

What Is Islam?

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1 Introduction

What is Islam? Is it a religion of peace hijacked by a militant fringe? Was Muhammad a prophet of God? It is comforting to think Islam is a peaceful religion, with roots similar to Judaism and Christianity. Is that true? Can there be a reconciliation between Islam and Christianity?

First, to my Muslim friends, I do not want to insult you. I am a dedicated Christian, and during my career I worked side-by-side with numerous dedicated Muslims. We were always cordial and friendly.

I do not compare individuals of the two religions. That is a pointless task. I do compare the ideals of Islam with those of Christianity. They are written down in our respective texts. Neither Christians nor Muslims manage to achieve their ideals.

I'm writing this in December 2023. Hamas (a Muslim terrorist organization) in Gaza attacked southern Israel on October seventh. They were unbelievably brutal, torturing many, particularly women, killing parents in front of young children, video recording their atrocities and sending the video home to brag about their attack. Fortunately most Muslims do not behave that way.

There is a deep divide between Muslim factions. Some simple facts about Israel help reveal it:¹ As of March 2023 the total Israeli population was nearly ten million (9,795,000.) Of those 73% are Jewish heritage, 21% are Arabs. By faith, Jews are 74.2% of the population, Muslims are 17.8%. All the citizens of Israel, including the Arabs, have equal rights. Jews are required to serve in the military, Arabs are not, but are welcome to join.

Public statements from Hamas and war planning documents captured by Israel, show that Hamas expected Israeli Muslims to join in the war, resulting in a quick defeat of Israel. Israeli Muslims ignored calls for violence. They kept working at their hospital jobs, in their government positions, etc.

Most Muslims are peaceful. Others are violent, and believe they are following Muhammad. So which is it? What does the Qur'an teach? What example did Muhammad set with his own life?

Notes:

I try to use only the most reliable sources. One that I quote often is 'Ali Dashti, a devout Muslim who lived from 1897 to 1982 A.D. He was somewhat of a reformer, and may have been murdered. His book, "Twenty

¹For more details see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Israel

Three Years,” was published posthumously at his request. The citation, [Das94], refers to that book.

I use the Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an version. It was translated by a Muslim scholar:

M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, was born in Egypt, and learned the Qur’an by heart from childhood. Educated at al–Azhar, Cairo, and Cambridge Universities.

— Preface of Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

2 Using a Christian Perspective

As Christians, we need to approach Islam in the spirit defined for us by Jesus:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

— John 3:16–17, New King James Bible

Christians are not here to condemn people, but to save them if possible. Jesus extended and sharpened the Jewish ideals:

²⁵ A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?” ²⁶ Jesus answered him, “What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?” ²⁷ The man answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ ” ²⁸ “You are right,” Jesus replied; “do this and you will live.” ²⁹ But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”

— Luke 10:25–29, Good News Bible

In response Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, which shocked His audience. They hated the Samaritans, but Jesus told them the Samaritans are also their neighbors, and must be loved.

Islamic folk are our neighbors. We, as Christians, are ordered to love our neighbors; all our neighbors.

3 Jesus and Muhammad

Christians believe Jesus the Christ is the Jewish Messiah predicted in several parts of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament.) We also believe He led the only perfect life, never sinning in any way. Christians strive to imitate Him, but all fall short.

Muslims believe Muhammad led the perfect life, and they strive to follow his example.

For this reason I do not have much to say about violence in the Old Testament. It is an important topic, and one that I struggle with sometimes. However, it is only tangential. It is enough to compare the ideals of Christianity with those of Islam.

Against the broad background of world religions, Islam and Christianity have significant agreements. Nabeel Qureshi, a Muslim who converted to Christianity, explains:

There's no question that Islam and Christianity are close to one another on the broader religious spectrum. They are both monotheistic, the largest two faith communities in the world, and they share many similarities. Each teaches the doctrine of an eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing God who is sovereign over the universe. It is God who created mankind out of one man and one woman, yet mankind turns away from him. Each teaches that one day there will be a resurrection and final judgment. Before then, it is of paramount importance for us to seek God and follow him. . . . But the many similarities do not mean that the differences are not significant . . . Where the difference matters most is in the ultimate message of each religion. According to Islam, the way to paradise is sharia, a code of laws to follow that will please Allah and earn his favor. Sharia is literally translated "the way." According to the Christian message, the gospel, the way to eternal life is Jesus. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). In Islam, sharia is the way, and in Christianity, Jesus is the way.

— Nabeel Qureshi in *No God But One*, pages 30–31, [Qur16]

Later, in the same book, Nabeel sharpens the comparison:

it is very important to note that the Qur'an and Jesus serve as analogues in their respective religions. In the case of Islam,

the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God, and in the case of Christianity, Jesus is the eternal Word of God (John 1:1–14).

— Nabeel Qureshi in *No God But One*, page 55, [Qur16]

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? Nabeel answers:

I started by stating the obvious: Christians worship Yahweh, the Trinity, whereas Muslims worship Allah, a monad . . . The Qur'an rejects the relational aspects of God . . . Most people who say Christians and Muslims worship the same God are aware of this difference, but they treat it as relatively inconsequential. This is not a trivial difference, though; it has major implications. *Since mankind is made in the image of the triune God, love is woven into our very nature.* The Trinity gives us the most consistent, most powerful basis for being self-sacrificial and altruistic.

— Nabeel Qureshi in *No God But One*, page 69–70, [Qur16]

4 What is the Qur'an?

The Qur'an is the supreme authority in Islam. It is the fundamental and paramount source of the creed, rituals, ethics, and laws of the Islamic religion. This supreme status stems from the belief that the Qur'an is the word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad via the archangel Gabriel, and intended for all times and all places.

— From the preface of *Oxford World's Classics Qur'an* [Hal04]

Muslims believe the Qur'an, in its original language, classical Arabic, is an exact copy of the book in heaven, co-eternal with Allah, and that every word is from Allah as dictated to Muhammad by archangel Gabriel. The central statement of the Islamic faith is:

There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

— Shahada: Islamic confession of faith

The Judeo-Christian Bible, written over a period of about two thousand years, includes poetry, history, law, parables, and prophecies. Writings from

many people are included. It tells us what was happening to the people involved. To a great extent, it explains itself.

The Qur'an contains only things Muhammad claimed archangel Gabriel revealed to him over a period 23 years, with no background explaining what was happening at the time, or who was involved. The Qur'an

- Includes 114 Sira (plural of Sura.) They are arranged, roughly, from longest to shortest.
- The first revelation came to Muhammad in 610 A.D. when he was 40 years old.
- The last revelation came 23 years later.
- Is written in a single language, Classical Arabic.
- Has no context for most of its content. It is often impossible to understand a Sura without reference to other sources explaining details of Muhammad's life.

Muhammad died of disease at 63 years old surrounded by his conquering military band and his many wives, including his favorite wife:

Ā'isha, daughter of Abu Bakr os-Seddiq. She was seven years old when she was betrothed and nine years old when she was married to the Prophet, the gap between them being more than forty years. Her age when he died in 632 was sixteen or seventeen.

— [Das94] page 123

That explains the prevalence of child brides in some Muslim countries.

Eighty six of 114 Sira are from the period when Muhammad lived in Mecca, before he moved to Yathreb, later called Medina (see figure 1 on page 7.) These are the "Meccan Sira." The remaining 28 are called "Medinan Sira." Muslim scholars point out that some revelations from Yathreb are embedded in the Meccan Sira, so this is not a perfect division.

Sura one is chronologically fifth. Oxford World's Classics Qur'an says "it is an obligatory part of the daily prayer, repeated several times during the day." It has seven verses:

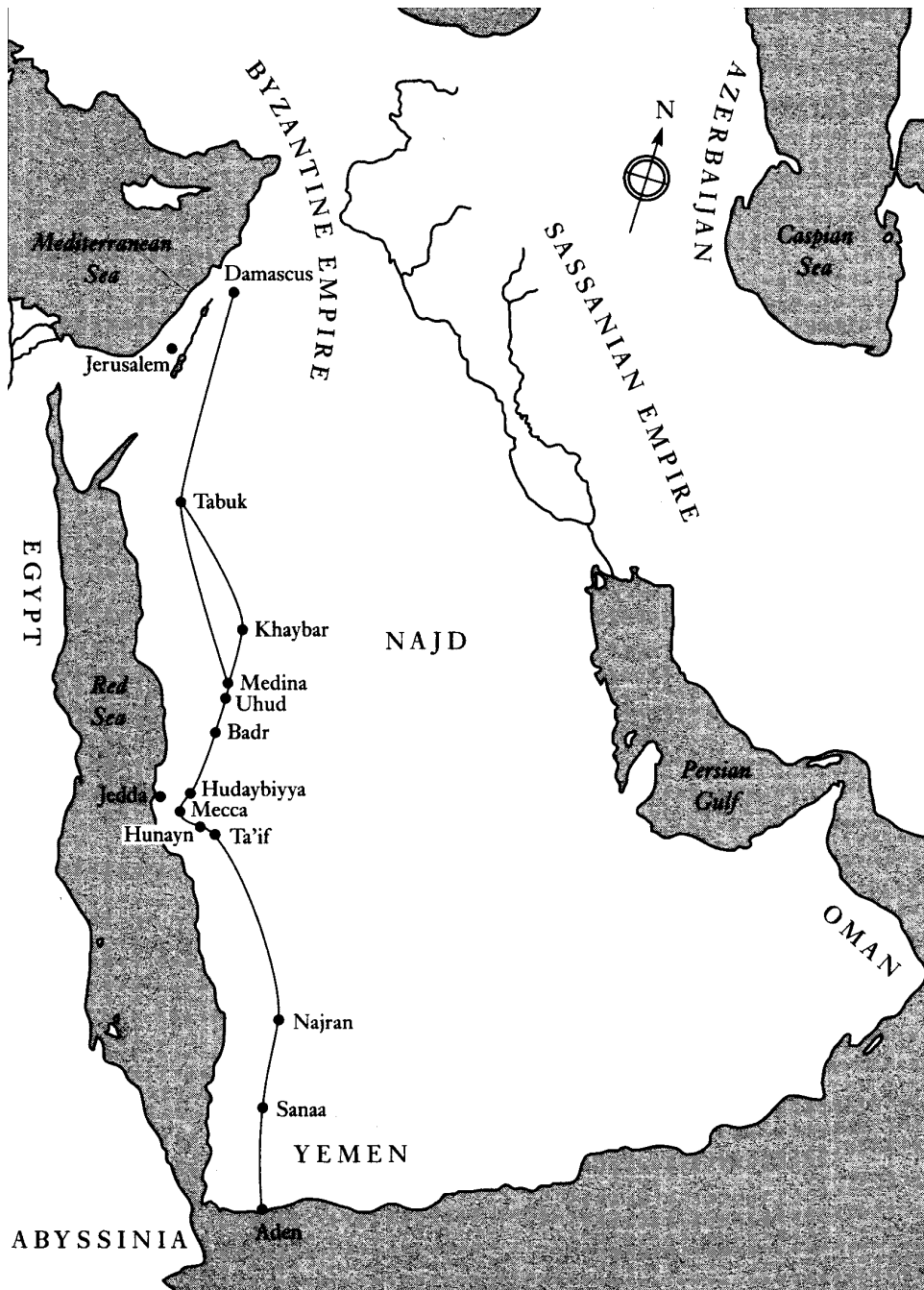


Figure 1: The Arabian peninsula at the time of Muhammad, taken from [Hal04]. He spent his life there, mostly near the Red Sea on the trade routes.

¹ In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!
² Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mercy,
the Giver of Mercy, Master of the Day of Judgment. ⁵ It is You
we worship; it is You we ask for help. ⁶ Guide us to the straight
path: ⁷ the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no
anger, and who have not gone astray.

— Sura 1:1—7, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

Who are the ones that “incur no anger, and who have not gone astray?”
Muhammad answers in Sura 33 (chronologically 90th):

When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that
concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman
to claim freedom of choice in the matter: whoever disobeys God
and His Messenger is far astray.

— Sura 33:36, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

In Christian worship, the “Lord’s Prayer,” given to us by Jesus, plays a
role similar to that played by Sura one in Muslim worship:

⁹ Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in
heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us
our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

— Matthew 6b:9–13 King James version

Jesus taught us to address God as “our Father.” The Lord loves us, will
forgive our sins if we forgive others, and wants to take care of us. In contrast,
Muhammad presents God as a stern judge who blesses only “those who incur
no anger, and who have not gone astray.”

Muhammad’s anger flares in Sura 111, chronologically sixth, right after
the prayer in Sura one:

¹ May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined
too! ² Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: ³ he will
burn in the Flaming Fire— ⁴ and so will his wife, the firewood-
carrier, ⁵ with a palm-fiber rope around her neck.

— Sura 111:1—5, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

Who made Muhammad so angry? The Qur'an gives no hint. Other writings must be consulted, which is the case for many Sira. Muslim scholars work hard to decide which of these numerous resources are reliable, but there are disputes among them. According to footnotes in Oxford World's Classics Qur'an, Abu Lahab is one of Muhammad's uncles. He and his wife both insulted Muhammad, saying things such as "may your hands be ruined." The wife reportedly tied bunches of thorns with ropes of twisted palm fiber and threw them in Muhammad's path. This is how Muhammad responded to his critics; he curses them. Remember, in Muslim thought Muhammad was perfect, so this behavior should be imitated.

Jesus faced lots of opposition. Did He do anything similar? No, He lamented over them:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

— Matthew 23:37 New Revised Standard Version

He yearns to save even His enemies. He tells His followers to love them. While hanging on the cross, Jesus forgave the soldiers who executed him so cruelly:

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

— Luke 23:34 King James Version

There is nothing like this in the Qur'an. Muhammad's opponents are condemned, and often killed. Consider this from Sura 32, chronologically 75th :

²⁰ As for those who defy God, their home will be the Fire. Whenever they try to escape it, they will be driven back into it, and they will be told, 'Taste the torment of the Fire, which you persistently denied.' ²¹ We shall certainly make them taste a nearer torment [in this life] prior to the greater torment, so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]. ²² Who does more wrong than someone who, when messages from his Lord are recited to him, turns away from them? We shall inflict retribution on the Guilty.

— Sura 32:20—22, Oxford World's Classics Qur'an

Warning about hell fire is not unusual, but verse 21 changes the tone. Muhammad declares that he and his followers “shall inflict retribution on the Guilty,” which means anyone that does not obey Muhammad. Evidence from Muhammad’s own life proves that is what these verses commend.

Apparently Muhammad was not always consistent in what he claimed were revelations from Gabriel. When challenged, he established what is now known as the *Tradition of Abrogation* in Sura two, chronologically 87th :

¹⁰⁵ Neither those People of the Book who disbelieve nor the idolaters would like anything good to be sent down to you from your Lord, but God chooses for His grace whoever He will: His bounty has no limits. ¹⁰⁶ Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything? ¹⁰⁷ Do you not know that control of the heavens and the earth belongs to Him? You [believers] have no protector or helper but God.

— Sura 2:105—107, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

“People of the Book” means Jews and Christians. Thus Muhammad claims authority to override all previous scriptures, including what he himself previously declared. Muslim scholars disagree how many Sura are overridden by later ones, and sometimes they disagree on the chronological order of the Sura. I am using the traditional ordering, which I found here: wikiislam.net/wiki/Chronological_Order_of_the_Qur'an

Example of abrogation: For example, later in Sura 2 (chronologically 87th) is this:

²⁵⁶ There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing. ²⁵⁷ God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.

— Sura 2:256—257, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

By “those who believe” Muhammad means the people who believe everything that Muhammad commands. “No compulsion in religion” is abrogated by this passage from Sura 9, chronologically 113th out of 114:

When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post; but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful.

— Sura 9:5, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

I found an attempt to reconcile these passages:

“There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path” [al-Baqrah 2:256] are not contrary to the command to fight the mushrikeen who turn people away from the religion of Allah, cause mischief on earth and spread kufr, shirk and corruption. Fighting them is one of the greatest deeds by means of which people prosper on earth and enjoy safety and stability . . . Islam aims to achieve that which is in people’s interests and to protect them from that which is harmful to them.

— islamqa.info

So, fighting and killing non-believers is not contradictory to “no compulsion in religion” because it is all done to benefit the victims.

What comes next? ‘Ali Dashti, a devout Muslim, gives us some idea:

The peculiar and unprecedented Islamic law of holy war must be regarded as a product of Muhammad’s far-seeing and realistic mind. When the spiritual message of the beautiful Meccan Sira proved ineffective, the only remedy that he could find was the sword.

— from page 56 of Twenty Three Years, [Das94]

This is as if Jesus miraculously saved himself from the cross, gathered an army, and conquered the Roman empire. Many of His followers wanted exactly that. But He did not.

5 Jihad

Jihad is Muslim holy war. Muhammad authored it. There is no parallel in Christianity. Jesus made this clear during His trial in front of Pilate, the Roman governor:

³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him.”

— John 18:35–38, NRSV

Do Christians sometimes wage war unjustly? Do they sometimes use passages in the Bible to support their views? Yes, but again, I am not comparing how Christians behave with how Muslims behave. I am contrasting the ideals of Christianity with those of Islam, as expressed in the Judeo-Christian Bible and the Qur’an respectively.

Appendix A (found in PrincipledThinking.com/Article/WhatIsIslamAppendix) is an outline of Muhammad’s life, as gleaned from many ahadith (plural of hadith) by Muslim scholars. I think it is widely accepted. In this section I use a few of those details to outline the development of Jihad.

Muhammad worked for Khadija, a woman in Mecca with a thriving trading business. Muhammad must have impressed her, because she married him in 595 A.D. when she was 40 and he was 25. Her business was the source of Muhammad’s living until her death in 619 A.D.

In 620 A.D. Muhammad started meeting with men from Yathreb (later renamed Medina) secretly, outside the town. They had feuds with other tribes in Yathreb, and wanted help. In 622 A.D. they concluded a pact with Muhammad, converted to Islam, and pledged allegiance to Muhammad. Muhammad and a few of his local followers went back to Yathreb with them. ‘Ali Dashti comments on the transformation of Muhammad after that move:

After the move to Yathreb, however, he became a relentless warrior, intent on spreading his religion by the sword, and a scheming founder of a state. A Messiah was transformed into a David. A man who had lived for more than twenty years with one wife became inordinately fond of women.

— page 81 of Twenty Three Years

ʿAli Dashti, a devout Muslim, compares Muhammad’s behavior after moving to Yathreb with that of the anointed, but not yet King, David. It is a valid comparison:

⁶ So that day Achish gave him Ziklag; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. ⁷ The length of time that David lived in the country of the Philistines was one year and four months. ⁸ Now David and his men went up and made raids on the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites; for these were the landed settlements from Telam on the way to Shur and on to the land of Egypt. ⁹ David struck the land, leaving neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing, and came back to Achish.

— First Samuel 27:6–9, NRSV

That sounds horrific. I will not try to exonerate David or Muhammad for their deeds.

So, what is the difference? Simply that Muslims believe Muhammad led a perfect life and they should follow his example. Christians do not think that of King David. We try to follow the perfect example of Jesus. That is why I am comparing the example of Muhammad to that of Jesus, not David.

Muhammad’s group in Yathreb had no source of income, so they raided passing caravans. The booty of money and slaves, particularly women, was split among the men. Muhammad’s share was 20%.

Muhammad’s battles began with raiding caravans, but quickly expanded. All “enemies of Allah” must be destroyed or subjugated. Sometimes subjugation was not enough. There were three Jewish tribes in Yathreb. Muhammad drove two of them out, then beheaded all the men of the third tribe in the street, keeping the women for himself and his followers. Later they also raided the town where many of the first two tribes took refuge.



Figure 2: Early Muslim conquests. Image from commons.wikimedia.org

In 630 A.D. Muhammad defeated Mecca. By 631 A.D. all of the tribes in the Arabian peninsula came under his control.

Muhammad died in 632 A.D. after completing the Muslim conquest of the Arabian peninsula and starting on the Byzantine empire. After his death the first Caliph was chosen—the person to take Muhammad’s place as head of all Muslims. These Caliphs had amazing military success against a large part of the world, quickly taking over North Africa (including Egypt) and much of the Mediterranean region. In 711 (just 79 years after Muhammad died) they invaded the Iberian peninsula (what is now Spain) making rapid progress. Figure 2 on page 14 documents these early successes. The wars continue, often guided by prominent Islamic clerics.

War claims many lives on both sides. How did Muhammad motivate his army? With promises of treasure and sex, now and in heaven. If they return successful from battle they get earthly treasure and captive women as slaves. If they die, their reward is opulent surroundings with their compatriots, and perfect, untouched, completely obedient maidens in heaven:

⁷⁰ There are good-natured, beautiful maidens. ⁷¹ Which, then of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? ⁷² Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions. ⁷³ Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you

both deny? ⁷⁴ Untouched beforehand by man or jinn. ⁷⁵ Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? ⁷⁶ They will all sit on green cushions and fine carpets. ⁷⁷ Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?

— Sura 55:70–76, Oxford World's Classics Qur'an

Muhammad repeatedly urged men to join the battle:

³⁸ Believers, why, when it is said to you, 'Go and fight in God's way,' do you feel weighed down to the ground? Do you prefer this world to the life to come? How small the enjoyment of this world is, compared with the life to come! ³⁹ If you do not go out and fight, God will punish you severely and put others in your place, but you cannot harm Him in any way: God has power over all things.

— Sura 9:38–39, Oxford World's Classics Qur'an

One hadith, considered “good and sound” enhances the reward for a martyr who dies in battle:

That the Messenger of Allah said: “There are six things with Allah for the martyr. He is forgiven with the first flow of blood (he suffers), he is shown his place in Paradise, he is protected from punishment in the grave, secured from the greatest terror, the crown of dignity is placed upon his head - and its gems are better than the world and what is in it - he is married to seventy two wives among Al-Huril-'Ayn of Paradise, and he may intercede for seventy of his close relatives.”

— sunnah.com/tirmidhi/22/46

Sura four, chronologically 92nd, contains 176 verses. It includes legal codes, for example inheritance laws. The first few verses include a restriction on ordinary believers: they are allowed no more than four wives, but no limit on female slaves. Some of the laws seem charitable, at least on first reading. It includes:

⁷⁶ The believers fight for God's cause, while those who reject faith fight for an unjust cause. Fight the allies of Satan: Satan's strategies are truly weak. . . . ⁹⁵ Those believers who stay at

home, apart from those with an incapacity, are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God’s way. God has raised such people to rank above those who stay at home—although He has promised all believers a good reward, those who strive are favored with a tremendous reward above those who stay at home.

— Sura 4:76, 95, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

Who are the “allies of Satan” that should be fought? Anyone who does not believe Muhammad. Especially people who, in Muhammad’s terms, ascribe partners to God. By this he means the Christian trinity, one God in three persons. Believing that is a sin that will not be forgiven:

God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will, but anyone who joins partners with God has concocted a tremendous sin.

— Sura 4:48, Oxford World’s Classics Qur’an

So, Christians are chief among sinners according to Muhammad. Muhammad has no patience with his enemies. At least in this sense he is the opposite of Jesus, who told us:

²⁷ But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.

— Luke 6:27–29, New King James Bible

6 Qur’an and Hadith

We learn about Jesus primarily through the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were all written within the lifetime of people who knew Jesus personally, some of whom witnessed His crucifixion and resurrection. Later writings, for example the [The Gospel of Thomas](#), were rejected by the early church because they are not based on eye-witness testimony.

The Qur’an contains little or nothing biographically about Muhammad. Thousands of documents known as ahadith (the plural of hadith) claim to

fill that gap.² Unfortunately, there is sharp disagreement between Muslims over which hadiths are reliable:

Unlike the Qur'an, not all Muslims believe that hadith accounts (or at least not all hadith accounts) are divine revelation. Different collections of hadith would come to differentiate the different branches of the Islamic faith. Some Muslims believe that Islamic guidance should be based on the Qur'an only, thus rejecting the authority of hadith; some further claim that most hadiths are fabrications (pseudepigrapha) created in the 8th and 9th centuries AD, and which are falsely attributed to Muhammad. Historically, Mu'tazilites³ also rejected the hadiths as the basis for Islamic law, while at the same time accepting the Sunnah⁴ and ijmā.⁵

— en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith

Some ahadith describe miracles Muhammad performed, or were done on his behalf. These include: trees bowing down as he passed, stones calling out in honor of him. Many Muslims believe these reports, but others do not:

Many Iranians have been reared on a diet of myth and are ready to believe that any *emānzāda*,⁶ of however doubtful ancestry, can at every moment perform a miracle. If they were to read the Qur'an, they would be surprised to find no report of a miracle in it at all. They would learn from twenty or more

²For example, see sunnah.com/muslim

³From en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mu'tazilism: Mu'tazilism is a theological movement that appeared in early Islamic history and flourished in Basra and Baghdad. Its adherents, the Mu'tazila or Mu'tazilites, were known for their neutrality in the dispute between Ali and his opponents after the death of the third caliph, Uthman.

⁴From en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah: In Islam, sunnah, also spelled sunna, are the traditions and practices of the Islamic prophet Muhammad that constitute a model for Muslims to follow. The sunnah is what all the Muslims of Muhammad's time evidently saw and followed and passed on to the next generations. According to classical Islamic theories, the sunnah are documented by hadith

⁵From en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ijma: Ijmā is an Arabic term referring to the consensus or agreement of the Islamic community on a point of Islamic law.

⁶From iranicaonline.org/articles/emamzada-i [emānzāda are] sites where divine favor and blessing occur, where mercy and grace descend; they are a refuge for the distressed, a shelter for the despondent, a haven for the oppressed, and a place of consolation for weary hearts, and will ever remain so until resurrection.

Qur'anic passages that whenever the Prophet Muhammad was asked by doubters to perform a miracle, he either stayed silent or said that he would not do so because he was a human being like any other, with no function except to communicate, to be a “bringer of good news and a warner.”

— Page 38 of Twenty Three Years, [Das94]

One of those twenty some places 'Ali Dashti references is in Sura 17:

⁸⁸ Say, “Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Qur'an, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.” ⁸⁹ In this Qur'an, We have set out all kinds of examples for people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving. ⁹⁰ They say, “We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; ⁹¹ or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; ⁹² or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring God and the angels before us face to face; ⁹³ or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky—even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.” Say, “Glory to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?” ⁹⁴ The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, “How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?” ⁹⁵ Say, “If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.” ⁹⁶ Say, “God is witness enough between me and you. He knows and observes His servants well.”

— Sura 17:88–96, Oxford World's Classics Qur'an

The single miracle Muhammad did claim is the Qur'an itself:

Muslim scholars are unanimous in regarding the Qur'an as Muhammad's miracle. There has been much debate, however, on the question whether the Qur'an is miraculous in respect of its eloquence or of its subject-matter, or both. In general the Muslim scholars consider it to be miraculous in both respects.

— From page 47 of Twenty Three Years, [Das94]

Most Muslims hold the Qur'an to be an exact copy of a book in heaven, written in classical Arabic, which very few can read. Still, it is held almost universally among Muslims to be perfect. If it cannot be understood that is the reader's fault, not the source's. It is dangerous to disagree:

In certain if not most places in the Islamic world, however, if one dares to suggest that the Qur'an is not coeternal with Allah, one had better have protection. In Egypt, Dr. Dasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and assistant professor of Arabic at the University of Cairo, provoked an uproar for suggesting that the Qur'an was a partially human product because language is a human convention . . . For this, he was brought to trial for apostasy. On June 14, 1995, the Appeals Court of Second Degree in Egypt ruled that Dr. Abu Zayd was a kafir (unbeliever.) The consequence of this would have been a forced divorce from his wife, as Muslim women are not allowed to be married to non-Muslim men. But Dr. Abu Zayd and his wife fled to Europe. Few voices were raised in his defense.

— Page 194 of *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, [Rei10]

7 Conclusion

I started this document with some questions to answer. Have we got those answers now?

What is Islam? A religion of peace hijacked by a militant fringe?

Muslims seek to follow Muhammad's example as Christians seek to follow the example of Jesus. I am very glad most Muslims are not warriors imitating Muhammad. Some Muslims seek to improve Islam by focusing on the non-violent parts of the Qur'an. Their task is difficult and dangerous. I hope they succeed. However, it does not appear they get much support from the Qur'an.

Was Muhammad a prophet of God? He was certainly not a prophet of the Judeo-Christian God. It seems he had only a slight knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Bible, and he condemns both Jews and Christians because they do not believe Muhammad's "revelations" override what we already had. Remember, Muhammad lived about six centuries after Jesus.

Can there be a reconciliation between Christianity and Islam? I do not see how it is possible. Muhammad declared that Christians in particular are chief among sinners because we believe in the Holy Trinity. Jesus commands “love your neighbor.” Muhammad commands “make war on the enemies of Allah.”

To my Muslim friends: I love you. Forgiveness and love awaits you in the arms of Jesus. Please read books by former Muslims, such as Nabeel Qureshi’s “No God But One, Allah or Jesus” [[Qur16](#)] and “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus” [[Qur14](#)]. He explains his journey from Islam to Christianity, and why.

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