

# and *Islam, Christianity* *The War on Terror*

Pastor Vern Christopherson

Week 1  
February 10

**Overview of Islam**

Week 2  
February 17

**Islam Movements and Emphasis**

Week 3  
February 24

**Islam and Christianity**

Week 4  
March 3

**Islam and Terrorism**

**Thursdays, February 10 through March 3  
10am or 6:30pm**

**Feel free to attend either the morning or evening session.  
The sessions will last approximately 90 minutes.**

**If you have to miss a session visit our Website at  
[www.zumbrolutheran.org/programs/adult](http://www.zumbrolutheran.org/programs/adult) to:**

- 1. Print a copy of the study guide**
- 2. View a video of the class on-line**

**If all else fails, you can pick up a study guide in the church office.**

**If you are interested, this class will be repeated in May.**

## Session Four

In this unit we'll explore the meaning of *jihad* in the Koran and early Islamic tradition. We'll also examine how *jihad* is being used today, especially among radical extremist groups. Two questions are of particular concern: "What are the roots of Muslim rage?" and "Why do they hate us?" Finally, we will attempt to articulate some ways that we as a country and we as individuals should be in relationship with Muslims.

Question: What is your understanding of *jihad*?

### What Does Islam say about War? (from *Discover Islam*)

Like Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self-defense of religion, or on the part of those who have been expelled forcibly from their homes. It lays down strict rules of combat that include prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees and livestock.

As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if good people were not prepared to risk their lives in a righteous cause.

One reads in the Qur'an:

*"Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors."* Qur'an 2:190

*"If they seek peace, then you seek peace. And trust in God for He is the One that hears and knows all things."* Qur'an 8:61

War is therefore the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law.

*Jihad* is an Islamic term meaning "struggle." More particularly; it is the struggle of good over evil. It is a religious duty of Muslims. The word occurs 41 times in the Koran, often in the sense of "striving in the way of God." *Jihad* can be on a personal level—inner struggle against evil within oneself; struggle for decency and goodness on a social level; and struggle on the battlefield, if and when necessary.

Some Muslims differentiate between "greater" and "lesser" jihad. This differentiation is traced back to the purported statement of one of Muhammad's companions, Jabir ibn Abd-Allah. According to Jabir, "The Prophet...returned from one of his battles, and thereupon told us, 'You have arrived with an excellent arrival, you have come from the Lesser Jihad to the Greater Jihad—the striving of a servant (of Allah) against his desires.'" Although this reference is disputed by some, it gave rise to the differentiation between these two forms of jihad.

Greater jihad—personal and spiritual  
Lesser jihad—on the battlefield

## **Muhammad, the Koran, and *Jihad***

Muslim history is dated from 622, when Muhammad left Mecca to go to Medina. Over a period of ten years, Muhammad and his followers converted the Arab tribesmen that occupied the territory. The Prophet is said to have participated in at least 27 military campaigns during this time—against Arabs, Bedouins, Jews, and Byzantine Christians.

The term *jihad* does not appear in the Koran with the meaning of holy war. Still, permission is given to Believers to fight for a just cause. In this case, the word “fight” is not *jihad* but *gital*.

*Permission is given to those who fight because they are wronged. Surely Allah is capable of giving them victory. Those who were driven out of their homes unjustly, merely for their saying: “Our Lord is Allah.” Had Allah not repelled some people by others, surely monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques would have been demolished. Indeed, Allah will support whoever supports Him. Allah is surely Strong and Mighty. Qur’an 22:39-40*

Sura 9:5 is commonly referred to as “The Verse of the Sword.” It revokes the immunity granted by God and Muhammad to those Arab tribes that had not yet converted to Islam. After the lifting of the immunity, Muslims are to fight unbelievers. Some Muslim interpreters have used this verse to proclaim a universal *jihad* against all non-Muslims.

*Then, when the sacred months are over, kill the idolaters wherever you find them, take them [captive], besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every point of observation. If they repent afterwards, perform the prayer and pay the alms, then release them. Allah is truly All-Forgiving, Merciful.*

Muslims believed it was their destiny to have dominance over Jews and Christians:

*Fight those among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians] who do not believe in God and the Last Day, do not forbid what God and His Apostle have forbidden, and do not profess the true religion [Islam] until they pay the poll-tax out of hand and submissively.*

One of the goals of *jihad* was to conquer and dominate non-Muslims. Again, although the Koran doesn’t speak of a “holy war” it does present a well-developed religious justification for waging war against Islam’s enemies. It covers questions concerning prisoners, the rewards of martyrs, the spoils of victory, (Sura 8 is entitled “The Spoils”), and disunity and doubt within the Muslim ranks.

The concept of *jihad* was instrumental in the spread of Islam during its first three centuries. The teachings of the Koran, as interpreted by some, lead believers to assume that God is on the side of Muslims, giving them victory over their enemies, and supporting them in every possible way.

Following the Koran, *hadiths* (traditional sayings attributed to Muhammad) were collected to deal with the complexities of Muslim conquest. Some of the earliest *hadiths* were concerned with the fate of martyrs:

*There is a man who fights in the path of Allah and does not want to kill or be killed, but is struck by an arrow. The first drop of blood [dripping] from him is atonement for every sin he has committed; for every drop he sheds he gains levels in paradise. The second type of man is one who fights desiring to kill but not to be killed, and is struck by an arrow. The first drop of blood [dripping] from him is atonement for every sin; for every drop he sheds he gains a level in paradise until he bumps Abraham’s knee [on the top level]. The third type of man is one who fights in the path of Allah desiring to kill and be killed, and is struck by an arrow. The first drop of blood [dripping] from him is atonement for every sin; he will come to the Day of Resurrection with a drawn sword, [able to] intercede.*

These traditions were very powerful and descriptive, reflecting a belief system capable of inspiring the conquest of much territory. Many of these wars came to be looked upon as wars of religion. The side that wins receives the affirmation of God.

The goals of *jihad* varied widely:

- 1) the conversion of as many infidels as possible before the end of the world (which many believed to be imminent)

*I was ordered to fight people until they say: "There is no god but Allah." When they have said that, then their blood and their property is protected from me, solely by reason [of saying it], and judgment upon them is in the hands of Allah.*

- 2) the conquest of territory
- 3) the spoils of victory
- 4) the opportunity to be a martyr, dying after fighting in the cause of Allah

*A Bedouin came to the Messenger of Allah and said: "A man can fight for fame, another can fight in order to receive praise, yet another to receive spoils, and another in order to show off." The Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever fights in order to make the Word of Allah the highest [see Qur'an 9:40], that person is [fighting] in the way of Allah."*

As the early conquests of Islam died down, other versions of *jihad* began to become more prominent. *Jihad* came to be seen as a spiritual struggle, a "striving" to follow in the right path of God. Many contemporary Muslims prefer to emphasize the spiritual side of *jihad*.

## **Roots of Muslim Rage**

According to Bernard Lewis, the struggle for good and evil has been present in Islam since the very beginning. If the fighters in the war for Islam are fighting for God, then it follows that their opponents are fighting against God. Much of that holy struggle has been carried on against Christendom. As long as Islam was advancing, the struggle was well and good. However, over the last three hundred years, Muslims have suffered successive stages of defeat.

This defeat, states Lewis, has shown up in three ways for a Muslim: 1) loss of world domination to the West, 2) invasion of foreign ideas into his own country, and 3) emancipated women and rebellious children (more Western influence) led to loss of control of his own house. This defeat has led to feelings of humiliation.

What is truly unacceptable to the Muslim, according to Lewis, is the domination of infidels over true believers. This leads to the corruption of religion and morality in society, and to the neglect or even flouting of God's law as found in the Koran.

The two chief enemies of the West, according to Islamic fundamentalism, are secularism and modernism. Secularism shows up in everything from the way we run our government to the values we choose to live by. Modernism leads us to ignore the right path of God in search of fame, riches, and other products of a decadent culture.

Writes Lewis:

*There is something in the religious culture of Islam which inspired, in even the humblest peasant or peddler, a dignity and a courtesy toward others never exceeded and rarely equaled in other civilizations. And yet, in moments of upheaval and disruption, when the deeper passions are stirred, this dignity and courtesy toward others can give way to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred which impels even the government of an ancient and civilized country—even the spokesman of a great spiritual and ethical religion—to espouse kidnapping and assassination, and try to find, in the life of their Prophet, approval and indeed precedent for such actions.*

Lewis sees this struggle as no less than a “clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.” He notes: “It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.”

## **Why Do They Hate Us?**

Fareed Zakaria, in exploring the perceived “hatred” arising from Muslim nations, makes a number of salient points:

To say that Al Qaeda is a fringe group may be reassuring, but it is false. There is wide-spread support and admiration for Al Qaeda in the Arab press and around the world.

Some see Islam as intrinsically intolerant and violent. Other scholars have disagreed, pointing out that Islam condemns murder and prohibits suicide. Nothing will be solved by searching for “true Islam” or quoting the Koran. The Koran is vast book, filled with poetry and contradictions (much like the Bible). You can find in it condemnations of war and incitements to struggle, beautiful expressions of tolerance and sterns strictures against unbelievers. *Quotations from it usually tells us more about the person who selected the passages than about Islam.*

The economic and political struggles of the Middle East have made life difficult for many in the Muslim world. Poverty is widespread. Oil gave a second wind to Arab hopes. But it produced little more than a new class of rich rulers.

Many Muslims see America’s role in the Middle East as dominated by self-interest. We want to protect our interests in oil and secure our way of life. We think Arabs should be grateful for our role in the Gulf War, for we saved Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Most Arabs think we saved the Kuwaiti and Saudi *royal families*. Big difference.

Disillusionment with Western ideas and values is at the heart of the Arab problem. Modernization is now taken to mean Americanization. This fear has paralyzed Arab civilization.

America thinks of modernity as all good – and it has been almost all good for America. But for the Arab world, modernity has been one failure after another. Each path followed – socialism, secularism, nationalism – has turned into a dead end. While other countries adjusted to their failures, Arab regimes got stuck in their ways.

Importing foreign stuff – Cadillacs and McDonalds – is easy. Importing the inner stuffings of modern society – a free market, political parties, accountability to the rule of law – is difficult and dangerous.

Enter religion: fundamentalism gave Arabs who were dissatisfied with their lot a powerful language of opposition. The Arab world is a political desert with no real political parties, no free press, few pathways for dissent. As a result, the mosque turned into the place to discuss politics.

If there is one great cause of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, it is the total failure of political institutions in the Arab world. As the moderate majority looks the other way, Islam is being taken over by a small, poisonous element, people who advocate cruel attitudes toward women, education, the economy, and modern life in general.

On top of everything, Arabs are angry with the United States' support of Israel. When Israel became a state in 1948, Palestinians were displaced. The anger deepened in the wake of America's support for Israel during the wars of 1967 and 1973, and ever since in its relations with the Palestinians. The daily exposure to Israel's "iron-fisted" rule over the occupied territories has turned into the great cause of the Arab – and indeed the broader Islamic – world.

### **Understanding Jihad – David Cook**

Contemporary radical Muslims (like Palestinian Abdallah Azzam) have emphasized that jihad, and jihad alone would resurrect the Muslim world, re-create the primal Muslim society from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, unify world Muslims, and be a world-wide power for the proclamation of Islam. The eventual goal is to liberate the Muslim world and re-create its glory.

Azzam's call to battle was based on the hope that warfare would revolutionize Muslim society and turn it away from failure and impotence. Osama bin Laden studied with Azzam.

Conspiracy theories are alive and well in the Muslim world. One of the factors binding radical Muslims together is the shared belief that the entire world is united in a concerted effort to destroy Islam. Israel is at the center of this plot. And the United States is their all-too-willing ally. *Indeed, Muslims that do not heed the call for jihad are also complicit, and their faith is called into question.*

The doctrine of *al-wala wa-l-bara* is loosely translated as "loyalty" and "disloyalty." Islam is defined--according to the radicals--by loyalty for anything related to Islam, and disloyalty or hatred for their opponents. Moderate Muslims have a difficult time speaking up, for fear of being branded disloyal to Islam and not true Believers.

Suicide is forbidden in the Koran. Yet radical Muslims do not see their operations as "suicide operations" but rather as acts of "self-sacrifice." They embark on an operation out of strength and conviction, to bring victory to Islam by sacrificing their lives for the uplifting of Allah's word. They regularly cite the verse from the David and Goliath story found in the Koran: "How many a small band has defeated a larger one by Allah's leave. Allah is with the steadfast" (22:49).

Radical Muslims argue that collateral damage (of civilians) is acceptable if the overall intent is to achieve a military victory for the sake of God.

All operations are carefully chosen. The two goals are to weaken the enemy and to win converts. In communicating with the Muslim world, verses from the Koran and the *hadiths* are regularly used to justify the attacks. Recruits are chosen from among marginal Muslims, recent converts, and those who have felt the humiliations of the modern world very strongly. This latter group often includes the well-educated, especially those who have come from a Muslim society to a Western country for the purposes of education or employment. Often these people feel more keenly the dramatic disparity between their societies and Western societies and have a desire to do something about it.

In the end, the globalist radical Muslim vision of jihad is world domination. Islam must come to dominate the world in its entirety, in accordance with the radical Muslim interpretation of Koran 8:39: “And fight them, so that sedition [temptation] might end and the only religion will be that of Allah.” Clearly this absolute vision does not speak for all Muslims, but it does have resonance for some.

### **Beyond Fundamentalism - Reza Aslan**

Reza Aslan argues for a careful differentiation between Radical Jihadists and more politically minded Islamists.

Radical Jihadists—like Osama bin Laden—are engaged in a cosmic struggle between good and evil. This is more than a holy war, with earthly battles between rival religious groups. A cosmic war is like a ritual drama in which participants act out on earth a battle they believe is actually taking place in the heavens. The conflict may be real but war itself is being waged on a spiritual plane; we humans are merely actors in a divine script written by God.

A cosmic war transforms those who should be considered butchers and thugs into soldiers sanctioned by God. It is enough to align one’s will with the will of God, to strike at the enemy with the full force of God’s wrath, confident that the end rests not in the hands of human beings, but God.

A cosmic war partitions the world into black and white, good and evil, us and them. In such a war, there is no middle ground: everyone must choose a side. The enemy is neither an army nor a state but evil itself. The battle is over civilization. Our identity is at risk. We cannot negotiate. We cannot surrender. We cannot lose.

Radical Jihadists attack the United States not to advance a particular cause or to redress a specific wrong but simply to make a point, to demonstrate that, despite all appearances to the contrary, they possess a power infinitely superior to their adversary’s.

Their goal is nothing less than global transformation. But how such transformation will take shape, who will lead the new order, and what that order will ultimately look like are questions that need not be addressed until after this world has been swept away.

Islamism, on the other hand, is a fusing of religion and nationalism. It is a political philosophy that seeks to establish an Islamic state—either through grassroots social and political activism or through violent revolution—built upon a distinctly Islamic moral framework. Some of the more well-known Islamist groups include the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Palestine, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Islamism and Jihadism, once cousins, have split into two opposing, rival movements. Islamism remains a nationalist ideology, whereas most Jihadists would like to erase all borders, eradicate all nationalities, and to return to an idealized past of religious communalism.

According to Reza Aslan, Islamists may provide an important bridge between secular nationalism (Hosni Mubarak) and Radical Jihadism. Poll after poll in the Middle East indicates that the lack of political rights is the people’s biggest concern. Moreover, when given the choice between more moderate and radical Islamist positions, people have consistently sided with the moderates. Islamism, according to Aslan, may be the antidote to Jihadism.

*Finally, Aslan argues that there is only one way to win a cosmic war: refuse to fight it.*

**Question** – How do we begin to address the issues we are facing with Muslim countries (especially in the Middle East)?

#### Recommended Resources

*Islam: An Introduction for Christians* Ed. by Paul Varo Martinson

*Anger in the East: Historic Sources of Muslim Discontent* Louis Lavoie (see Rick Turner for how to order the book directly from the author)

*Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics* Daniel Ali & Robert Spencer

*Inside Islam: The Faith, The People, the Conflicts* Ed. by John Miller & Aaron Kenedi

*Understanding Jihad* David Cook

*The Complete Infidel's Guide to the Koran* Robert Spencer

*The Heirs of Muhammed.* Barnaby Rogerson

*The Last Crusaders* Barnaby Rogerson

*The Prophet Muhammed: a Biography* Barnaby Rogerson

*Beyond Fundamentalism* Reza Aslan

*The Faith Club: a Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew* Ranya Idliby, Suzanne Olsen, and Priscilla Warner

*The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* Irshad Manji

DVD *Kandahar*

**What have you found helpful in this class?**