

Islam & Christianity – Lesson 8

How is the Islamic idea of jihad different from the violence in the Bible?

Immediately following the horrific terrorist attacks on 9/11, many Westerners began to take notice of [Islam](#) for the first time. Many were shocked to find out that Islam's holy book (the Qur'an) provides specific injunctions to engage in acts of violence as part of the "holy war" (jihad) in the cause of their religion. Soon many secular thinkers began to draw comparisons between Islamic terrorist attacks and the violence found in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. But are these comparisons valid? Are the commands of Yahweh to the Israelites in the Old Testament the same as jihad as prescribed in the Qur'an? What is the difference between the violence found in the Bible and Islamic jihad?

To answer this question, we must define what we mean by "**jihad**." The word **jihad** means "striving" or "struggle." Within Islam, there are several categories of jihad. The word can be used to describe various types of struggles such as "jihad of the pen" (which would involve persuasion or instruction in the promotion of Islam) or "jihad of the heart" (a battle against one's own sin). However, the most well-known form of jihad is that which involves physical violence or warfare in the cause of Islam. While the Qur'an does contain passages that encourage Muslims to engage unbelievers with grace and persuasion (Sura 16:125), the Qur'an contains other verses that appear to command Muslims to engage in offensive physical warfare against non-Muslims.

In Sura 9 we read, "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]; but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful" (Sura 9:5). Also in Sura 9, "Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, [even if they are] of the People of the Book [Christians and Jews], until they pay the *jizya* [tribute] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (Sura 9:29).

In addition to the teachings of the Qur'an, Muslims also follow the [Hadith](#), a supposedly inspired record of Muhammad's words and actions. The Hadith explains how Muhammad instructed his commander when sent out on an expedition, "When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and

withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to [accept] Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them. . . . If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the *jizya*. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them" (Sahih Muslim, Book 19, Number 4294).

But what about the violence commanded by God in the Old Testament? Is that any different? The most often-discussed episodes of violence in the Old Testament are Yahweh's command for the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites and take possession of the land He had promised Jacob's children. When assessing these incidents, we must understand the context in which these events took place. The Canaanites were a brutal and wicked culture that frequently engaged in incredibly decadent behavior. As Christian author Norman Geisler put it, "This was a thoroughly evil culture, so much so that the Bible says it nauseated God. They were into brutality, cruelty, incest, bestiality, cultic prostitution, and even child sacrifice by fire. They were an aggressive culture that wanted to annihilate the Israelites."

By ordering the destruction of the Canaanites, God enacted a form of corporate capital punishment on a people that had been deserving of God's judgment for some time. God had given the Canaanite people over 400 years to repent ([Genesis 15:13–16](#)). When they did not, the Lord used the Israelites as an instrument of judgment on an evil and deeply depraved society. The Canaanites were not ignorant as news of God's awesome power had reached them ([Joshua 2:10–11](#); [9:9](#)). Such awareness should have driven them to repentance. The example of [Rahab](#) and her family is a sure proof that the Canaanites could have avoided destruction if they had repented before Israel's God ([Joshua 2](#)). No person had to die. God's desire is that the wicked turn from their sin rather than perish ([Ezekiel 18:31–32](#); [33:11](#)).

We must also remember that Yahweh did not sanction *all* of the wars recorded in the Old Testament, and that the wars specifically commissioned by Him beyond the time of Joshua were defensive in nature. A number of the battles that Israel fought on the way to and within Canaan were also defensive in nature ([Exodus 17:8](#); [Numbers 21:21–32](#); [Deuteronomy 2:26–37](#); [Joshua 10:4](#)).

The more difficult question, however, has to do with God's command to kill all of the Canaanites, including the women and children ([Deuteronomy 7:2–5](#); [Joshua 6:21](#)). In response to this, we can point out that, while the Bible records that such

a command was given, it may well be that, in some cases, no women or children were actually killed. Most of the battles in Canaan would probably have involved only soldiers, and, given the chance, women and children would likely have fled. As [Jeremiah 4](#) indicates, “At the noise of horseman and archer every city takes to flight; they enter thickets; they climb among rocks; all the cities are forsaken, and no man dwells in them” ([Jeremiah 4:29](#)).

In conclusion, there is a radical difference between the violence in the Old Testament and Islamic jihad. First, the violence prescribed by God in the Old Testament was intended for a particular time and limited to a particular people group. The conquest of Canaan had clear limits, geographically and historically, making it very different from the continuing Islamic commands regarding jihad. The conquest of Canaan set no precedent to continue the warfare beyond what God had commanded. In contrast, the Qur’an actually prescribes and condones military jihad in the promotion of Islam. At no time in the Bible do we see God commanding His people to kill unbelievers in the promotion of biblical faith.

It is beyond dispute that, in its earliest years, Islam was promoted by the sword. It is exactly the opposite for early Christianity. Many of the early Christians were severely persecuted and martyred for their commitment to Christ. As one Christian philosopher put it, “Both Islam and Christianity were spread by the sword, but the swords were pointing in opposite directions!”

Finally, for the Christian, the final and complete revelation of God is in Jesus Christ, who was remarkably non-violent in His approach. If a Christian engages in violence in the name of Christ, he is doing so in direct disobedience of His Master. Jesus taught that all who live by the sword will die by it ([Matthew 26:52](#)). The teachings and example of Muhammad are quite different. A Muslim who desires to commit violence in the name of Islam can find ample justification for his action both in the Qur’an and in the words and actions of the prophet Muhammad.

What are jinn?

Jinn (singular, *jinni*; also spelled *djinni* or *genie*) is an Arabic word that literally means “to hide.” Jinn are supernatural creatures found in Islamic and Arabic writings, particularly the Qur’an. The Qur’an says that the jinn were created from a “smokeless and scorching fire,” separately from humans or angels. However, they can appear in human or animal form to interact with people. From the word *jinn* we get our English word *genie*, defined as a spirit in human form who grants wishes. According to the Qur’an, jinn will be judged the same as human

beings and will be sent to either paradise or hell, according to their deeds on earth.

Jinn are often considered the Islamic equivalent of [demons](#); however, they are more complex than that. Muslims do not believe that angels can sin, although Scripture indicates that they can ([Isaiah 14:12–15](#); [Luke 10:18](#); [2 Peter 2:4](#)). Muslims believe that [Satan](#) (*Shaitan*) was a jinni, not an angel named Lucifer ([Isaiah 14:12](#)) who refused to obey God and was cast from heaven. In [Islam](#), jinn are a different kind of spirit creature that can do evil (by rejecting Islam) or do good (by accepting Islam). They have free will just as humans do but can also oppress and possess human beings, animals, and objects. They have social order that includes celebrating weddings, honoring kings, and practicing religion.

The idea of jinn has been snatched from the world of ancient religious writings and spun into the world of fantasy, with websites abounding that claim to help people understand jinn. Many of these explanations sound more like characters in a video game, with instructions about how to contact jinn or derive personal benefit from them. Depending on whom you ask, there can be three to five different categories of jinn:

1. Marid: the strongest, most powerful type of jinn.
2. Ifrit: enormous, winged creatures of fire, either male or female, who live underground and inhabit ruins.
3. Shaitan: the evil jinn, akin to demons in Christianity. In Islam, these jinn chose to be non-Muslim.
4. Ghoul: the creepiest type of jinn. Blood-suckers that inhabit graveyards and lonely places.
5. Jann: serpent-like, primitive, and considered the father of the jinn.

From a biblical perspective, the idea of jinn could be an attempt to identify the many [unseen creatures](#) that inhabit the heavenly realms ([2 Corinthians 10:3–4](#); [Ephesians 6:12](#)). We know that the spiritual realm is real, but we possess little information about it. The Bible does not mention jinn at all, but it does expressly mention angels ([Hebrews 1:14](#)), demons ([Luke 4:41](#)), living creatures ([Revelation 4:6–9](#)), seraphim ([Isaiah 6:2](#)), and cherubim ([Ezekiel 10:9–17](#)). There could be

countless other creations of God, designed to worship and serve Him, although they are not mentioned in Scripture. The existence of what the Qur'an and other ancient texts call jinn may have some validity, but perhaps not in the way those documents explain them.

What we do know is that God's Word contains everything God wants us to know about supernatural creatures, including angels and demons ([2 Peter 1:3](#); [2 Timothy 3:16](#)). If jinn do exist, we know the Qur'anic explanation of them is incorrect because it contradicts God's Word ([John 17:17](#)). Since *jinn* simply means "hidden," then the word could describe those unseen creatures that inhabit the spiritual realm. But we must always be careful to compare any speculation with what is revealed in God's Word and base any belief or conviction on that alone.