



The Islam Research Group

The Quran as Reportedly Practised and Preached by Mohammed: Part 1

Hostility to disbelievers

- ❖ *'Al-wala wal bara'*
(‘loyalty and rejection’);
- ❖ No punishment for killing an unbeliever;
- ❖ *Jizya*; and
- ❖ (The final instruction:) kill all idolaters.



Introductory notes

[Note to reader: This and the following two pages are common to all the papers in this series]

Structure

In this series of papers, ten instructions contained within the Quran are considered.

Over the centuries the instructions contained within the Quran have been the subject of a range of different applications by different Islamic traditions. Surveying the full range of such interpretations is outside the scope these papers. Rather the aim is to present clearly and accurately, on the best evidence available, what one might call 'true' or 'primitive' Islam: what the words of the Quran instruct, as it was intended to be understood at the time that it was announced. That is to say the instructions of the Quran as it was practised and preached by Mohammed.

To achieve this, and avoid any suggestion of 'cherry picking' or presenting verses out of their original context, in each case the verse or verses containing the instruction will be presented in full within the context of:

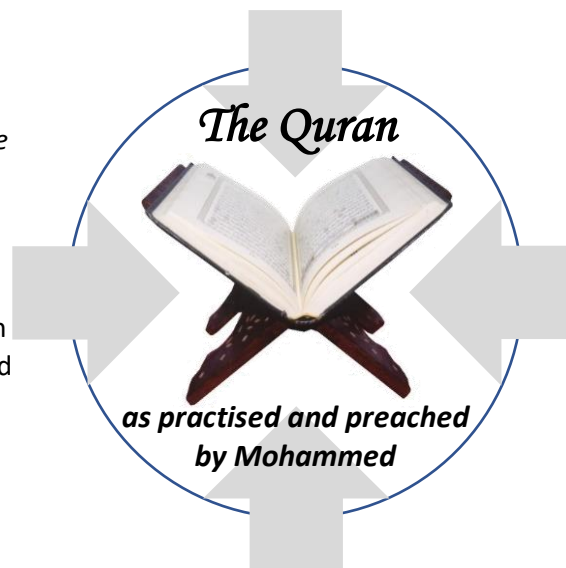
The circumstances in which the verse was said to have been announced

Any report describing the circumstances in which Mohammed came to announce a verse, the **Asbab al Nuzul** (principally those collected by **Ali ibn Ahmed al Wahidi (d. 1075)**) are given to give it its traditionally understood immediate context.

16 leading translations

The author principally uses *The Study Quran* (2015). However, this translation is cross-referenced with **fifteen other leading English translations** of the Quran from a wide variety of traditions, and compared with:

related verses of the Quran



The example of Mohammed

Incidents from the recorded life of Mohammed in the *sira* or *hadith* showing how Mohammed wished the verse to be understood, or how he himself applied it.

Sharia application

Rulings on the application of the verse by the founders of the **four major schools of Sharia jurisprudence (Hanifa, Maliki, Shafii and Hanbali)**.

Tafsir commentary

Commentary from the major **Quranic commentaries**.

Sources

Information concerning the life, words and deeds of Mohammed comes chiefly from two sources:

The sira is the life story of Mohammed as written in the early centuries after his death. Of these the biography of Mohammed, ***Sirat Rasul Allah***, (The Life of the Messenger of God) by **Ibn Ishaq**, written approximately 120-130 years following Mohammed's death for the Abbasid caliph, is by far the fullest extant source of historical information concerning the life of Mohammed and the establishment of Islam. The full text of Ibn Ishaq's work is now lost, but lengthy extracts have survived as they were copied into two later works: the *Sira an-Nabawiyyah*, (The Biography of the Prophet) by Ibn Hisham in the mid-ninth century and *Annals of Prophets and Kings* by Al Tabari (early tenth century). These two extracts are most frequently read in English language as reconstructed by Alfred Guillaume and published as *The Life of Mohammed* in 1955.

Although Ibn Ishaq's biography gives a relatively early and full account of Mohammed's life, Muslims traditionally afford greater prescriptive authority to the **hadith**: accounts of the words and actions of Mohammed, each with a proven chain of narration leading back to one of Mohammed's companions. These tend to be fragmentary, often written with little or no context. The first collections of hadith were collected by jurists to establish authority for their rulings on Sharia law. From the mid-ninth century (about a century after Ibn Ishaq completed *Sirat Rasul Allah*) larger collections were compiled. There are six major collections of hadith recognised by Sunni Islam. All Islamic scholars accept that some hadith are forgeries, and scholars and judges differ over which may be considered authentic. However most treat those contained in the two 'sahih' ('trusted') collections of **Bukhari** and **Muslim** as the most reliable evidence available to Muslims of Mohammed's words and actions.

In the eleventh century **Ali ibn Ahmed al Wahidi** (d. 1075) compiled a collection of hadith relating specifically to the circumstances in which individual verses of the Quran came to be announced, the **Asbab al Nuzul**.

Translation of the Quran

All quotations from the Quran are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from *The Study Quran* (2015). However, this translation is cross-referenced with the following fifteen other English translations of the Quran, representing secular scholarship and the full spectrum of Islamic traditions¹:

The Meaning of the Glorious Quran (1930) by Muhammad Marmaduke **Pickthall**, British convert to Islam;

The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary (1934) Abdullah **Yusuf Ali**, a civil servant of the British Raj, said to be the most used English translation;

The Koran Interpreted (1955) Arthur John **Arberry**, non-muslim scholar;

The Meaning of the Quran (1972) by Syed Abul A'la **Maududi**, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the largest Islamic organisation in Asia;

The Glorious Qur'an by Abdul-Majid **Dariyabadi** (Indian, d.1977);

The Holy Quran (Koran), Muhammad Habib **Shakir** (the Ahmadiyya Community – a minority Islamic sect - have asserted that Shakir's translation was plagiarised from a translation by a member of their own community, Maulana Muhammad Ali);

The Holy Qur'an (1982) by Shaykh Muhammad **Sarwar**, US Shia;

Al-Quran, A Contemporary Translation (1984) by **Ahmad Ali**;

The Noble Qur'an (1985) by Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali (**Khan & Hilali**), said to be Saudi funded and reflecting Wahabi theology;

The Qur'an, English Meanings (1997) **Sahih International**, three US born female converts, Saudi published;

The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an (2001) by Grand Shaykh Hasan Qaribullah and Shaykh Ahmad Darwish (**Qaribullah & Darwish**), of Umm Durman University, Cairo;

The Qur'an With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation (2005) by **Ali Qarai** of the Islamic College of Advanced Studies;

The Qur'an: A New Translation (2009) by Maulana **Wahihuddin Khan**, Indian, peace activist, a former member, later critic of *Jamaat-e-Islami*;

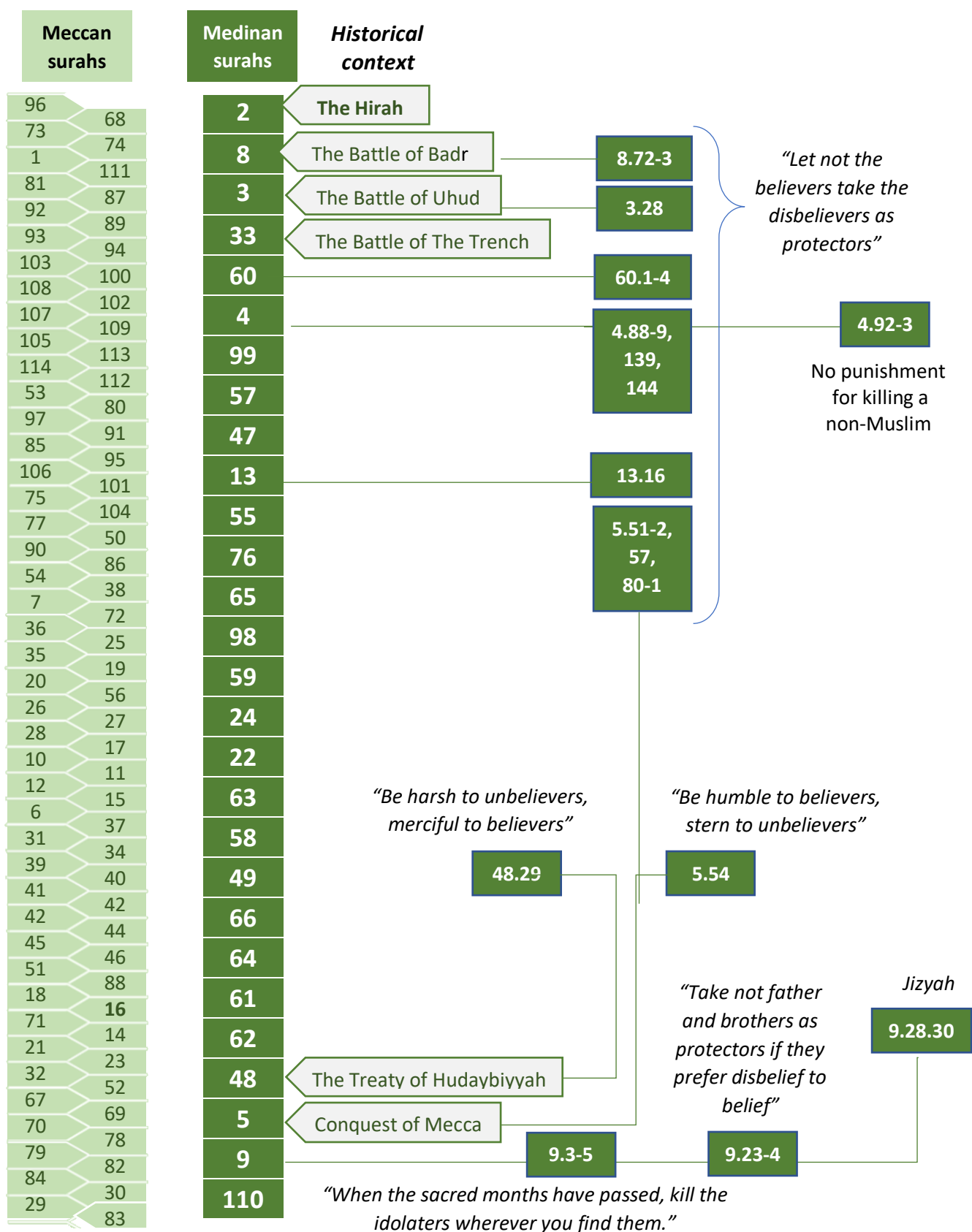
The Clear Quran (2012) by **Talal Itani**, Lebanese former engineer;

The Quranic Arabic Corpus, a collaborative online research project (corpus.quran.com) administered by the University of Leeds.

¹ All accessed via QuranX.com

Verses of the Quran in chronological order²

Principal verse considered in this paper



² There is no consensus on the exact order of Quran verses. This is a simplified version adapted from **The History of the Quran** by Allamah Abu Abd Allah al-Zanjani.

I ‘*Al-wala wal bara*’ (‘loyalty and rejection’)

‘*Al wala wal bara*’ is a common phrase used within Islam to indicate a Muslim’s duty of:

‘*wala*’ (alliance) to God and the Muslim community, and

‘*bara*’ (enmity) to those who reject God or His message as revealed in the Quran.

Both these words are used frequently in the Quran to describe God’s own disposition towards those who believe or disbelieve respectively.

This doctrine of exclusive mutual support amongst Muslims undoubtedly helped Mohammed to build up a strongly cohesive community that swiftly overcame the tribal structure of Arabian society. Integral to this doctrine of mutual support is the instruction to Muslims to observe a clear sectarian division between themselves and unbelievers, reinforced repeatedly in the verses of the Quran revealed after the hijra (migration to Medina).

The doctrine is clearly linked to *jihad*, which, as discussed in another paper in this series, is almost always expressed as conflict between believers and unbelievers, and is most commonly justified by the disbelief of their enemies *per se*. However the instructions considered in this paper are relevant not merely to conflict between Islamic communities and their neighbouring non-Islamic communities but also to informing Muslims’ relationships (or lack thereof) with non-Muslims living alongside them.

(i) ‘Let not the believers take the disbelievers as protectors’

The Quran contains ten similarly worded instructions -

3.28,
4.88-9, 139 and 144,
5.51-2, 57 and 80-1,
8.72-3,
13.16, and
60.1-4

to Muslims not to take non-Muslims as *aulyah* – ‘allies’ or ‘friends’ – in preference to Muslims.

Translation notes

The term *aulyah* used in the first ten verses quoted above, as a role not to be accorded to disbelievers, which is rendered as ‘*protectors*’ by *The Study Quran*, is variously translated in the considered alternative translations of the Quran as:

‘*friends*’ (with a variant ‘*must not establish friendship with*’ per Sarwar)

‘*allies*’ and

‘*guides*’

with Yusuf Ali rendering the word as ‘*friends or helpers*’ and Khan & Hilali retaining the Arabic word but adding ‘*supporters, helpers, etc.*’ in parentheses.

It seems reasonable to hold that the word is used to prohibit a relationship that is closer than a mere informal social acquaintance, but less than a formal treaty of protection. It is suggested that it be understood as a corollary of tribal loyalty which was a concept that Mohammed largely rejected.



Surah 3 'The House of Imran'

28. "Let not the believers take disbelievers as protectors apart from the believers. Whoever does that has no bond with God unless you guard against them out of prudence.

And God warns you of Himself and unto God is the journey's end."

Al Wahidi provides three hadith addressing the circumstances of narration for **3.28**. The first is that the verse was announced in relation to some Medinan converts to Islam (who were collectively known as the Ansar or 'helpers') who used to associate with Jews. A group of Muslims who had emigrated with Mohammed from Mecca told them:

'Stay away from these Jews and beware of keeping their company lest they drive you away from your religion'

and when the former refused to stop keeping the Jews' company, this verse was announced.

The second account records that the verse was announced in relation to Abdullah Ubayy in particular. Ubayy was the leader of an important tribe at Medina, the Banu Khazraj. He formally converted to Islam shortly after Mohammed's arrival but in Islamic tradition he is recorded as having been frequently critical of Mohammed and as failing to fight alongside Mohammed at the Battle of Uhud. He is often regarded in Islamic tradition as a hypocrite who feigned his conversion for political ends.³

The account reads:



Hadith recording the circumstances in which a verse was announced, as compiled by Ali ibn Ahmed Al Wahidi (d.1095)

"This verse was revealed about the hypocrites: Abd Allah ibn Ubayy and his companions. They allied themselves with the Jews and the idolaters, supplying them with information, hoping that they would have the upper hand over the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace. And so Allah, exalted is He, revealed this verse, warning the believers against acting like them."

Al Wahidi on **3.28** (2).

³. He is also said by Ibn Ishaq to have argued in favour of Mohammed expelling rather than killing his tribe's traditional allies, the Jewish Banu Qaynuqa, aggressively grabbing hold of Mohammed in the process.

Finally it is said that the verse was announced as Mohammed marched out to confront the Meccans at the battle of Uhud:

"Ubadah ibn al-Samit, who was among those who took part in Badr and was a trusted man, had allies from among the Jews ... Ubadah said:

'O Prophet of Allah! I have with me five hundred men from the Jews, and I am of the opinion to take them with me to impress the enemy.'

Because of this, Allah, exalted is He, revealed ['Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers']".

Al Wahidi on 3.28 (3)

The three accounts, although distinct, are not inconsistent with one another.

The first asserts that the verse was aimed at some of the *Ansar*/'Helpers', whilst Ubayy, referred to in second account, was a prominent leader amongst the Ansar.⁴

Moreover the third account relates to Mohammed rejecting Jewish help at the Battle of Uhud, at which the Banu Khazraj led by Ubayy is said to have left the battlefield without fighting due to Mohammed's rejection of the assistance of Jewish fighters in their midst.

The common theme of all three accounts is that they refer specifically to the rejection of association – whether social, as implied in the first account, or military, as in the second and third – between the Medinan converts to Islam and their neighbours and former allies, the Medinan Jews.

⁴ He was chief of the Banu Khazraj, who intervened to support their Jewish allies the Banu Nadir, and persuaded Mohammed to expel them rather than inflict violent retribution .



Surah 4 'Women'

88. "What is with you that you are [divided into] two groups concerning the hypocrites [those who had returned to Medina], when God Himself has cast them back for that which they have earned? Do you seek to guide those whom God has led astray? Whom God leads astray, you will not find a way for him.

89. They wish you should disbelieve even as they disbelieve that you may be on a level with them. **So take them not as protectors until they migrate in the way of God. But if they turn their backs then seize them and slay them wherever you find them and take no protector or helper from amongst them [90]** save those who seek refuge with people with whom you have a covenant, or those who come to you with hearts reluctant to fight you or to fight their own people.

Had God willed He could have given them authority over you and then surely they would have fought you. So if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer peace, God allows you no way against them."



139. "Those who take believers as protectors instead of believers – do they seek might through them? Truly might belongs to God altogether. [140] He has already sent down upon you in the Book that **when you hear the signs of God being rejected and mocked, do not sit with them** until they engage in some other discourse, or else you will surely be like them. Truly God will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers in hell all together."



144. "O you who believe! **Do not take the disbelievers as protectors rather than the believers. Do you want to give God a clear warrant against you?"**

Al Wahidi provides three hadith addressing the circumstances of the announcement of **4.88-9**. One of these, in common to the third account of **3.28** given immediately above, relates the verse to the Battle of Uhud:



"A group of people initially accompanied the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, to Uhud but then turned back and returned to Medina.

The Muslims were divided in their opinions about them. Some of them were of the opinion that they should be killed while others thought they should be spared, and so this verse was revealed."

Al Wahidi on **4.88-9** (1)

The other two hadith, apparently unconnected to the Battle of Uhud, tell of a group that had come to Medina from Mecca, converted to Islam, but then wished to return to Mecca.

"A group of Arabs came to the Messenger of Allah... and embraced Islam. Then they contracted the illness and fever that was going round in Medina and, as a result, renounced Islam and left Medina.

They were met by a group among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah... who asked them:

'Why did you leave Medina?'

They replied:

'We contracted the illness of Medina and for this reason we disliked remaining there'.

The Companions said:

'Do you not have a good example in the person of the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace?'

Some of the Companions were of the opinion that these Arabs were hypocrites while others thought they were still Muslims. And because of this difference of opinion, Allah, exalted is He, revealed [4.88-9: 'if they turn back (to enmity) then take them and kill them wherever ye find them']".

Al Wahidi on **4.88-9** (2).

"This was revealed about some people who left Mecca to Medina, claiming to be Emigrants. They then renounced Islam and asked permission from the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, to go to Mecca to bring some merchandise with which to trade. The believers were divided in their opinions about this matter. Some thought that these people were hypocrites while others were of the opinion they were believers.

*Allah, exalted is He, then revealed their hypocrisy by means of this verse **and commanded that they be executed...** "*

Al Wahidi on 4.88-9 (3).

The Tafsir (Islamic commentary) of Ibn Kathir links verse 4.88-9 to a tradition that Mohammed compared the expulsion of non-Muslims from Medina to iron rejecting impurities through the process of rusting:

"The Messenger of Allah said Medina is Taybah, and she expels filth, just as the billow expels rust from iron".

However, Ibn Kathir also includes a hadith linking the verse to a dispute over whether Muslims should kill those who had converted to Islam but who had refused to accompany Mohammed on the hijra (migration) to Medina.



(c.1360)

Most widely
used Quran
commentary

'The Ayah [verse] was revealed about some people in Makkah who said they embraced Islam, yet they gave their support to the idolaters. One time, these people went out of Makkah to fulfil some needs and said to each other:

'If we meet the Companions of Muhammad, there will be no harm for us from their side.'

When the believers got news that these people went out of Makkah, some of them said:

'Let us march to these cowards and kill them, because they support your enemy against you.'

However, another group from the believers said:

'Glory be to Allah! Do you kill a people who say as you have said, just because they did not perform Hijra [the migration from Mecca to Medina] or leave their land. Is it allowed to shed their blood and confiscate their money in this case?'

So they divided to two groups, while the Messenger was with them, and did not prohibit either group from reiterating their argument.

Thereafter, Allah revealed [4.88-9]

Tafsir Ibn Kathir on 4.88-9.



Surah 5 '*The Table Spread*'

51. "O you who believe! **Take not Jews and Christians as protectors.** They are the protectors of one another. **And whosoever takes them as protectors, surely he is of them.** Truly God guides not wrongdoing people.

52. Yet thou seest in those in whose hearts is a disease hastening to them saying:

'We fear lest a change of fortune should befall us'

It may be that God will grant victory or a command from him. And then they shall be remorseful for that which they secretly harboured in their souls."



57. "You who believe. **Take not as protectors those who take your religion in mockery and as play from among those who were given the Book before you, or the disbelievers,** and reverence God if you are believers."



80. "Thou seest many of them allying with those who have disbelieved. **Evil indeed is that which they have sent forth for their souls:** the anger of God is upon them and in punishment will they abide.

81. And **had they believed in God and the Prophet, and that which was sent down unto them, they would not have taken them as protectors.,** but many of them are iniquitous."

Al Wahidi reports that **5.51** was announced in consequence of an enquiry by Ubaidah ibn al-Samith (referred to in connection with the announcement of **3.28** above) as to whether he was permitted to trade with Jews:



Hadith recording the circumstances in which a verse was announced, as compiled by Ali ibn Ahmed Al Wahidi (d.1095)

"Ubadah ibn al-Samit went to see the Prophet and asked him:

'O Messenger of Allah! I have numerous clients from amongst the Jews, who are ever ready to support me. However, I stand before Allah and His Messenger to absolve myself from the guardianship of the Jews. And I turn, instead, to Allah and His Messenger'.

*Hearing this, Abd Allah ibn Ubayy [referred to in relation to **3.28** above] said:*

'I am a man who fears the turn of events and will not absolve myself from the guardianship of the Jews'.

The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, then said:

'O Abu I-Hubab ['father of Hubab' ie Abd Allah ibn Ubayy], that which you reserve to yourself of the guardianship of the Jews apart from Ubadah ibn al-Samit is all yours and none of it is his'.

He said: 'I accept'.

And so Allah, exalted is He, revealed about the two of them: ['O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another'.]"

Al Wahidi on **5.51**.

Al Wahidi reports that **5.57** was announced in relation to two named individuals.

"Rifa'ah ibn Zayd and Suwayd ibn al-Harith were among those who displayed their faith in Islam but were hypocrites. Some Muslim men used to show affection to them, and so Allah, exalted is He, revealed this verse".

Al Wahidi on **5.57**.



Surah 8 '*The Spoils*'

72. "Truly those who believe and migrate and strive [make *jihad*] with their wealth and their selves in the way of God, and those who sheltered and helped – they are the protectors of one another. As for those who believe and did not migrate, you owe them no protection until they migrate. But if they ask your help for the sake of religion, then help is a duty upon you, except against a people with whom you have a covenant. And God sees whatever you do.
73. **As for those who disbelieve, they are protectors of one another. Unless you do the same there will be strife in the land and a great corruption."**



Surah 9 'Repentance'

23. O you who believe! **Take not your fathers and your brothers as protectors if they prefer disbelief to belief. As for those amongst you who take them as protectors, it is they who are the wrongdoers.**

24. Say:

'If your fathers, your children, your brothers, your spouses, your tribe, the wealth you have acquired, commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing are more beloved to you than God and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His Command.'

And God guides not the iniquitous people.

Although **Surah 9** of the Quran is generally considered to be the penultimate surah to be announced, Al Wahidi relates **9.23** to those who had failed to make the Hijra to Medina:

"When the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, was commanded to migrate to Medina, some men went to their fathers, brothers or wives and said:

'We have been commanded to migrate to Medina'.

Thus, some people liked the command and hastened to execute it, while the wives, dependents and children of others hung on to some others, saying:

'We beseech you by Allah not to leave us to no one, causing our waste and peril'.

The hearts of these softened for them and, as a result, they refrained from migrating. These words of Allah, exalted is He, were then revealed to rebuke them'.

Al Wahidi on 9.23



Surah 13 '*The Thunder*'

16. Say: 'Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?'

Say: 'God.'

Say: '**Then have you taken, apart from him, protectors who have no power over what benefit or harm may come to themselves?**'

Say: 'Are the blind and the seer equal? Or are darkness and Light equal?'

Or have they ascribed unto partners who have created the light like of His creation, such that that creation seems alike to them?

Say: 'God is the creator of all things., and He is the One, the Paramount.' "

I *Al-wala wal bara* ('loyalty and rejection')

(ii) '*Be harsh to disbelievers, merciful to one another*'

In addition to the ten verses given above instructing Muslims not to take unbelievers as protectors, two verses set out a dual standard that Muslims are bound to adopt: to be well disposed to one another, but hostile to non-Muslims.



Surah 5 '*The Table Spread*'

54. "O you who believe! Whosoever amongst you shall renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom he loves and who love him, **humble towards the believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving** [making *jihad*] **in the way of God, and fearing not the blame of any blamer.**

That is the Bounty of God which He gives to whomsoever He will.

And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing."

Surah 48 '*Victory*'

29. "Muhammad is the Messenger of God. **Those who are with him are harsh against the disbelievers, merciful to one another.**

You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and contentment; their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah.

And their likeness in the Gospel is a sapling that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it such that it grows stout and rises firmly upon its stalk, impressing the sowers, **that through them, He may enrage the disbelievers.**

God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those among them who believe and perform righteous deeds."

Translation notes

The instruction in **5.54** that believers should be '**humble towards the believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving in the way of God, and fearing not the blame of any blamer.**' is translated to a similar effect in all the considered translation, with believers instructed to be:

'humble'; 'lowly' (Yusuf Ali, Shakir);
'gentle' (Ahmad Ali, Dariyabadi) or
'kind'/'kind and considerate' (Talal Itani and Wahihuddin Khan)

to one another, but:

'stern'; 'firm' (Maududi); 'firm and unyielding' (Wahihuddin Khan) or
'mighty' (Yusuf Ali and Shakir); 'powerful' (Sahih International); 'unbending' (Ahmad Ali); or
'disdainful' (Arberry);

towards the unbeliever whilst:

'striving/striving hard'; 'fighting' (Khan & Hilali and Yusuf Ali); 'waging jihad'
(Ahmad Ali) 'in the way of Allah';

and fearing not the blame of any 'blamer'/'critic'/'reproacher'/'slanderer'/'fault finder'; or (Sarwar) having 'no fear of anyone's accusations'.

The word that is translated in *The Study Quran* as '*striving*' is possibly the best known Arabic word from the Quran, '*jihad*' (literally '*striving*') and when used in this context – '*jihad in the way of God*' is generally understood to mean fighting in the cause of Islam.⁵ It is suggested that the phrase's juxtaposition with the instruction to be '*a'izzah*' ('*stern*') to disbelievers and in a way that is expected to attract criticism (which criticism is to be disregarded) gives the overall meaning of the verse a more directly threatening tone than the phrase '*stern*' would have carried outside this context.

A similar phrase is used in **48.29**. Here, however a different Arabic word to '*a'izzah*' is used to describe Muslims' proper attitude to disbelievers which most translations render in a more confrontational term than they used for **5.54**, *The Study Quran* rendering it as being '*harsh against*' rather than '*stern towards*'; other translations using:

'severe' (Ahmad Ali) or 'firm and unyielding' (Wahihuddin Khan) 'towards';

and

'severe' (Khan & Hilali), 'firm' (Corpus), 'firm of heart' (Pickthall), 'hard' (Arberry, Ali Qarai), 'stern' (Dariyabadi, Sarwar, Talal Itani), 'harsh' (Qaribullah & Darwish), 'forceful' (Sahih International) or 'strong' (Yusuf Ali) 'against'.

⁵ There is a fuller discussion of this word in another paper in this series: ie ***The Quran as Reportedly Practised and Preached by Mohammed: 2. Violent Jihad.***

A further verse following the general theme of loyalty and rejection uses words attributed to the prophet Abraham.



Surah 60 '*She Who Is Examined*'

1. "O you who believe! **Take not mine enemy and your enemy as friends – you offer them affection though they have indeed disbelieved in the truth that has come to you, expelling the Messenger and you for having believed in God your Lord –** if you have gone forth striving in My way and seeking My good pleasure. **You show them affection in secret while I know best that which ye hide and that which ye disclose. And whosoever among you does so has indeed strayed from the right way.**
2. Were they to come upon you, they would be enemies unto you and would stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you in evil. And they wish you to disbelieve.
3. Your family relations and your children will not benefit you on the day of resurrection; He will distinguish between you. And God sees whatever you do.
4. There is indeed a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people:

‘Truly we are quit of you. And of all that you worship apart from God. **We have rejected you and enmity and hatred have arisen between us and you forever, till you believe in God alone.**’

Save for Abraham’s saying to his father:

‘I shall assuredly ask forgiveness for you though I have no power to avail. Make us not a trial for those who disbelieve and forgive us. O Lord! Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise’.

II. No punishment for killing an unbeliever

The Quran contains three general instructions against killing '*the soul that God has made inviolable*' **6.151**, **17.33** and **25.68**, each of which immediately adds the proviso '*save by right*'. The oft misquoted **5.32** has a similar structure comparing the killing of a person to killing mankind all together '*unless it be for another soul or for working corruption upon the earth*'.

4.92-93 are the only verses in the Quran that prescribe any punishment for killing and such punishment is explicitly restricted only to the killing of Muslims or killings in breach of a specific treaty. The verses unambiguously exclude any punishment for a Muslim who kills a non-believer with whom the killer had no treaty.



Surah 4 'Women'

92. "It is not for a believer to slay a believer unless it be in error.

Whosoever has slain a believer in error let him set free a believing slave and pay compensation to the victim's family unless they remit it in charity.

If he belongs to a people at war with you **but was a believer**, then a believing slave is to be set free.

And **if he belonged to a people with whom you had a covenant** let him pay compensation to the victim's family and let him set free a believing slave.

Whosoever finds not [the means] let him fast two consecutive months as a penance from God. God is Knowing, Wise.

93: Whosoever slays a believer wilfully, his recompense is hell, abiding therein. God is wroth with him and curses him and prepares for him a mighty punishment."

Circumstances of the verse's announcement

Al Wahidi gives the following hadith addressing the circumstances of the announcement of **4.92**, which reinforces the explicit meaning of the text that, absent a specific treaty, sharia law protects the only lives of Muslims.



"Ayyash ibn Abi Rabi'ah al-Makhzumi had embraced Islam but was fearful of coming in the open about it. He fled to Medina and took refuge in one of its fortresses. His mother was distressed a great deal. She said to her two sons Abu Jahl and al-Harith ibn Hisham, who were his half-brothers from his mother's side:

'By Allah, I will stay outside not eating or drinking, until you bring him back to me'

And they went looking for him ... until they reached Medina. They went to Ayyash in his fortress, and said to him:

'Come down, your mother has not entered the confines of a house since you left. She has also sworn that she will not eat or drink until you go back to her. By Allah we give you assurance that we will not coerce you to do anything nor will we come between you and your religion'.

When they mentioned his mother's distress and gave him their assurance, he came down to them. They took him out of Medina, tied him up with strings and whipped him a hundred lashes each, and then took him to his mother. His mother said to him:

'I will not untie your fetters until you disbelieve in that which you have believed',

and he was left fettered in the sun until he gave them some of what they had wanted. Al-Harith ibn Yazid went to him and said:

'O Ayyash, by Allah, if that which you followed was guidance, you have now left it, and if it was error, you were already in error'.

Ayyash got very angry and this prompted him to say to him:

'By Allah, I will kill you if I find you alone'.

*Afterwards, Ayyash [again] embraced Islam and migrated to the Messenger of Allah... in Medina. Al-Harith ibn Yazid also embraced Islam and migrated to Medina. This happened at a time when Ayyash was not present. As such, he was unaware of al-Harith becoming Muslim. **As he was walking outside Quba, he met al-Harith ibn Yazid. When he saw him, he attacked and killed him. People said to him:***

'What on earth have you done? He had become Muslim!'

Ayyash went back to the Messenger of Allah ... and said:

'O Messenger of Allah, you know what happened between me and al-Harith; I was unaware of his acceptance of Islam and I killed him'.

And so Gabriel, peace be upon him, came down with the words of Allah, exalted is He, [It is not for a believer to kill a believer unless (it be) by mistake]'".

III. Jizya

According to Ibn Kathir's list of the chronological order of announcement of Quran surahs, **surah 9** is the penultimate surah to be announced, in the ninth or tenth year following the hijrah. It is generally held to have been announced following Mohammed's capture of Mecca and subjugation of the Meccans' traditional rivals to the south: that is to say when Mohammed's political and military dominance of Western Arabia had become secure.

In **9.28-30** the hostility shown toward disbelievers is increased from separation and lack of protection to exclusion from the Ka'ba - now described as 'the Sacred Mosque' - and enforcement of *jizyah*: a financial demand made of disbelievers living in Muslim controlled land.



Surah 9 '*The Repentance*'

28. "O you who believe! The idolaters are surely unclean; so let them not come near the Sacred Mosque after this year of theirs. If you fear poverty God will enrich you from his Bounty if He will. Truly God is Knowing, Wise.
29. **Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and who do not forbid what God and his Messenger have forbidden, and who follow not the Religion of Truth, among those who were given the Book, till they pay *jizyah* with a willing hand, being humbled.**
30. The Jews say Ezra is the Son of God and the Christians say the Messiah is the Son of God. Those are the words from their mouths. They resemble the words of those who disbelieved before. God curse them! How they are perverted! ..."

Translation notes

A footnote to *The Study Quran* explains:

"Jizyah means the rendering of a thing owed. And as a legal matter it amounts to an indemnity or tribute from non-Muslims communities residing within the Islamic state with whom Muslims have a treaty. Such treaty holders paid this indemnity but were exempt from paying the alms (zakah) or contributing to military defence, as Muslims were obliged to do; jurists disagreed as to the precise amount of the indemnity and the method of payment.

Here 'with a willing hand' ... some interpret to mean that they should pay directly, without intermediary and without delay. Others say that it refers to its reception by Muslims and mans 'generously' as in 'with an open hand' such the taking of the jizyah is a form of munificence that averted a state of conflict."

Yusuf Ali, Khan & Hilali, Sahih International and Corpus, in common with *The Study Quran*, retain the work *jizyah*, presumably finding it a word with no appropriate English equivalent.

Of the eleven translations that did use an English word in its place, six chose the word '*tribute*' with a further qualification that the payer through the payment exhibit submission:

Ali Qarai: "... until they pay the tribute out of hand, **degraded**."

Arberry: "... until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been **humbled**."

Dariyabadi: "... until they pay the tribute out of hand and they are **subdued**."

Maududi: "... until they pay tribute out of their hand and are utterly **subdued**."

Pickthall: "... until they pay the tribute readily, being **brought low**."

Qaribullah & Darwish: "... until they pay tribute out of hand and have been **humiliated**."

Five employed the word '*tax*', although also set within a phrase that makes it clear that this represents submission in a way that is not a part of modern notions of taxation:

Sarwar: "... until they **humbly** pay tax with their own hands."

Ahmad Ali: "... until all of them pay **protective tax in submission**."

Shakir: "... until they pay the tax in **acknowledgment of superiority** and they are in a **state of subjection**."

Talal Itani: "... until they pay the due tax, **willingly or unwillingly**."

Wahihuddin Khan: "... until they pay the tax willingly **and agree to submit**."

The reference to non-Muslim's paying jizya to Muslims in submission makes clear that the payment was to benefit the Muslim community and, as with *zakah*, no benefit was intended to accrue to the payers, other than the retention of their lives and homes.

Circumstance of the verse's announcement

The origins of *jizyah* are thought to be in the conquest by of Kaybar, Fidak and Wadi al Qura. After Mohammed's victory, the Jewish tribes in these settlements were permitted to continue to live there and farm the land, so long as they gave a half of the produce thenceforth to Mohammed and the Islamic community.

The Study Quran adds the footnote to **9.28**:

"Some commentators believe that [9.28-30] was revealed in the ninth year of the hijra after the conquest of Mecca and the same year when it is reported that the prophet sent Ali ibn Abu Talib to announce to the idolaters that they were no longer to return to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca [ie 9.5 - see following section].

Others say that rather the time of revelation was the following year."

The culmination of the instructions to show hostility to unbelievers: (*'the Sword Verse'*) '*Kill all idolaters*'.

The instructions to show hostility to unbelievers reaches its zenith in 9.5, sometimes referred to as '*the sword verse*' in which pagans living under Mohammed's rule in Mecca were permitted four months to convert to Islam, failing which, and absent a specific treaty of protection, they must leave or face being put to death.



Surah 9 '*The Repentance*'

3. "... So if you repent it would be better for you. And if you turn away then know that you cannot thwart God. **And give the disbelievers glad tidings of a painful punishment** [4] save for those idolaters with whom you have made a treaty and who thereafter commit no breach against you, nor support anyone against you. So fulfil the treaty with them for its duration. Truly God loves the reverent."

5. **Then when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, capture them and besiege them and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush.** But if they should repent and perform the prayer and give the alms then let them go their way. Truly, God is Forgiving, Merciful."

[*Note on the organisation of this paper*]

It has been noted above that there is a difference of opinion in Islamic tradition whether 9.5 was announced significantly before or at about the same time as 9.28-30.

For the purposes of this paper the significance of 9.28-30 lies in its instruction to fight disbelievers until they pay the *jizyah*, whilst the significance of 9.5 is in its instruction to kill polytheists '*wherever you find them*'. These two instructions are not inconsistent as the '*disbelievers*' referred to in the former verses would include 'People of the Book' - monotheists such as Jews and Christians (although some Muslims count trinitarian Christians as polytheists for associating Jesus with God) .

Therefore, although 9.28-30 may have been announced after 9.5, it makes sense, by virtue of the content of the verses, to regard 9.5 as the culmination of the Quran's instructions to show hostility to disbelievers.]

Circumstances of the verse's announcement

Ibn Ishaq records the following account of the announcement, first in Medina, then to the pagans of Mecca, of 9.5, a virtually identical account of which appears in the much later Tafsir al Kathir.

SIRAT RASUL

ALLAH



Earliest
biography of
Mohammed,
c.760

"A discharge came down permitting the breaking of the agreement between the apostle and the polytheists that none should be kept back from the temple when he came to it and that none need fear during the sacred month. That was the general agreement between him and the polytheists.

Meanwhile there were particular agreements between the Apostle and the Arab tribes for specified terms. And there came down about it and about the disaffected who held back from him in the raid on Tabuk, and about what they said, in which God uncovered the secret thoughts of people who were dissembling. We know the names of some of them, others we do not.

He [Mohammed] said:

'A discharge from God and His apostle towards those polytheists with whom you made a treaty' ie those polytheists with whom you made a general treaty (ie the general agreement):

[‘So travel through the land for four months and know that you cannot escape God and that God will put the unbelievers to shame. And a proclamation from God and His apostle to men on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God and His apostle are free from obligation to the polytheists’] (ie after this pilgrimage.)

[‘So if you repent it will be better for you.; and if you turn back know that you cannot escape God. Inform those who disbelieve about a painful punishment except those polytheists with whom you have made a treaty.’] (ie the special treaty for a specified term [‘since they have not come short in anything in regard to you and have not helped any one against you. So fulfil your treaty to them to their allotted time. God loves the pious.]

[‘And when the sacred months are passed’] (He means the four which He fixed as their time) [then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and seize them and besiege them and lie in wait for them at every ambush. But if they repent and perform prayer and pay the poor tax then let them go their way. God is Forgiving, Merciful’.]

[If one of the polytheists,] (ie one of those whom I have ordered you to kill) [asks your protection give it to him so that he might hear the word of God; then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know...’]

... When the discharge came down to the apostle after he had sent Abu Bakr to superintend the hajj⁶ someone expressed the wish that he would send the news of it to Abu Bakr. He said:

'None shall transmit it from me but a man from my own house.'

Then he summonsed Ali⁷ and said:

'Take [9.5] and proclaim it to the people on the day of sacrifice when they assemble at Mina. No unbeliever shall enter paradise and no polytheist shall make pilgrimage after this year and no naked person shall circumambulate the temple. He who has an agreement with the apostle has it for the appointed time only.'

Ali went forth on the apostle's slit eared camel and overtook Abu Bakr on the way. When Abu Bakr saw Ali he asked whether he had come to give instructions or to convey them. He said: 'To convey them'. They went on together and Abu Bakr superintended the hajj, the Arabs in that year doing as they had done in the heathen period.

When the day of sacrifice came, Ali arose and proclaimed what the apostle had ordered him to say. And **he gave the men a period of four months from the date of the proclamation to return to their place of safety; afterwards there was to be no treaty between them except one with whom the apostle had an agreement for a period.** And he could have it for that period. After that year no polytheist went on pilgrimage or circumambulated the temple naked. Then the two of them returned to the apostle. This was the discharge in relation to the polytheists who had a general agreement, and those who had respite for a specific time.

Then the apostle gave orders to fight the polytheists who had broken the special agreement as well as those who had a general agreement after the four months which had been given them as a fixed time, save that if any one of them showed hostility he should be killed for it. And He said:

'Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and thought to drive out the apostle and attacked you first? Do you fear them when God is more worthy to be feared if you are believers? Fight them! God will punish them by your hands and put them to shame and give you the victory over them and will heal the breasts of a believing people and He will remove the anger of their hearts and God will relent – after that – towards whom He will. God is Knowing, Wise.

Or do you think that you will be left idle when God does not yet know those of you who will bestir yourselves and choose none for friend but God and His apostle and the believers? God is informed about what you do.'"⁸

⁶ A pilgrimage from Medina to Mecca.

⁷ Ali was Mohammed's first cousin.

⁸ *Sirat Rasul Allah* 919-922.

Related verses in the Quran

The word *kuffar* - generally translated as 'unbeliever' or 'disbeliever', or some other similar word - appears 170 times in the 114 surahs of the Quran, and the contrasting juxtaposition between believers and disbelievers is among the Quran's most recurring literary motifs. *The Study Quran* says of the word '*kafirun*' (in a footnote to verse [5.43-4](#)):

"Those who do not judge according to 'that which God has sent down' – here invoking the case of the Jews neglecting the judgment on adulterers found in the Torah – are disbelievers (kafirun). Kafirun also has the meaning of those who 'cover' or 'hide' something and may thus refer to those who try to conceal the words or rulings found in scripture, rather than to those in an absolute state of disbelief. The warning to those who do not judge by 'that which is sent down' is repeated [5.45, 47] where such people are described as 'wrongdoers' and 'iniquitous'. An interpretation attributed to the early commentator Ibn Abbas asserts that those who actively oppose or reject the judgment of God are disbelievers, whilst those who simply fail to judge according to Divine Law are 'wrongdoers' [5.45] and 'iniquitous' [5.47]."

Consequently '*kuffar*' in the Quran carries pejorative meaning of one who conceals the truth by rejecting God's message as it is being announced by Mohammed, thereby defying the will of God.

Unbelievers dehumanised

The *kuffar* are frequently referred to in the Quran in derogatory- terms. Sometimes this goes so far as to present them as being subhuman:



Related verses

Surah 5. '*The Table Spread*'

[59.](#) "Say:

'O People of the Book! Are you vengeful towards us for no other reason than that we believe in God and that which has been sent down unto us and in that which was sent down before **and because most of you are iniquitous**⁹?'

[60.](#) Say:

'Shall I inform you of something worse than that by way of recompense from God? **Whomsoever God has cursed and upon whom is His Wrath and among whom He has made some to be apes and swine and who worship false deities, such are in a worse situation, and further away from the right way.**'

⁹ Literally 'godless'

61. When they come to you they say 'We believe'. But they certainly entered with disbelief and they have certainly left with it, and God knows best what they were concealing.

Surah 2 'The Cow'

63. "And when We made a covenant with you and raised the Mount:

'Take hold of what We have given you with strength and remember what is in it that haply you may be reverent.'

64. Then you turned away thereafter and were it not for God's Bounty upon you and His Mercy you would have been among the losers.

65. And you have indeed known those among you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath and so We said to them:

'Be you apes, outcast.'¹⁰

66. So We made it an exemplary punishment for their time and for times to come, and an admonition for the reverent."

Surah 7 'The Heights'

175. "And recite unto them the account of the one to whom We gave Our signs but he cast them off. So Satan made him his follower, and he became one of the deviant.

176. Had we willed We would surely have elevated him thereby, but he inclined towards the earth and followed his caprice. **Thus his parable is that of a dog. If you attack him he lolls out his tongue, and if you leave him alone he lolls out his tongue. That is the likeness of the people who deny Our signs.** So recount the stories that haply they may reflect ...¹¹



¹⁰ The same curse is invoked again in **7.166**.

¹¹ It is a Muslim tradition that this verse relates specifically to a pet and contemporary of Mohammed, Umayya bin Abi al-Salt who was not a Muslim but whose poetry survives and is considered to have such similarities to verses of the Quran that some propose it as a source of the Quran – *Koranic Allusions*, Ibn Warraq.

179. We have indeed created for Hell, many among jinn and men: they have hearts with which they understand not; they have eyes with which they see not; and they have ears with which they hear not. **Such as these are like cattle. Nay, they are even further astray.** It is they who are heedless.”

Surah 8 ‘The Spoils of War’

55. “Truly the worst of beasts in the sight of God are those who have disbelieved and will not believe. [56] those among them with whom thou madest a pact and who then break their pact every time., and who are not reverent.

57. So if thou comest upon them in war, use them to scatter those who will come after them that haply they may be reminded. “

Surah 98 ‘The Clear Proof’

6. “Truly the disbelievers among the People of the Book and the idolaters are in the fire of hell, abiding therein; **it is they who are the worst of creation.**”

In 9.28 (reproduced above¹²) it is said that “**The idolaters are surely unclean.**”

¹² III. Jizyah

Prophecies of divine punishment

The Quran contains very many references to hell, which is said to be mentioned in over five hundred of its verses (approximately one in twelve). Its descriptions of hell are often graphic and it is explicitly stated on many occasions that disbelief is by itself a cause of a person being punished therein.

The following are four particularly vivid descriptions of the punishment to be incurred for disbelief:

Surah 4 'Women'

55. "Among [Jews] are those who believe in [Mohammed] and among them are those who turn away from him. And Hell suffices as a blazing flame!"

56. Those who disbelieve in Our signs. We shall surely cause them to burnt in a Fire. As often as their skins are consumed, We shall replace them with other skins, that they may taste the punishment. Truly God is Mighty, Wise."

Surah 22 'The Pilgrimage'

19. "These two adversaries dispute concerning their Lord. As for those who disbelieve, garments of fire shall be cut for them and boiling liquid shall be poured over their heads, [20] by which their innards and their skin will be melted.

21. And for them shall be hooked iron rods.

22. Whensoever they desire, in their grief, to leave it they shall be returned unto it, while being told:

"Taste the punishment of the burning'."

Surah 40 'The Forgiver'

69. "Hast thou not considered those who dispute concerning the signs of God, how they are turned away, [70] those who deny the Book, and that wherewith we have sent our messengers. But soon they will know [71] since they will be dragged with shackles and chains around their necks [72] into the boiling liquid. Then they shall be set aflame in the Fire."

Surah 56 '*The Event*'

90. “And if one be among the companions of the right [91] then peace unto thee from the companions of the right.

92. But if one be among **the deniers who go astray** [93] **then a welcome of boiling liquid** [94] **and burning in Hellfire.**“

Instruction to wage violent jihad against disbelievers.

The instruction to wage violent jihad against unbelievers has been considered in a separate paper in this series.¹³ Here, for the purpose of setting the context for instructions to show hostility towards unbelievers more generally, it suffices to note that the most common reason cited in the Quran for an instruction to wage violent jihad, is that Islam requires Muslims to be at enmity with disbelievers and are called upon to punish them for their disbelief:

Surah 3 ‘The Family of Imran’

140. “If a wound afflicts you a like wound has already afflicted that people. And such days we hand out in turns to mankind. And [this is] so that God may know those who believe and take witnesses from amongst you. – and God loves not the wrongdoers.

141. And **so that God may assay those who believe and blight the disbelievers.**”

Surah 4 ‘Women’

102. “And when you are among them and keep up the prayer for them, let a party of them stand up with you, and let them take their arms; then when they have prostrated themselves let them go to your rear, and let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, and let them take their precautions and their arms; (for) those who disbelieve desire that you may be careless of your arms and your luggage, so that they may then turn upon you with a sudden united attack, and there is no blame on you, if you are annoyed with rain or if you are sick, that you lay down your arms, and take your precautions; **surely God has prepared a disgraceful chastisement for the unbelievers.**”



¹³ ***The Quran as Practised and Preached by Mohammed, Fact files for Factphilies 2. Violent Jihad***

141. “Those who await your ruin. **If you have a victory from God**, they say:

‘Were we not with you?’

And if the disbelievers have a share of it, they say to them:

‘Did we not on a previous occasion get the better of you and save you from the believers?’

God will judge between you on the day of Resurrection; **and God will not grant the disbelievers a way to prevail against the believers.**”

Surah 5 ‘The Table Spread’

33. “Verily, the recompense of those who wage war against God and His Messenger and endeavour to work corruption upon the earth is that they be killed or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off from opposite sides or be banished from the land. That is their disgrace in this world and in the Hereafter theirs shall be a great punishment [34] save those who repent before you overpower them. And know that God is Forgiving, Merciful.”

Surah 8 ‘The Spoils of War’

12. “Behold thy Lord revealed unto the angels:

‘Truly I am with you so make firm those who believe. I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike above their neck and strike their every fingertip’.

13. That is because they are in schism with God and His Messenger. And so whosoever opposes God and His Messenger.”

Surah 8 ‘The Repentance’

26. “Then God sent down his Tranquillity upon His Messenger and upon the believers and sent down hosts whom you saw not and **punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the unbelievers.**”



123. “O you who believe! **Fight those of the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you hardness; and know that God is with the reverent.**”

Surah 66 ‘Forbiddance’

9. “O Prophet! **Strive [in Jihad] against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh with them. Their refuge is hell.** What an evil journey’s end.”

Four verses are frequently cited in support of the proposition that the Quran encourages tolerance towards non-Muslims. Each needs consideration within its context.

109.6: 'Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion'

Surah 109 'The Disbelievers'

1. "Say:

'O disbelievers, [2] I worship not what you worship; [3] nor are you worshippers of what I worship; [4] nor am I a worshipper of what you worship; [5] nor are you worshippers of what I worship.

[6] **Unto you your religion and unto me my religion'.**"

Al Wahidi includes the following narration account for **109.1-6** which relates to a dialogue that took place in Mecca before the Hijrah:



"These verses were revealed about a group of people from the Quraysh who said to the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace:

'Come follow our religion and we will follow yours. You worship our idols for a year and we worship you Allah the following year. In this way, if what you have brought us is better than what we have, we would partake of it and take our share of goodness from it; and if what we have is better than what you have brought, you would partake of it and take your share of goodness from it'.

He said:

'Allah forbid that I associate anything with Him',

*and so Allah, exalted is He, revealed [**109.1-6**]. The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, then went to the Sacred Sanctuary, which was full of people, and recited to them the Surah. It was at that point that they despaired of him."*

Al Wahidi on **109.1-6**.

60.8: 'God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion ... from ... being just towards them.'

Surah 60 'She who is examined'

4. "There is a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people:

"Truly we are quit of you and all that you worship apart from God. We have rejected you and enmity and hatred have arisen between us and you forever till you believe in God alone.'

Save for Abraham saying to his father:

'I shall assuredly ask for forgiveness from you. Though I have no power to avail you aught from God.'

'Our Lord in Thee do we trust; unto Thee do we turn in repentance and unto Thee is the journey's end. [5] Our Lord, make us not a trial for those who disbelieve and forgive us. O Lord truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.'

6. You have a beautiful example in in them for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day. And whosoever turns away – truly God is the Self-sufficient, the Praised -

7.It may be that God will forge affection between you and those of them with whom you are in enmity. God is Powerful, and God is Forgiving, Merciful.

8. God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes from treating them righteously and being just towards them. Truly God loves the just.

9. God only forbids you with regard to those who fought you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported your expulsion from befriending them. Whoever befriends them they are the wrongdoers."

Al Wahidi includes the following two narration accounts for **60.4-8**.

One is of a general nature:



"Allah, exalted is He, says to the believers: ['You have in Abraham as well as in the prophets and friends of Allah good role models, regarding their declaration of enmity towards their relatives who were idolaters, which should be emulated'.] "

So when this verse was revealed, the believers declared their relatives who were idolaters to be their enemies. They showed this enmity to them and absolved themselves of all the things that they did or believed in.

Allah, exalted is He, knew that this was hard on the believers and so He revealed ['It may be that Allah will ordain love between you and those of them with whom ye are at enmity'.] And He did just that when many of them embraced Islam, thus becoming brothers and friends.

Consequently, they mingled with and married from among each other. The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, married Umm Habibah, the daughter of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb. As a result, Abu Sufyan mellowed a little. When he heard of the news of his daughter's marriage, he said, while he was still an idolater:

'He [Mohammed] is an outstanding person, no harm shall come to him'. "

Al Wahidi on **60.4-8**. (1)

The second is specific to one particular incident:

"Qutaylah bint Abd al-Uzza went to visit her daughter Asma bint Abi Bakr and took with her gifts: desert lizards, clarified butter and dry cheese. However, Asma refused to let her in her house and rejected her gifts. Aishah went on behalf of Asma to ask the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, about this.

Allah, exalted is He, revealed [Allah forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion].

Asma then let her mother into her house and accepted her gifts".

Al Wahidi on **60.4-8** (2).

It is noteworthy that the words seem somewhat grudging. Muslims are 'not forbidden' from being just to some unbelievers; an expression that falls well short of an instruction to *be just* towards *all* unbelievers.

2.256: 'There is no coercion in religion'

Surah 2 'The Cow'

256: **"There is no coercion in religion.** Sound judgment has become clear from error. So whosoever disavows false deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks.

And God is Hearing, Knowing."

Al Wahidi includes six narration accounts concerning this important verse.

Three of these are similar and relate to the expulsion of the Banu Nadir from Medina.¹⁴ Following Mohammed's defeat by the Meccans at the battle of Uhud, Mohammed is said to have suspected that the Banu Nadir were plotting with the Meccans. He went to negotiate with them. but on the way received intelligence that they planned to kill him and so he summoned his fighters and besieged their compound until they agreed to leave Medina.

Some of the Medinan converts (the Ansar or 'Helpers') had apparently given their children to the Banu Nadir to raise, prior to Mohammed's arrival in Mecca, and on the Nadir being expelled the issue arose whether these children would leave with their adoptive families or remain in Medina with their biological ones.

One account for the narration of **2.256** reads:

The women of the Helpers whose boys always died in infancy used to vow to bring up their boys as Jews if they were to live. When the Banu Nadir were driven out, they had among them children of the Helpers.

The Helpers said:

'We will not leave our children!'

Upon which Allah, exalted is He, revealed ['There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error']."

Al Wahidi on **2.256** (1).

¹⁴ The expulsion of the Banu Nadir is considered in another paper in this series: **2. Violent Jihad**

Wahidi adds from a different source:

"Those who wished to leave with the Jews did leave, and those who wished to embrace Islam embraced Islam".

However Al Wahidi also offers two versions of an alternative narration account, that relates the verse to two adult Christian sons of a Muslim convert. The first of these also offers an opinion that the verse was later abrogated by **Surah 9**:

"This verse was revealed about a man from the Helpers called Abul Husayn. This man had two sons. It happened that some traders from Syria came to Medina to sell oil. When the traders were about to leave Medina, the two sons of Abul Husayn called them to embrace Christianity. These traders converted to Christianity and left Medina.

*Abul Husayn informed the Messenger of Allah ... of what had happened. He asked him to summon his two sons. But then Allah, exalted is He, revealed (**'There is no compulsion in religion'**).*

The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, said:

'May Allah banish both of them. They are the first to disbelieve'.

*This was before the Messenger of Allah ... was commanded to fight the people of the Book. Later then Allah's saying (**'There is no compulsion in religion'**) was abrogated and the Prophet was commanded to fight the People of the Book [**Surah 9**]"*

Al Wahidi on 2.256 (2).

The second version of the story reads:

"A man from the Helpers, from amongst the Banu Salim Banu 'Awf, had two sons who had converted to Christianity before the advent of the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace. [After the migration of the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, to Medina,] these two sons came to Medina along a group of Christians to trade in food. Their father went to them and refused to leave them, saying:

'By Allah! I will not leave you until you become Muslim'.

They refused to become Muslim and they all went to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, to settle their dispute. The father said:

'O Messenger of Allah! How can I leave a part of me enter hell fire while I just sit and look?'

Allah, glorious and majestic is He, then revealed [There is no compulsion in religion]" after which he let them go".

Al Wahidi on 2.256 (3).

The sixth account has sparse detail:

"This verse was revealed about a Helper who had a black boy called Subayh whom he used to coerce to become Muslim".

3.64: 'O People of the Book! Come to a common word between us...'

Surah 3 'The Family of Imran'

59. "Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him 'Be' and he was.

60. The truth is from thy Lord, so be not among the doubters.

61. And to whomsoever disputes thee over it, after the knowledge that has come unto thee, say:

'Come! Let us call upon our sons and you sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves. Then let us pray earnestly so as to place the curse of god upon those who lie.'

62. This is indeed the true account: there is no god but God, and truly God is the Mighty, the Wise.

63. And if they turn away, then God knows well the workers of corruption.

64. Say:

'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God, shall not associate aught with Him and shall not take one another as lords apart from God.'

And if they turn away then say:

'Bear witness that we are submitters.'

65. O People of the Book why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospels was sent down until after him? Do you not understand?

66. Behold you are the very same who dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge; so why do you dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge? God knows and you know not.

67. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but rather was a hanif, a submitter, and he was not one of the idolaters. Truly the people worthiest of Abraham are those who followed him, and this prophet, and those who believe. And God is the protector of the believers.”

Translation note

A footnote to **3.64** in *The Study Quran* reads in relation to the phrase ‘a common word’:

“Interpreting [3.64] hinges on the understanding of ‘common’, ‘sawa’, a word sometimes understood as meaning ‘just’ or ‘fair’. ‘Sawa’ comes from a root meaning: ‘level (with)’, ‘the same’, ‘equal’, ‘straight’, ‘sound’, ‘well-proportioned’ or ‘middle (of)’. As in ‘sawa al-sabil’ which literally means ‘the middle of the road’ but idiomatically means ‘the right way’.

Thus this phrase is interpreted by some to mean not that the Quran is calling the People of the Book to observe what Christianity or Judaism have in common with Islam, but that this word (these words) to which the Prophet is calling the People of the Book are just and fair.

Al Razi glosses it thus:

‘Come to a word in which there is fair treatment from each of us to the other’

Others, while accepting the gloss of ‘just’, go on to explain that it refers to what these religions have in common. Since they all claim to worship God.

And others similarly say that ‘sawa’ refers to that regarding which the Quran, the Torah and the Gospels do not differ. Al Thalabi quotes an opinion of Ibn Masud that to call some to the ‘sawa’ of something is to call them to the middle of it.

For some the command in this verse was meant to address the Jews in and around Medina, while for others it was directed at both Jews and Christians but some restricted it to the Christians of Najran in particular.

All fifteen alternative translations considered translate ‘sawa’ as ‘common’, save for Shakir, Sahi International and Corpus which render it ‘equitable’ and Hilali & Khan which calls for a ‘just’ word.

The incident of the Christian delegation from Najran is not included in Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Martin Lings includes a description of it in ***Muhammad his Life based on the Earliest Sources***:

"Deputations continued to come as in the previous year and one of these was from the Christians of Najran., who sought to make a pact with the Prophet. They were of the Byzantine rite and in the past had received rich subsidies from Constantinople. The delegates, sixty in number were received by the Prophet in the Mosque. And when the time for their prayer came he allowed them to pray it there, which they did, facing towards the east.

At the audiences which they had with him during their stay many points of doctrine were touched upon and there were some disagreements between him and them concerning the person of Jesus. Then came the Revelation [3.59-61].

The Prophet recited this Revelation to the Christians and invited them to meet with him and his family and to settle their dispute in the way here suggested. They said they would think about it and the next day when they came to the Prophet they saw that Ali was with him and behind them were Fatima and her two sons¹⁵. The Prophet was wearing a large cloak and he now spread it wide enough to enfold them all in it., including himself. For this reason the five of them are reverently known as 'the People of the Cloak'.

As for the Christians, they said that they were not prepared to carry their disagreement as far as imprecation and the Prophet made with them a favourable treaty according to which, in return for the payment of taxes, they were to have the full protection of the Islamic state for themselves, their churches and other possessions".¹⁶

Lings presents the delegation of Najran as having occurred after the conquest of Mecca. Ibn Kathir however, is of the opinion that the delegation took place earlier, before the Treaty of Hudaibiyya.

¹⁵ Mohammed's grandsons.

¹⁶ LXXX After Tabuk

The example of Mohammed

Mohammed's hostility to other religions, especially the sin of *shirk* (associating others with God) is clear after Mohammed's conquest of Mecca. Mohammed sends parties out to surrounding towns to destroy the idols worshipped there and (as has been stated above) gave the pagans of Mecca four months to convert to Islam, leave or face death.

Ibn Ishaq's account of the surrender of Ta'if, which Mohammed had unsuccessfully besieged a year earlier, is particularly illustrative of Mohammed's compromising attitude to disbelief.

SIRAT RASUL

ALLAH



Earliest
biography of
Mohammed,
c.760

"[The people of Tai'f] delayed some months ... Then they took counsel among themselves and decided that they could not fight the Arabs all around them who had paid homage and accepted Islam...

Amr said:

'We are in an impasse. You have seen how the affair of this man [Mohammed] has progressed. All the Arabs have accepted Islam and you lack the power to fight them so look to your case.'

Thereupon ... they said to one another:

'Don't you see that your herds are not safe; none of you can go out without being cut off. '

So after conferring together they decided to send a man to the Apostle.

... Among the things they asked the Apostle was that they should be allowed to retain their idol Al Lat undestroyed for three years. The Apostle refused, and they continued to ask him for a year or two and he refused. Finally, they asked for a month after their return home but he refused to agree any set time.

All that they wanted as they were trying to show was to be safe from their fanatics and women and children by leaving her [the idol] and they did not want to frighten their people by destroying her until they [the people] had accepted Islam. The Apostle refused this but he sent Abu Sufyan to destroy her. They had also asked that he would excuse them from prayer and that they should not have to break their idol with their own hands. The Apostle said:

We excuse you from breaking the idol with your own hands but as for the prayer there is no good in a religion which has no prayers.

They said they would perform them although they were demeaning.

[As Abu Suyan struck the first blow against the idol] The women of Ta'if came out with their heads uncovered bewailing her [the idol] and saying

'O weep for our protector. Poltroons would neglect her whose swords need a corrector'

The earliest collection of hadith, compiled by the jurist and founder of one of the four schools of Islamic law, Malik bin Anas, recorded Mohammed' supposed last words going further, even, than the strict words of 9.3-5 the 'Sword verse' stating:



"Yahia narrated from Malik, on the authority of Ishmael bin Abu Hakim that he heard Umar bin Abdel Aziz saying:

'The last thing that Allah's Messenger said was:

'May Allah fight both the Jews and Christians as they used the tombs of their prophets as mosques. No two religions should co-exist in the land of the Arabs'."

And

"Yahia narrated from Malik on the authority of Ibn Shihab that the Messenger of Allah said:

'No two religions should co-exist on the Arabian Peninsula'"

Al Muwatta of **Malik bin Anas**: (1650, 1651).

The latter hadith is also contained in Sahih Muslim, where transmission is attributed to Umar.

'It has been narrated by 'Umar b. al-Khattib that he heard the Messenger of Allah... say:

'I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslim.

No two religions should co-exist on the Arabian Peninsula'."

Sahih Muslim (1767).

Islam After Mohammed

[Note to reader: This and the following three pages are common to all the papers in this series]

The following is a brief chronology of the Islamic community in the one hundred and twenty years following the death of Mohammed.

632 **The incident at Fatima's house**

Whilst Mohammed's daughter, Fatima, and son in law, Ali, revered by most Shiah Muslims as the first imam, buried Mohammed other leading Muslims met and elected **Abu Bakr** as caliph.

That evening Umar attended Fatima's house demanding she endorse Abu Bakr's succession. All accounts of the incident describe Umar threatening to burn Fatima's house and assaulting her and Ali before securing their endorsement of Abu Bakr. During the incident Fatima suffered injuries and later miscarried what would have been Mohammed's last grandchild.

632-4 ***Caliphate of Abu Bakr (the first caliph)***

The Apostasy ('Ridda') Wars; Invasion of Iraq and Syria

Abu Bakr spent much of his short caliphate re-establishing Muslim control over Arabia and enforcing the payment of zakat (Islamic tax) against Bedouin tribes.

In his final months as caliph, Abu Bakr sent armies into Syria and Iraq.

634-44 ***Caliphate of Umar (the second caliph)***

Umar hugely expanded Islamic territory to include Egypt, Palestine, Eastern Anatolia, Persia and the Caucuses.

644-56 ***Caliphate of Uthman (the third caliph)***

Under Umar the caliphate further expanded to Afghanistan in the east and along the North African coast to Tripoli.

Uthman faced rebellion and was killed by group of Egyptian Muslims.

656-61 ***The Caliphate of Ali (the fourth caliph and for Shia Muslims the first imam)***

On Uthman's death, the caliphate finally fell to Ali.

The Battle of the Camel / The First Fitna (651)

Discontent from Muslims loyal to the memory of Uthman including Uthman's cousin Mu'awiyah led to fighting at the Battle of the Camel, prompting a civil war ('the First Fitna') that would last for all of Ali's reign as caliph. Ali consented to the dispute over his caliphate being arbitrated upon but was assassinated by his former supporters allowing Mu'awiyah to seize the caliphate.

The Umayyad Caliphate	661-750	<p>The Umayyad caliphate</p> <p>Ali's elder son, Hasan (revered by most Shia Muslims as the second imam) pledged allegiance to Muawiyah, upon the condition that Muawiyah would not name his successor.</p> <p>The Second Fitna / the Battle of Karbala (680)</p> <p>On Hassan's death, reputedly poisoned at Muawiyah's instigation, his younger brother Husayn (revered by most Shia Muslims as the third imam) announced that he would honour the agreement made between Hassan and Muawiyah. However, when Muawiyah named his son, Yazid, as his heir, Husayn declared this as a breach of the agreement made with Hassan and took up arms against him ('the Second Fitna').</p> <p>Husayn was attempting to raise an army when he was ambushed at Karbala in Iraq and was killed along with 21 other descendants of Mohammed.</p> <p>Muawiyah founded the Umayyad dynasty that produced fourteen caliphs. They expanded the Islamic empire to include parts of present India and China in the east, and the whole North African coast and large parts of Spain and France. Expansion into Europe was halted by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours (732).</p>
	744-50	<p>The Third Fitna and Abbasid Revolution</p> <p>A third civil war broke out within the Umayyad dynasty that lasted between 744 to 747 and the instability permitted an insurgency by a party, the Abbasids, who claimed descent from Mohammed's uncle Abbas.</p>
The Abbasid revolution	750+	<p>In 750 the Abbasids captured Damascus and executed the last Umayyad caliph (although the Umayyads continued to rule as emirs in Spain).</p> <p>The Abbasid reign is often called Islam's 'golden age' in which Greek texts from the library at Alexandria were translated into Arabic prompting an interest in philosophy, science mathematics and law.</p>

The century after Mohammed's death saw territory under Islam expand rapidly.

It is also characterised by a series of bitter power struggles that commenced as Mohammed was being buried and included his closest companions. Later doctrinal differences would emerge between the parties that would become Sunni and Shia Muslims, but in the beginning there was no sign that the differences were driven by any issue of any doctrine beyond the fiercely contested issue of who possessed the authority to lead the ummah. Indeed, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman had conquered Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Iraq before the Quran had even been arranged into its final form and the earliest Islamic book after the Quran, *Kitab al Athar Imam Abu Hanifa*, was not written until over a century after Mohammed's death.¹⁷

¹⁷ This prioritization of empire building and personal ambition over theological reflection – which, in fairness, continued the nature of Mohammed's prophethood - may help to explain the circumstance that despite the

conquest of Damascus, Jerusalem and Alexandria, the chronicles of their inhabitants and of the Byzantine made no reference to Mohammed, Islam, the Quran, or anything that indicates awareness that the Arabs who had invaded them adhered to a new religion (see Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of The Sword*).

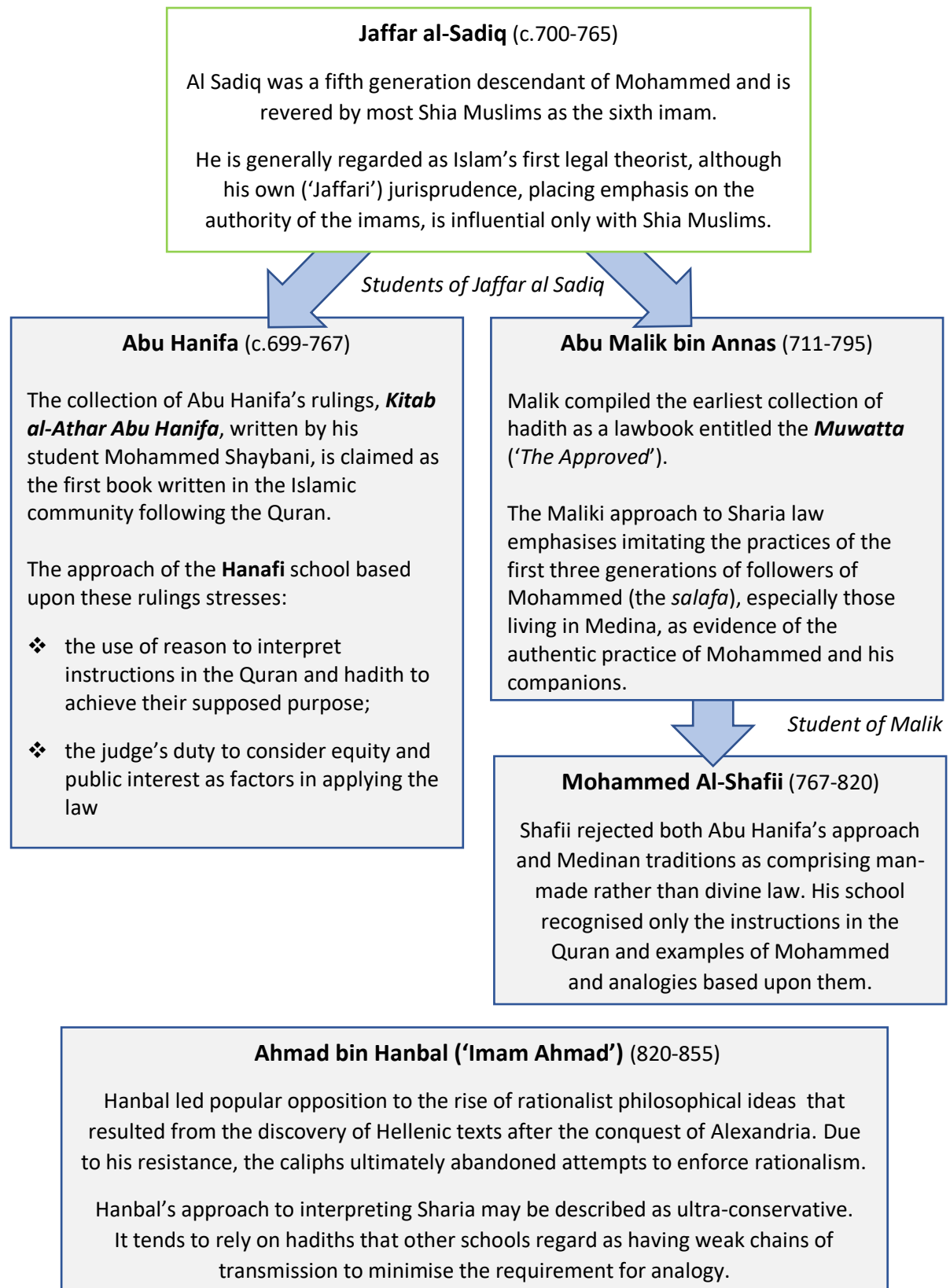
Violent power struggles are certainly not unknown to occur in Christian states at various periods in history. However what makes the very early stages of post-Mohammed Islam unlike the equivalent stages of other religions is:

1. that the combatants included Mohammed's closest companions, presumably people who had been chosen by Mohammed to form his inner circle, knew Mohammed best and had imbued his character and philosophy most intensely; and
2. the scant respect shown to honouring the religion's key figure, Mohammed, through the actions of many of his leading companions in determining the succession against Ali whilst Ali was attending Mohammed's funeral, the violence subsequently inflicted upon Mohammed's daughter Fatima, and the targeted slaughter of the majority of his living descendants at Karbala.











It is suggested that it is hard to imagine the first generation disciples of Jesus, Guru Nanak or the Buddha acting in such a manner to one another or to the family of their most revered personage.

The four great Sunni *Sharia* jurists

Following the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate the earliest known attempts to arrange the Quran's instructions into a legal framework were made. Today the vast majority of Muslims follow one of the four schools of *Sharia* law (*fiqh*) that developed from the approaches of Abu Hanifa, Abu Malik ibn Anas, Mohammed ibn Idris al Shafii, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal



Chronology of Important Early Islamic Texts

Date (Years since death of Mohammed)	Title	Author	
650s (12-24)	 The Quran		Traditionally said to have been arranged into its final form in the reign of Caliph Uthman (644-656)
Rule of Ali Abi Talib (656-661) Umayyad caliphate (661-750) Abbasid Revolution, 750			
760s (c.120)	 <i>Sirat Rasul Allah</i> (<i>The Life of the Messenger of God</i>)	Mohammad Ibn Ishaq	Earliest detailed biography of Mohammed, written shortly after the Abbasid Revolution. The full original work is now lost but lengthy extracts were preserved in the: <i>Sira</i> of Ibn Hisham; and <i>History of Prophets and Kings</i> by Tabari.
Late 8 th C (140-160)	 <i>Kitab al Athar</i>	Abu Hanifa (699-767)	Rulings of Abu Hanifa as recorded after his death by his student Muhammad Shaybani.
c.800 (c.170)	 <i>Al Muwatta</i>	Malik ibn Anas (711-795)	First collection of hadith, by Malik for use as law book, arranged by his student Yahia.
Early 9 th C. (<200)	 <i>Sira of the Prophet</i>	Ibn Hisham (d.833)	[See <i>Sirat Rasul Allah</i> above]
820s-40s (c.200)	 <i>Musnad</i>	Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855)	Collection of hadith used in judicial rulings by including some thought to be of weak transmission.
	 <i>Sahih Bukhari</i>	Mo. al Bukhari (810-70)	Traditionally regarded as the most reliable collection of hadith.
The Minha (833-48): Abbasid inquisition to enforce rationalist (Mutazila) ideas based upon Hellenic philosophy failed in part due to the resistance of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal			
Mid-late 9 th C (c.250)	 <i>Sahih Muslim</i>	Muslim al Hajjaj (817-874)	Traditionally regarded as the second most reliable collection of hadith, compiled by
Early 10 th C. (<300)	 <i>Annals of Prophets and Kings</i>	Mohammad Ibn Jarir al Tabari (839-923)	[See <i>Sirat Rasul Allah</i> above]
	 <i>Tafsir Tabari</i>		First commentary on the Quran

The four great Sunni jurists and hostility to unbelievers

In *Al-Muwatta*, Malik Bin Anas supports his two hadith of Mohammed's last instruction (reproduced above) that "*No two religions should co-exist in the Arabian peninsula*" with a report of Umar, as second caliph, acting upon it to expel the Jews of Najran, Fadak and Khaybar from Arabia.¹⁸

In *Kitab al-Athar Abu Hanifa* states that all non-Muslims living under Islamic rule should be treated as a people with whom there exists a covenant which guarantees their right to life. Hanifa was of the opinion, based upon 4.92-3, that a Muslim killing a non-Muslim under Islamic rule should be enforced with the same sanctions as apply to killing a fellow Muslim, although in doing so he records an instance in which Umar, as second caliph, changed his mind on the issue:



"Muhammed [Shaybani] said:

'Abu Hanif informed us from Hammid from Ibrahim that a man of the tribe of Bakr ibn Wa'il killed a man of the people of Hirah [said in a footnote to be a Christian town]. Umar ibn al-Khattab wrote concerning it:

'Give him over to the heirs of the deceased and they can kill him if they wish or pardon him if they wish'...

So the man was given over to the heir of the deceased and then on to a man Khutaym of the people of Hirah who killed him.

After than Umar wrote concerning it:

'If the man has not already been killed do not kill him'

And they thought that Umar had wanted to satisfy them with the compensatory payment.'

"Muhammed [Shaynabi] said:

*'We adhere to this. If a Muslim deliberately kills a non-Muslim living under Muslim governance then he may be killed for it and that is the verdict of Abu Hanifa.'"*¹⁹

¹⁸ 1652

¹⁹ 590

However this view is not shared by the Shafii school as recorded in the pre-eminent Shafi'i legal text is ***Umdat al Salik*** (the ***Reliance of the Traveller***) by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri (completed 1368) :



"The following are not subject to retaliation:

a child or insane person;

a Muslim for killing a non-Muslim,

a father or mother for killing their offspring,

*nor is retaliation permissible to a descendant for his ancestor's killing someone whose death would otherwise entitle the descendant to retaliate such as when his father kills his mother. "*²⁰

Moreover *The Reliance of the Traveller* states that no treaty may ever be formed with non-monotheists:

"A formal agreement of protection is made with citizens who are Jews, Christian, Zoroastrians Sabians and those who adhere to the religion of Abraham or one of the other prophets.

Such an agreement may not be effected with those who are idol worshippers or those who do not have a sacred book. Or something that could have been a book. Such an agreement is only valid when the subject peoples:

Follow the rules of Islam though in acts of worship and in their private lives the subject communities have their own laws; and pay the jizya."

The *Reliance of the Traveller* also records the Shafii view concerning the quantum of indemnity to paid by a Muslim for killing a non-Muslim

"The indemnity for the death or injury of a woman is one half the indemnity paid for a man.

The indemnity paid for a Jew or a Christian is one third of the indemnity paid for a Muslim. The indemnity paid for a Zoroastrian is one fifteenth of that of a Muslim."²¹

²⁰ O 1.2.

²¹ O 4.9

Elsewhere all schools of fiqh record that:

concerning inheritance law:

*“Those who associate others with Allah have more right to each other. We do not inherit from them and they do not inherit from us,”*²² and

An undertaking by those who do not convert to Islam to pay the jizya is a requirement of accepting their surrender:

*“If they refuse to pay the jizya, end the negotiations with them and fight them.”*²³

Hanifa even considers that

*“We abhor that a Muslim should initiate a greeting a non Muslim with the greeting of peace [presumably the traditional Muslim greeting ‘As salamu alaykum’ / ‘peace be upon you’], but there is no harm in returning his greeting.”*²⁴

²² *Khittab Al Arthar* 686. For the Maliki school see *Al Muwatta* 1104-8, for Shafii see *The reliance of the Traveller* L 5.2

²³ 859

²⁴ 910

Conclusion and Comment

Muslims believe that the Quran:

- contains the verbatim words of God,
- is intended to be prescriptive, to guide mankind as to the social order that God wishes; and
- may never be reviewed or amended.

The Quran offers no recognition of the possibility that a person may, in good conscience, be unconvinced that it is a direct message from God. Kafir are people who 'cover up' the truth and as such:

- are presented to Muslims as either enemies or less than human: *'the worst of beasts', 'even further astray than cattle'*;
- are destined to be punished by God with agonising torment in the fires of hell;
- should not receive equal treatment to that given to Muslims nor admitted into close relationships by Muslims.

More specifically the Quran:

- prescribes no punishment for a Muslim who kills an unbeliever, outside the context of a treaty of protection;
- states that war with unbelievers are justified by the fact that the unbelievers' lack of faith has put them in schism with God;
- requires that Jews and Christians living under Islamic rule must pay a specific tax or tribute as part of accepting humility to Islam's supremacy over them;
- instructs, in almost its final verse to be announced, that polytheists, should be ambushed and put to death.

Verses proposed as evidence of religious tolerance in the Quran

The considerable weight of derogatory descriptions of and instructions to show hostility to unbelievers throughout the Quran is not displaced by the four passages that are sometimes relied upon to project an image of tolerance –

‘Unto you your religion and unto me my religion’ [109.6];

‘God does not forbid you from being just (to unbelievers)’ [60.8],

‘There is no coercion in religion’ [2.252], and

‘Come to a common word between us and you’ [3.64];

for the following reasons.

Literal meaning

Despite their conciliatory-sounding tone, a literal reading of these verses does not show any contradiction with the instructions to show hostility to unbelievers in the ways referred to in this paper. It is perfectly consistent for a Muslim:

- A. to refuse to engage with other religions;
- B. to accept that a disbeliever cannot be compelled to believe in Islam;
- C. to permit Muslims to treat disbelievers justly (so long as justice is understood as behaviour permitted by the Quran); and
- D. call on disbelievers to come to a belief that is consistent with Islam,

all the while holding that polytheism should be punishable by death, that Jews and Christians should pay a discriminatory financial levy, and that Muslims should avoid entering into close relationship with them.

Textual context

When read in the context of the words that come immediately before or after, it is clear that each of these four passages commonly proposed as evidence of religious tolerance in the Quran, was intended to be read as emphasising the *division* between Islam and disbelief and the assertion that Islam alone contains truth, rather than encouraging respect for non-Islamic beliefs and practices.

“Say: ‘O disbelievers, I worship not what you worship; nor are you worshippers of what I worship...” [109:1-3:]

“There is a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people: “Truly we are quit of you and all that you worship apart from God...” [60.4]

“... Sound judgment has become clear from error. So whosoever disavows false deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks” 2.256

*“... Behold you are the very same who dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge; **so why do you dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge?** God knows and you know not.” [3.66].*

Narration circumstances

Each of the four passages has a narration context that belies the suggestion of tolerance that is often associated with it.

109.1-6 constituted, on the face of it, the brusque refusal of an attempt by the Quraysh to reduce tensions between themselves and Mohammed and build on shared religious experiences. Whilst it is understandable that Mohammed may not have wished to participate in their proposed plan, his rejection, with words that make it unambiguous that his faith alone had access to truth, gave no hope for peaceful co-existence.

60.4-9 was announced following the reluctance of a Muslim to accept gifts from her mother without having first obtained Mohammed's permission. Although permission was granted, the perceived need to seek it gives a strong indication that the early Muslim community saw their prophet as discouraging of contact between his followers and disbelievers, even where close family members.

2.256 arose, according to the preponderance of sources, out of the expulsion of the Banu Nadir from Medina. The Nadir were the second Jewish tribe that Mohammed expelled from the settlement that had welcomed him.

3.59-7 was the culmination of a meeting with a delegation of Christians from Najran in Yemen. There is no record of the Najran delegation having shown Mohammed any hostility, but following Mohammed's capture of Mecca he sent expeditions south to Yemen and north to Palestine in what were unambiguously wars of conquest. After this Mohammed and the Najrans are said to have agreed a treaty, based in part upon them paying him *jizrah* in return for their 'protection' although there is no record of any threat to Najran other than that posed by Mohammed's new Islamic domain.

Any rational and fair approach to religion must begin with the truism that a person will believe those propositions that they consider most likely to be true. A free and tolerant society is one that permits a person to live in accordance with those beliefs and to communicate them to others, subject to those restrictions necessary to protect the rights of others. Modern liberal democratic states give great importance to the protection of the right to explore and celebrate one's religious faith freely, principles that in the UK are currently enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The right to religious freedom is often expressed as an individual's rights of belief, expression and participation in liturgy, but religious belief is not confined to certain concepts, logical persuasion and formal rituals. Almost invariably a person's faith stems from spiritual experiences, often formed in childhood, channelled and interpreted through culture and tradition. A general acceptance and tolerance of differing religious and non-theistic perspectives, values and lifestyles (that are consistent with the rights of others) is essential for achieving a harmonious and peaceful society.

It follows from the clear and repeated words of the Quran that its explicit and unambiguous instructions, as exemplified by the life of Mohammed, to Muslims to demonstrate hostility to unbelievers are inconsistent with the values of a liberal, democratic and tolerant society.