

Is God More Violent in the Old Testament Than the New?

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At a casual glance, looking at the Bible from an earthly frame of mind, God's behavior and character can appear different in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament. Many dismiss and reject God and a Biblical worldview because of a perception that God is only benevolent and kind in the second half of the book, while displaying a violent and wrathful temperament in the first half. Jesus seems so kind as He heals the blind and raises Lazarus from the dead, while Jehovah sent a cataclysmic flood to wipe out humanity and seemed to allow people groups to be eliminated on a whim.

Further study about the character of God, man's sinful nature, and God's overall plan for bringing humanity closer to Him and His character reveals that God's nature has remained consistent, loving, and holy. God is not violent, rather, both a merciful savior and a righteous judge simultaneously.



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Is God More Angry or Violent in the Old Testament?

Often, when passages are read out of context, God's actions do appear wrathful, but closer contextual examination shows that God balances His justice with mercy all through the [Bible](#). Understanding the pattern of God's patience and His judgment can be found in a few key verses. Some of the acts that appeared angry or violent were acts of fatherly discipline, and others righteous judgment that He would have stayed had they been willing to repent.

1. Prone to Wander

“My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” ([Proverbs 3:11-12](#)).

People are often compared to less than flattering images. Humanity will wander into trouble, danger, and sin like sheep. They will also be stubborn, disobedient, and temperamental like a small child. Sometimes people see moments like God allowing the Hebrew people to wander the wilderness for forty years as act of cruelty, but the prophet Jeremiah clarified, “Thus says the Lord, ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the Lord’” ([Jeremiah 2:2b-3](#)).

Because of that time in the wilderness, generations came after with great [faith](#) who claimed the promised land. Just like today, when bad things happen to people – whether they are believers or not – they are going through a season of discipline, like in the Old Testament when God disciplined His people.



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2. Everyone Will Be Judged

“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” ([Romans 14:10b-12](#)).

Everyone is born into sin, into a world full of temptation. No one but the Lord Jesus, God in the flesh, lived, or could ever live, a perfect life. Because God is wholly good and wholly just, His Kingdom will be good and just. To enter that kingdom, people will have to give an account of what they did in their life.

Judgment must come to everyone. God gives people a lifetime to confess to Him and call Him Lord. For those who do, Jesus’ righteousness is credited to them. Sometimes, in the Old Testament, whole cultures, nations, and people groups hardened their hearts so much that God sent His judgment. Sodom and Gomorrah were two such cities. Abraham asked God to spare the cities if ten righteous men could be found, but only Lot’s family was spared. In these situations, God did always look for their hearts to turn to Him. He sent angels to Sodom and Gomorrah. Later, He sent His prophet [Jonah](#) to Nineveh.

Unlike Sodom, the whole city grieved because of their sin. “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” ([Jonah 3:10](#)). Though reading about how God poured out His wrath can be difficult, He always stayed His hand if people would repent.

It is also important to note that many theologians agree that many of the people the [Bible](#) says were eliminated, wiped out, or removed from the face of the earth were not fully eliminated. In Genesis, God said, “When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out” ([Genesis 23:23](#)). Centuries later, a man named Uriah served David and the armies of the Lord faithfully. Uriah was a Hittite, showing that God blotted out pagan practices, but not necessarily all the people.



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What Do Some of These Violent Incidents Mean?

The first moment in the [Bible](#) people point to as an example of God overreacting violently is the Great Flood of Noah. God wiped out all of mankind in a global flood, sparing only Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their wives. With two of every kind of animal, they started the world anew. While this act may seem merciless, humanity had time and opportunities to repent, and turn away from their behavior, which was, "...that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" ([Genesis 6:5b](#)).

People were not mostly evil, but exhibited some good, or sinning and feeling remorse. The whole of mankind was always thinking, feeling, and doing wicked things. No evil act was too depraved. While Noah constructed the ark, which was immense and took time, people around him had a chance to re-evaluate, ask questions, and turn, but they did not. When the ark was finished, it took time for the animal pairs to arrive, and then the Bible says, "And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth" ([Genesis 7:10](#)). In order to allow any good, righteous people to thrive, people had to change their ways. But they would not.

Often, people also point to the battles in which God helped Israel defeat other people groups, including seven nations living in the Promised Land, and nearby people during the reigns of Saul and David.

When the time came from the Hebrew people to leave the wilderness and enter the promised land, God helped them take down the walls of the great city of Jericho. While this incident was a display of God's power, it was also a demonstration of His patience. Before they ever set foot near the walls, Joshua sent spies into the city. A prostitute named Rahab sheltered those spies, and informed them, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt... for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" ([Joshua 2:8b-11](#)).

The citizens of Jericho knew about the [10 plagues](#) of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, as well as the defeats of kings who tried to eliminate the Hebrews. The parting of the Red Sea was at least forty years prior to the spies going into Jericho. The people in the land knew for decades that a God more powerful than their own was working miracles, and Rahab even said her people knew the land belonged to the Hebrews. They had forty years to turn to that God, as Rahab did. Instead they locked themselves in the walled city. Not only did Rahab put her faith in the true God and survive - demonstrating His mercy - she became a part of the ancestry of Jesus Christ.



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Is God Still Loving in the Old Testament?

There is a gap in time of approximately 400 years between the Old Testament and the New; God did not change His nature from wrathful and violent to loving and merciful. He cared for His people, and always extended patience, waiting for those who did not know Him to repent. King David wrote about the [love](#) God showed Him in many [Psalms](#). One of these Psalms, 103, details some of the ways He showed His love, even before Jesus died on the cross:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's” ([Psalm 103:2-5](#)).

He answered prayers, sent His Spirit to guide people, protected them, and so much more. God loved His people back in the Old Testament as much as He did when He sent Jesus Christ to die for them. He returned sons to grieving mothers, redeemed sinful acts for His glorious purpose, and was planning to send them a redeemer.

God is unchanging, but His ways are also higher than our ways. It can be difficult to read about people suffering, dying in battle, or cultures being wiped out. Even though people always hurt God by sinning and rebelling against Him, He waits patiently for them to come to Him. In His good time, He sent His only Son to pay the price for the sins of all humanity.

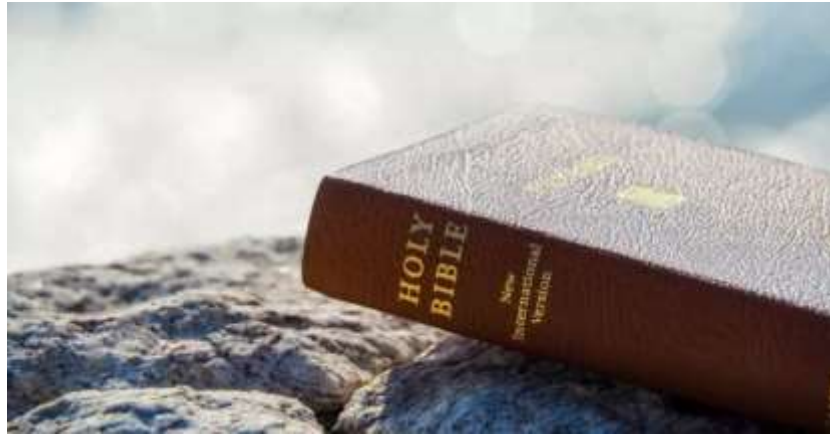


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God Does Not Change

There were times when God’s justice seems harsh, unfair, or violent to modern eyes. Those eyes are also the eyes of sinners, sometimes not wanting to face their own wickedness, or empathizing because they know they were that sinful once. God’s wrath against sin is not unjustified, as it hurts Him deeply. Rather than allow each person to face His justice, He elected to have Jesus Christ pay the price. The Old Testament can feel far away, and living in an age of grace, after the [resurrection](#), the old system of sacrifice and justice can feel foreign and distressing. Knowing that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and going to Him whenever a passage in the [Bible](#) is confusing, His Spirit will always reveal His love.

“He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” ([Psalm 33:5](#)).

Sources

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