for and that's why I think the Old Testament as it stands remains deeply deeply ambiguous and actually I think it's one of the things Jonathan Sachs was exploring in his recent book Not in God's Name where you get the Isaac and the Ishmael story and he points out that the Hebrew words that are used are designed to push the reader's sympathy all onto Ishmael even though we know that Isaac is the one who's going to come out smiling at the end of the day and likewise as Jacob and Esau it's as though the writers of Genesis and the other books are saying this was how it had to be but there's a deep ambiguity built in and I think the Canaanite stuff is the most obvious example of that but then when you read it from a Christian lens part of the meaning of the cross of Jesus it seems to me is that the four gospels tell the story as this is how the whole story of Israel and the world gets funneled down onto one point and it'll only work you can only understand it if you say this isn't just the story of a first century human being called Jesus this is the story of God himself taking responsibility because he's made a world in which this was the only way that things could be dealt with and now he's he's bearing it all himself that I find not a comfortable thing but then the cross is never meant to be a comfortable thing but it's a way of saying when I see the story whole and all the multiple tragedies you know the Canaanite women etc and I see Mary at the foot of the cross and the sword will appear so soul also etc that there's something whole about that which then with the resurrection says and now that's been done and we are starting a new world and the book of Acts is not about the church going out with swords and staves to beat everybody up it's about a different kind of mission entirely. They ask and to write anything podcast is brought to you by Premiere in partnership with SBCK and NT Wright online. SBCK Tom's UK publisher have recently released a very exciting project The Bible for Everyone a fresh translation of scripture by John Goldenay and Tom Wright it's a really insight for them very readable translation of scripture and with an exclusive podcast listener discount on it if you go to sbckpublishing.co.uk look for the Bible for everyone and enter this at the checkout NT Wright in capital letters all one word as well that's NT Wright in capital letters all one word at the checkout and you'll get that exclusive podcast listener discount and later on I'll remind you how to enter for one of three signed copies of the Bible for everyone as well.

A lot of people as I mentioned have been getting in touch regarding a particular hermeneutic that has been doing the rounds recently from Gregory Boyd who is fairly well known for theologian I think you've been at conferences together and that sort of thing Missio Alliance Conference and his book his big two volume book *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God* which again we've discussed on my other podcast unbelievable with him and again we can't really in the 10 minutes we've got left to do justice to the fullness obviously of his argument but let me let me at least give you the questions that have come in on this and and it'll give a sweep of some of the way people are at least understanding what he is saying there. Pamela in the US says Greg Boyd suggests as best I can read him in his recent book that the difficult things said by God in the Old Testament are examples of God taking on a mask to relate better to the culture of the time or allowing the people to assign things like genocide to him even though God wouldn't really do that his rationale seems to be that the death and resurrection of Christ show God isn't like those difficult aspects of the Old Testament. Marty in Saskatchewan, I think that's how you pronounce it.

Saskatchewan. That's the one in Canada. Greg Boyd has recently released his two volume book *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*.

In these volumes he attempts to reconcile violent passages such as God's command to Joshua to wipe out the Canaanites. He does this through what he calls literary crucifixes in that just as Jesus allowed himself to be seen as a criminal in the eyes of many while on the cross God in his grace only appeared to show himself as violent and retributive before the nations through Israel where in reality Israel acted on its own behalf violently and merely attributed these commands slash actions to God. It seems to me in light of our post-modern western sensibilities that in desire to protect God from any word or action that may offend we like Boyd our re-envisioning scripture to meet these concerns.

My question to you is do you see validity in his thesis and is the attempt more harmful than good? Let's go for one more from here Ron in Sioux Falls who says how do you explain the different pictures of God we find in scriptures in Greg Boyd's *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*? Can some understand this as a matter of perception seeing what they expected to see in the Old Testament authors but I don't find it totally satisfying says Ron. I don't know if you sort of personally have an idea of where Greg is coming from. Yes I do.

I mean Greg and I were at a conference as you said a couple of years ago which was fascinating and he gave rather a long lecture and I had the same reaction as I did when you're reading those quotes just now that to begin with I was thinking yeah I think maybe this will fly maybe this will actually work. I have to say the more I listened to Greg and he's a delightful guy and we hung out together and talked at length. The more I thought I don't think that's quite right but it's hard to put your finger on it partly because we're dealing with such huge issues of many many texts and themes and so on.

I do think that comment that you just read is important that we have to beware of apparently rushing to God's defense and no no no God wouldn't do that. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out that the primal sin in Genesis is people putting the knowledge of good and evil

before the knowledge of God and that doesn't mean that God lives in a moral vacuum and that there is a total disconnect between God's view of good and evil and our view of good and evil but it rather implies as Paul says in Romans 9 who are you a human being to answer back to God and that way you know we always do have to be aware of that. Having said that I think Greg is right to put his finger on something not least because in his culture more than in my culture there are people who seem to imply that oh well God does redemptive violence so then that's how you solve the problems of the world you go and drop bombs on Iraq or whatever it is and I think he's very much reacting in the present American political climate which again many people in Britain simply aren't terribly aware of how all that works out in America.

I've spent a long time in America and I sometimes shudder at it and so he's trying to say no we've got a distance ourselves from there. I would want to come at it a little differently because there is a major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament and that is part of God's story with the world and you have to understand the whole story which like a Shakespeare play has these different acts and you don't repeat speeches from Acts 2 and 3 say if you're in Acts 4 or 5 whereas a different point in the drama now that doesn't mean that it was bad what happened there it means something has happened which has changed the situation and obviously if you believe anything like the Christian gospel the thing that's happened is Jesus so yes there is a change there is a shift and the slaughter of the Canaanites or whatever can never be a model although many Christians have said yeah okay that's what we have to do sort of thing which is which is terrifying when you think about it. I recall at the end of Genesis 15 when God is making the covenant with Abraham the basic covenant he says that your descendants will be slaves in a land not theirs and I will rescue them and they will come out and I'll take them home to their own land in the fourth generation then he says because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full which is a very interesting idea and it goes with other Old Testament passages particularly but also new in which it seems that God's moral providence allows human beings to go from bad to worse from bad to worse and I'm not an expert on ancient Canaanite practices but such little as I have read of that indicates that there were some things which were taken as routine whether it was child sacrifice or whatever which we today would find completely stomach churning not that we don't have some stomach churning things in our own world as well but in that context you can understand an ancient Israelite author saying the only word that God can say to this is total destruction putting it all under a ban now you know we shudder at that but so I'm saying I think Greg is raising important questions I understand why they're coming particularly sharply within the American context I wouldn't myself want to go all that route I tell the story slightly differently I mean one perspective on this I come across and I think it's sort of in the general area of the way Greg approaches this is I mean Greg speaks of the idea of God accommodating yes yes to people's understandings of where they are in their culture which of course is what Calvin says about the Bible in general Calvin says God lisps in our language you know that the words of scripture are human words which can't begin to express the majesty and glory of God but God graciously inspires these words in order to talk I mean rustling Costa Mesa as part of a

longer question asked could it be that scripture is still important and inspired but we read it more as a journey of a people's progressive understanding of God in that sense I mean well so many the word progressive has had a long and checkered history and particularly in the 19th century people reached for that idea of a progressive revelation which then got hooked into various philosophical schemes that well at the beginning they didn't get very much of it and then with Moses he got a bit more and then with David he got a bit more actually I didn't see that at all I see Abraham at his best got as much of it as any of them right David at his worst was worse than the rest of them so I don't see a progressive revelation though I do see some cumulative things on both sides of the ledger you have to read Psalm 105 and 106 together 105 says God brought us out of Egypt he gave us the law and we're his people and hurrah let's go we're oh we're going Psalm 106 says and we got it wrong yeah and then he forgave us and then we blew it again and so he punished us and then we said sorry and then we you know you need both of those stories and if there is progress I think the way people think of it if you know Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the best perfect representation of God you know this is God truly revered in the truth stamp of God's in the truth stamp of God's image do it the idea that it's through that image God gives us of himself that we then read understands all of those other images and this is why why Richard Hayes's short book on the Old Testament of the Gospels is called reading backwards and the idea that here is Jesus this is where it was all going and now like the two on the road to Emmaus we look back as of course these things were all and that includes all the times when they're getting it wrong because all the times when they're getting it wrong end up with the disciples running away Judas portraying Jesus Peter denying him those are the quintessential story of that that side of the Old Testament just like Mary and John at the foot of the cross are the quintessential the good side of the Old Testament you like but you need both because both contribute to the meaning of the cross where God takes the positive and fulfills it and takes the negative and finally deals with it sure Greg would love to have a chat of his own with you at some point and maybe that could happen who knows and in any case thank you so much for tackling all of those I mean a short space of time Tom just a quick one to finish off with this is I think it's pronounced zombal in Hungary do you know any good Old Testament commentary suggestions that you yourself like and would recommend for somebody starting in ministry and he says I'm particularly looking for commentaries that are like yours but written on the Old Testament well the ones that are explicitly like mine written on the Old Testament are by my friend and colleague John Goldingay who's done the full Old Testament people sometimes ask me are you going to do the Old Testament absolutely not mine was a huge journey how John did that I simply don't know but he's done the whole old and it should be mentioned we've got sitting here with us the bible for everyone published by SPCA which is John's Old Testament and my new exactly yeah and he's done a whole series of commentaries himself it was that that's a good Old Testament for everyone Genesis for everyone and they are they are great I would also say even though I often disagree with him Walter Brigerman remains a great guide and always stimulating and provocative and always with the needs of the pastor and preaching church at his heart absolutely well there you go a few suggestions to get you started Zombal for the moment Tom thank you very much thank you delving into the Old

Testament looking forward to what we may have in coming weeks but for the moment thank you for listening and don't forget to rate and review the podcast share it with others and of course get signed up to the mailing list where you can find it more about all the special extra bonus content as well that's available from askentiright.com and we'll see you again next time it's indeed well thanks for being with us on today's show and just a reminder that we've three signed copies of the bible for everyone to give away it's a hefty old prize I can assure you it's actually not just Tom Wright's translation of the New Testament but as we heard John Goldengaze translation of the Old Testament so if you're subscribed to the newsletter you will be entered automatically into that prize draw just make sure you're subscribed by the end of March if you're not already signing up also gets you access to bonus video content the fortnightly newsletter that means you can ask a question too so go over to askentiright.com and we'll see you next time you've been listening to the askentiright anything podcast let other people know about this show by rating and reviewing it in your podcast provider for more podcasts from premiere visit premiere.org.uk [buzzer]