

Islam: A Religion of Peace?

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Despite what we see and hear going on in other parts of the world, Islam is often depicted as a religion of peace. We are assured that the “fundamentalists” responsible for acts of terror around the world, and more specifically, those who flew two airplanes into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, are merely “radicals” who have twisted the true Muslim faith. This is what we are told; but is it true?

This is not about whether or not there are Muslims who act peaceably, for there certainly are. This is not about whether or not all Muslims condone violence, for they certainly do not. This is about what the Qur'an, the primary source of authority for Islam, actually teaches.¹

Concerning Jihad

The term “jihad” is often said to mean “holy war” though the literal meaning is “to strive or struggle” (Sura 25:52; 29:69; 49:15; 61:11; 66:9). It is a general term that can apply both to the spiritual struggle within a person (greater jihad) and these “holy war” type acts of physical violence (lesser jihad). The primary concern of this writing is what the Qur'an has to say about the latter.

What About the Bible?

Before discussing the Qur'an, it would serve us well to note the fact that the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, contains examples of God's people committing acts of violence at His command (Jos. 6:20-21; 10:40; 1 Sam. 15:2-3; many more). Some things to consider along these lines are:

- 1) God is just and always does right (Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4)
- 2) God hates violence of the wicked (Ps. 11:5), and hands that shed innocent blood (Pr. 6:16-19)
- 3) God used violence as a means of punishing the wicked (Lev. 18:1-30; 1 Sam. 15:1-6; cf. Gen. 15:12-16), even His own people (Ex. 21:12ff.; Lev. 18:26-30; Deut. 28:15-68)
- 4) Wicked nations knew the consequences of their actions (Jos. 9:9-11, 24; cf. Dan. 5; Obad., Jonah, Nahum)
- 5) God did not give free reign to attack (Deut. 2:2-23), but was **specific about why, what, where, when, and by whom** certain actions should take place (Deut. 20:10-17; 1 Sam. 15:1-6).
- 6) God gave these commands directly through easily identifiable prophets (Deut. 18:21-22), while God no longer gives such commands through prophets today (Heb. 1:1-2).
- 7) God never used violence to convert people.
- 8) God's commands for all men today are found in the New Testament (Heb. 8:6; cf. Matt. 17:5), which does not condone violence or personal vengeance (Matt. 5:39, 44; 7:12; Rom. 12:17-21; 13:9-10; Eph. 4:26-32)², and places the responsibility to administer justice in the hands of the civil government (Rom. 13:1-7).

Violence in the Qur'an

The Qur'an reflects the violent circumstances in which it was written, and though these commands have an historical setting in one of the many conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims during the time of Muhammad, the reader will note that they are stated in such a way as to apply to all Muslims for all time. Provided below is a listing of some of these passages, alongside New Testament teachings.

The Qur'an	The New Testament
<p>Enemies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fighting is good for you (Sura 2:216) • Smite the necks and cut off finger tips of unbelievers (Sura 8:12) • Strike terror in enemies until they incline to peace (Sura 8:60-61)³ • Slay pagans unless they repent (Sura 9:5) • Fight the unbelievers near you (Sura 9:123) • Fight People of the Book until they pay a tax (Sura 9:29)³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your enemies (Matt. 5:44) • Live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18), do good to all (Gal. 6:10)
<p>Persecution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persecution is worse than killing (Sura 2:217) • Slay them wherever you catch them, oppression is worse than killing (Sura 2:191) • Fight until persecution is no more (Sura 8:39) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bless those who persecute you (Rom. 12:14)
<p>Vengeance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not begin hostilities (Sura 2:190), but fight oppressors until there is no more oppression (2:191-193)⁴ • Do not take life except in the course of justice (Sura 6:151) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not avenge, overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21)⁵ • Civil government is avenger (Rom. 13:1-7)
<p>Domestic Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect wives, but beat them if not obedient (Sura 4:34) • Can have sex with captives who are not wives (Sura 4:24-25; 23:5-6; 70:29-30). Don't force them, but Allah will forgive you if you do (Sura 24:33) • “Honor killing” sanctioned (Sura 4:15; 18:74, 80) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your wives, give your life for them (Eph. 5:25), give honor (1 Pet. 3:7) • Marriage honorable and marriage bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4) • Love suffers long (1 Cor. 13:4)
<p>Martyrdom⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Die to earn salvation as a bargain (Sura 61:10-12) • Giving life earns pleasure of Allah (Sura 2:207) • Martyrs guaranteed paradise (Sura 9:111) • Smiting necks of unbelievers is a test for Muslims, actions not in vain (Sura 47:4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10)

<p><i>Apostates</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slay the hypocrite wherever you find them unless they repent or they are dwelling with whom you have made a treaty (Sura 4:88-90) • Fight the heads of disbelief unless they repent (Sura 9:11-12) • Strive hard against the unbelievers and hypocrites (Sura 9:73) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore the apostate (Gal. 6:1) • Withdraw from disorderly, admonish (2 Thes. 3:14-15)
<p><i>Dominion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subdue the world through fighting • Fight until no more persecution/oppression and religion is all for Allah (Sura 2:190-193; 8:39) • Battle for the cause of Allah in ranks (Sura 61:4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subdue the world by preaching the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16)
<p><i>Example</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow example of Muhammad (Sura 33:21), who was not sinless (Sura 40:55; 47:19), and committed acts of violence in the name of Allah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow example of Jesus, who was sinless and committed no violence (Matt. 12:19-20; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-22)

Conclusion

The Qur'an reflects the violent circumstances in which it was written, and in doing so, clearly sanctions the use of armed conflict to stop oppression, punish the apostate, and convert the world. Islam is not just a religion concerned with moral responsibility, but a political and cultural system aimed toward global dominion. As the Qur'an says "There is a **goodly pattern** for you in Abraham and those with him, when they told their folk: Lo! we are guiltless of you and all that ye worship beside Allah. We have done with you. And there hath arisen between us and you **hostility and hate for ever until ye believe in Allah only** " (Sura 60:4; emp. added).

We pray that Muslims everywhere examine these things (1 Thes. 5:21) and seriously consider a better way (Jn. 14:6), of true peace (Phi. 4:7), both in this life and the next (cf. Jn. 10:10; 1 Tim. 4:8).

Notes

¹Just because a person claims to follow a particular religion, does not make that person a true follower of that religion. Even Jesus said “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth the will of my Father** which is in heaven ” (Matt. 7:21). When it comes to Islam, who is really doing the will of Allah?

²Though Jesus said “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34), He was referring to the reaction of those who rejected Him, and to the fact that His mission was not physical peace (Rom. 5:1), though that would result if all followed Him. He could hardly be called the “Prince of Peace” otherwise (Isa. 9:6; cf. Jn. 18:36; Eph. 2:11-18).

³The Qur'an says there is “no compulsion in religion” (Sura 2:256), and to “incline to peace” toward those who do the same (Sura 8:61), and forgive the People of the Book (Sura 2:109), but these must be “abrogated verses” (Sura 2:106) in light of later verses that call for killing the impenitent apostates and unbelievers. Notice in Sura 47:35 Muslims are told not to cry for peace.

⁴What it means to be oppressed is open for debate. “Fundamentalists” would apply this to cultural oppression from the West, and therefore are permitted to begin hostilities in self-defense.

⁵Though Old Testament law was “eye for an eye” (Ex. 21), it was in the context of a fair judgment, not any sort of personal vengeance (Deut. 16:18; 25:1; cf. Deut. 19:15).

⁶Though the Qur'an appears to condemn suicide (Sura 4:29-30), these verses are used to justify killing oneself and others in the name of Allah (i.e., suicide bombing equals martyrdom).