

Skeptic's Guide to the Universe

Week Three: Violence



In many people's opinion, the flood of Noah was a violent event. The question is raised, "How can a loving God condone and commission such violence?" This is a difficult question to answer because it is nearly impossible to understand the pure actions of God with impure minds and hearts. In our weekly services, we began addressing the reasons some of God's actions appear violent. In this study we will look at two examples, Jonah and Abraham, to better understand how we should view the kindness and severity of God. **Begin by reading Genesis 7:20-23.**

What Do You Think?

- Have we become desensitized to violence in our culture? Why does some violence bother us and some seems to roll off our backs?
- When you encounter violence (whether you hear about, witness, or experience it), do you attribute it to God, people, or something else? Why?
- What is the difference between violence and justice? What understandings and experiences have molded your view of what is just and unjust? Does everyone agree?

“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 (ESV)

What Does God Say?

Jonah and Nineveh

- Read Jonah 1:1-3.** What does this tell us about Jonah's mindset and heart? If Jonah could have chosen justice for Nineveh, what would it have been? In what situations might people have the same reaction today?



- Read Jonah 2:7-3:10.** Jonah decides to obey God and we see the result. What does this event teach us about God's desire and character? How can this understanding change the way we look at people and situations right now?
 - Read Jonah 4:1-11.** What lesson is God trying to teach Jonah? What lesson is He trying to teach us?
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“So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.” Genesis 19:29 (ESV)

Abraham and Sodom

- Read Genesis 18:16-33.** How is Abraham's mindset different than Jonah's? If Abraham could have chosen justice for Sodom, what would it have been? Why?
- Read Genesis 19:12-13 and 23-25.** Why was the end result for Sodom different than for Nineveh? What does this teach us about God's justice and mercy?
- Read Genesis 19:27-29.** How does Abraham's reaction differ from Jonah's? Which do you think is the right attitude and why?

What Will You Do?

- Clearly our view of justice does not always match up with God's. **Read 2 Peter 2:4-9.** The Lord knows how to rescue and how to judge. He is holy and can do it rightly. If God is the one who justly determines the outcome, what is our responsibility?
- Will you choose to be like Jonah or like Abraham in the way you respond to God's justice? What are some practical steps you could take to align your heart and view with God's?
- God is ultimately merciful. **Read 2 Peter 3:5-13.** Each of us, like Nineveh, has the opportunity to repent and be saved. God allowed His own son to endure violence on the cross to administer justice meant for us, and then He raised Jesus from the dead to give us hope. Do you know someone who needs to accept the mercy of God? Maybe you had written them off as a lost cause and God is pushing to you offer them hope. What will you do to spare them from pain and introduce them to hope?

