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# IS TRUE ISLAM PEACEFUL OR MILITANT?

**T**he answer to this opening question is not simple, for there are many faces to Islam. Muslim clerics in the United States say that Islam means peace and doesn't sanction terrorist acts. Yet many clerics in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan, teach that committed Muslims must fight unbelievers (Jews and Christians) until they are subdued.

Muhammad, a prophet living in the seventh century, received revelations that he believed came from God, who identified Himself as Allah. Those revelations came to Muhammad to meet needs that arose on specific occasions. The revelations were gathered and recorded as the Quran (sometimes called the Koran), which has 114 chapters, or suras. Muhammad and those who followed him believed those revelations formed the Word of Allah.

Some revelations in the Quran are kind to non-Muslims.

Other revelations are adversarial. *Either position can be argued by quoting specific Quranic verses.*

Let's look at why Islam sometimes appears as a religion divided.

#### PEACEFUL AND MILITANT QURANIC REVELATIONS

During Muhammad's years in Mecca and early years in Medina, he made it easy for Jews and Christians to co-exist with Muslims. Adherents of Islam faced Jerusalem when praying, and Muhammad's message was tolerant toward Jews and Christians. Early passages in the Quran advocate a peaceful coexistence with Christianity.

Lo! those who believe [in that which was revealed unto thee, Muhammad] and those who are Jews and Christians . . . whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord. (Sura 2:62)

There is no compulsion in religion. (Sura 2:256)

And argue not with the people of Scripture unless it be in [a way] that is better, . . . say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender. (Sura 29:46)

As Muhammad's power increased in Medina, however, he turned on the Jewish tribes and Christians who refused to accept him as the unique prophet of God. Sura 9:5 commands, "Slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them [captive], and besiege them and prepare for them each ambush." Verse 29 adds, "Fight against such of

those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day.”

Muhammad confirmed this teaching in the Hadith. “I have been ordered [by Allah] to fight the people till they say: ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allah’” (Hadith 2:483).

#### LATER REVELATIONS THAT ANNUL EARLIER REVELATIONS

According to Quranic teaching, Allah can change His mind and replace a verse with a later and better revelation.

Such of our revelations as we abrogate our cause to be forgotten, we bring [in place] one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is able to do all things? (Sura 2:106)

And when we put a revelation in place of [another] revelation—and Allah knowest best what He revealest. (Sura 16:101)

Militant Muslims say that the later revelations, as in Sura 9:5, 29, annul the earlier revelations (Sura 2:62, 256) that were tolerant of non-Muslims. These later Quranic suras justify *jihad*, that is, war on infidels.

#### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MUHAMMAD’S LIFE IN MECCA AND MEDINA

When Muhammad began receiving revelations in A.D. 610, the people of Mecca tolerated the various creeds espoused in Arabia. As long as Muhammad kept to general statements, such as exhortations to live good lives, his preaching continued to be accepted. When Muhammad

began to attack the idolatry of the Kaaba (see glossary), active opposition began. He attracted only a small number of followers, and soon the time came to try another city. The words “. . . and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah” (Sura 6:106) are said to be a command from Allah to leave Mecca after preaching there for thirteen years. Muhammad and his one hundred fifty followers journeyed to Medina in 622.

Mark A. Gabriel, former professor of Islamic history at al-Azhar University of Cairo, Egypt, notes that Muhammad, while living in Mecca, “never spoke of *jihad*.” He did not mention a “holy war” because he lacked the military might. While in Medina, however, where he built an army,

the major topic of Quranic revelation was *jihad* and fighting the enemy. . . . Let’s compare the differences between Muhammad’s life in Mecca and his life in Medina.

- Mecca: He invited people to be part of Islam by preaching.  
Medina: He persuaded people to convert by the sword.
- Mecca: He acted like a priest living a life of prayer, fasting, and worship.  
Medina: He behaved like a military commander, personally leading twenty-seven attacks.
- Mecca: He had only one wife, Khadija, for those twelve years.  
Medina: He married twelve more women in ten years.

- Mecca: He fought against idol worship.  
Medina: He fought against People of the Book (Jews and Christians).

Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina changed Islam into a political movement.<sup>1</sup>

### BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE QURAN

Here are some basic facts about the structure of the Quran, Muhammad's role in its writing, and the Quran's revered position among Muslims.

- The Quran was reputedly revealed in Arabic over a period of twenty-two years (610–632).
- The arrangement of the 114 suras is not chronological. The longest suras are placed first in the Quran.
- According to Theodore Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qurans (History of the Qurans)*, ninety suras (chapters) were revealed while Muhammad was in Mecca and twenty-four suras while he was in Medina.<sup>2</sup>
- Sura 96 is said to be the first sura revealed to Muhammad.
- Sura 1 (the Fatiha) is often described as “the essence of the Quran.”
- The “mother of the Quran” (Ummu-L-Kitab) is said to be in heaven, written by Allah Himself.
- Muslims say that the angel Gabriel revealed the Quran to Muhammad.
- The Quran is considered an integral part of Allah's being. It was not created. Starting in A.D. 610, Muslims believe there was a telling forth of that which always was.

- The third caliph, Uthman (644–656), established the official text of the Quran and had other texts burned.

#### TWO ABODES:

#### ABODE OF ISLAM AND THE ABODE OF WAR

Islam divides the peoples of the world into two distinct realms or abodes: the Abode of Islam and the Abode of War. The former have submitted to the will of Allah, and the latter are still resisting. Countries under Muslim control are considered the Abode of Islam. It is the duty of all Muslims to preserve the Abode of Islam from contamination and, where possible, to enlarge it at the expense of the Abode of War, where the “infidel” rules.

Many Muslims believe that the nations of the West established Israel in the heart of the Arab world to be the outpost of their civilization, to be a sword of the West hanging over the necks of Muslims. Therefore, many militant Muslims are committed to restoring Israel’s territory to Muslim control and to preserve the Abode of Islam in Palestine. Islam teaches that Muslims who die in the struggle against infidels will immediately be translated to paradise.

#### MUHAMMAD:

#### THE FINAL AND GREATEST PROPHET

Muslims believe that Jesus’ limited ministry was to announce the messenger who would follow him, that is, Ahmad (a variant of Muhammad): “Jesus son of Mary said . . . ‘I am the messenger of Allah . . . bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One [Ahmad]’” (Sura 61:6).



Therefore, Muslims regard Muhammad as the final and greatest prophet. “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets” (Sura 33:40).

They consider Muhammad (or Ahmad) to be unique because Allah revealed His perfect revelation, the Quran, to Muhammad. Muhammad was the channel through whom the will of Allah became known. Muslims believe the miracle of the Quran proves that Muhammad is the final prophet.

A more detailed discussion of the role of Muhammad as the great prophet can be found in chapter 2, in the section “Prophets.”

#### WAR AND PEACE ACCORDING TO TWO PROPHETS

Jesus Christ and Muhammad, leaders of two great world religions, are both thought to advocate peace, but their goals and approaches differ markedly. The chart “Differences in the Teachings of Jesus and Muhammad” points out those differences.

#### *Differences in the Teachings of Jesus and Muhammad*

##### JESUS

- Jesus declared, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). His words inspired followers to seek peace with all people (see also 1 Peter 3:11). They certainly did not promote His followers to harm people who did not accept His teachings.

##### MUHAMMAD

- Allah told Muhammad: “Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day” (Sura 9:29). This verse inspires militant Muslims to fight people who do not accept the religion of Islam.

## JESUS

■ In essence, Jesus said, “Believe and live.” He declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25–26).

■ Jesus accepted the fact that some of His followers would no longer follow Him because of His teaching (see John 6:60–66). In Christianity, turning away from the faith is not considered a crime.

■ Jesus’ mission was to conquer sin’s penalty and power by His vicarious death. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21; see also 1 Peter 3:18).

## MUHAMMAD

■ In essence, Muhammad said, “Convert or die.” He declared, “I have been ordered [by Allah] to fight the people till they say: None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and whoever said it then he will save his life and property” (Hadith 2:483).

■ Muhammad taught his followers to kill anyone who left the faith: “. . . the statement of Allah’s Apostle, ‘Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him’” (Hadith 9:57).

■ Muhammad’s mission was to conquer the world for Allah. The goal of jihad, or a holy war, is to establish Islamic authority over the whole world. Islam teaches that Allah is the only authority, and all political systems must be based on Allah’s teaching. Allah is important.

Notice that much of the call to action comes in the Hadith, a companion book that amplifies on the Quran by quoting the words of Muhammad. Islam teaches that

man's success on this earth and in the hereafter depends on obeying the teachings in the Quran. In the Quran is found a code for all of man's life, including the place of war and peace in one's life. The broad examples of life in the Quran become specific as a Muslim follows the example of Muhammad. The Quran says, "Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much" (Sura 33:21). But important words of Allah's messenger are found in the Hadith.

#### MUHAMMAD AND THE HADITH

Muslims are greatly affected by the Hadith, which is a record of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad. These styles of behavior have been passed down for thirteen hundred years. In the Hadith, Muhammad is seen in "the ordinary acts of his life—sleeping, eating, mating, praying, dispensing justice, planning, expeditions and revenge against his enemies . . . morality derives from the Prophet's actions; the moral is whatever he did. Morality does not determine the Prophet's actions, but his actions determine and define morality. Muhammad's acts were not ordinary acts; they were Allah's own acts."<sup>3</sup>

Muslims seeking to gain Allah's favor are to follow the styles of behavior in Muhammad's everyday life. Therefore, to be as good as Muhammad is the ideal of every Muslim. Muhammad's teaching became the dogma of Islam. In *Unveiling Islam*, Ergun and Emir Caner note:

According to the South African Council of Muslim Theologians, the Hadith/Sunnah is the sensible explanation of an otherwise ambiguous Quran. They explain, "The Holy

Quran without the Hadith or Sunnah of the Prophet remains unintelligible in certain instances and in view of that, the Holy Quran has, in several verses, ordered Muslims to follow the Prophet in all his deeds and sayings. Therefore, if one believes in the Holy Quran, there is no alternative but to uphold the Hadith of the Prophet.”<sup>4</sup>

The most authoritative collection of the Hadith was put together by Sahih-Al-Bukhari (A.D. 811–876) more than two hundred years after Muhammad’s death. The nine-volume Arabic-English collection of Al-Bukhari’s *Hadith* is 4,705 pages in length. (It is also available on Alim-ISL software.) This collection of traditions is the Islamic reference for this book.

Teachings from the Hadith have profound effects on Muslim lives. For example, Muhammad said in Hadith 9:459 that Allah guarantees anyone who engages in holy war (jihad) for the cause of jihad alone with “belief in [Allah’s] words, that He will either admit him into paradise or return him with his reward or the booty he has earned to his residence from where he went out.”

As a result, young Muslim men and women, believing their efforts against America to be a holy war (jihad), believe they will be admitted to paradise if they die in the process.

Interestingly, the Hadith addresses specific conduct between men and women, husbands and wives, as well as personal hygiene. (See chapter 3 for specific examples.) Two traditions govern the conduct of men and women:

Then he heard the Prophet saying, “It is not permissible for a man to be alone with a woman, and no lady should travel except with a Muhram, i.e. her husband or a person whom she cannot marry.”  
(4:250)

The prophet said: “None of you should flog his wife as he flogs a slave and then have sexual intercourse with her in the last part of the day.” (7:132)

#### HADITH FOLLOWED RATHER THAN THE QURAN

Sometimes fundamentalist Muslim authorities follow the Hadith rather than the Quran. In a way, teachings of the Hadith can supersede those of the Quran. For example, in Sura 4:15–16 persons guilty of fornication are to be confined to the house until death takes them. Sura 24:2 says, “The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them [with] a hundred stripes.” The Quran never says that sexual sins are to be punished by stoning the guilty parties. However, Muhammad and his disciples enforced this extreme penalty.

Thus, stoning in public is still carried out in some Muslim countries, based on Hadith 8:816, which says, “We do not find the verses of [stoning to death] in the Holy Book. . . . Lo! I confirm that the penalty of Rajam [stoning] be inflicted on him who commits illegal sexual intercourse. . . . Allah’s Apostle carried out the penalty of Rajam, and so did we after him.”

Even though Muhammad died almost fourteen hundred years ago, his sayings and acts are still considered “rigid guidance” and affect more than one billion Muslims. The Hadith shows how to put the guidance of the Quran into practice. The Hadith itself declares: “Abdullah said, ‘The best talk is Allah’s Book [Quran] and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad’” (8:120).

Muslims feel close to Muhammad in his life and hope to be closer in paradise. They follow Islam, a seventh-century religious system that still governs believers’ everyday lives.

### A Chronology of Biblical and Islamic World Events



