

no meaning in Islam, at least as it emerged in the seventh century. Indeed, Islam has no Church in the Christian sense, and it has no separate secular polity — at least in the ideal. In the ideal, there is only God's *umma*, which is governed by God's Holy Law, or *Sharia*. The study and application of *Sharia* is one of the highest callings in Islamic life and stands at the center of its civilization.

The Word of God

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55 ▼ THE QURAN

As long as the Prophet was alive, there was no compelling reason to set his messages down in some definitive form. However, following Muhammad's death in 632, Caliph Abu Bakr ordered one of the Prophet's Companions, Zayd ibn Thabit, to collect from both oral and written sources all of Muhammad's inspired utterances. Subsequently, Caliph Uthman (r. 644–656) promulgated an official collection of these Recitations and ordered all other versions destroyed.

This standard text became the basis of every pious Muslim's education. As Islam spread beyond Arab ethnic boundaries, Muslims all over the world continued to learn Arabic in order to study and recite (usually from memory) the sacred *surahs* (chapters) of this holy book. Because of the Quran's centrality to Islam, Arabic literacy became the hallmark of Muslims from sub-Saharan West Africa to Southeast Asia.

The following excerpts come from the second of the Quran's 114 *surahs*. Known as "The Cow" (*al-Baqarab*) because portions of it tell the story of how the ancient Israelites sacrificed a cow to God, this *surah* dates to the first year after the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, or around 623. Our selections illustrate several of Islam's major doctrinal tenets, religious obligations, and moral principles and also shed light on the connections between Islam and the faiths of Judaism and Christianity.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What evidence is there that Muhammad was experiencing difficulty converting Jewish, Christian, and pagan Arabs?
2. How does the Quran portray Jews and Christians, and what is Islam's relationship with these two faiths?
3. What are the basic tenets of faith enjoined on all Muslims?
4. What are a Muslim's basic moral obligations?
5. What specific religious rites and practices must every observant Muslim perform?
6. How are Muslims to deal with those who attack them?
7. "For members of the Islamic community, there is no distinction between what one believes and the manner in which one lives and conducts one's affairs." After reading these passages from the Quran, do you agree or disagree that this is a central Islamic principle?

8. Compare these passages with the Sermon on the Mount (source 45). Which strike you as more significant, the similarities or the differences in message and tone? What do you conclude from your answer?

Those unbelievers of the People of the Book¹
and the idolaters² wish not that any good
should be sent down upon you from your
Lord;
but God singles out for His mercy whom he
will;
God is of bounty abounding. . . .

Many of the People of the Book wish they
might
restore you as unbelievers, after you have
believed,
in the jealousy of their souls, after the truth
has become clear to them; yet do you pardon
and be forgiving, till God brings His
command;
truly God is powerful over everything.
And perform the prayer, and pay the alms;³
whatever good you shall forward to your souls'
account,
you shall find it with God; assuredly God
sees the things you do.
And they say, "None shall enter Paradise
except that they be Jews or Christians."
Such are their fancies. Say: "Produce your
proof, if you speak truly."
Nay, but whosoever submits his will to God,
being a good-doer, his wage is with his Lord,
and no fear shall be on them, neither shall
they sorrow.

¹People who have their own sacred scriptures from God through such prophets as Moses and Jesus. Elsewhere, this surah identifies three such peoples: Jews, Christians, and Sabians (a Gnostic sect with Jewish and Christian roots that inhabited the borderlands of Syria, Iraq, and Iran; see source 53 for Gnosticism).

²Pagans who worship idols.

³The *zakat*, or obligatory alms-payment, which supports the poor within the Islamic community.

The Jews say, "The Christians stand not on anything";
the Christians say, "The Jews stand not on anything";
yet they recite the Book. So too the ignorant say the like of them. God shall decide between them on the Day of Resurrection touching their differences.
And who does greater evil than he who bars God's places of worship, so that His Name be not rehearsed in them, and strives to destroy them?
Such men might never enter them, save in fear;
for them is degradation in the present world, and in the world to come a mighty chastisement. . . .

Children of Israel,⁴ remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and that I have preferred you above all beings. . . .

And when his Lord tested Abraham⁵ with certain words, and he fulfilled them: He said, "Behold, I make you a leader for the people." Said he, "And of my seed?" He said, "My covenant shall not reach the evildoers."⁶

And when We appointed the House⁷ to be a place of visitation for the people, and a sanctuary,

⁴Jews — the offspring of Israel, or Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham (note 5).

⁵According to both Arabic and Jewish traditions, Abraham (ca. 1800 B.C.E.) was the father of both the Arabic and Jewish people, through, respectively, his sons Ishmael and Isaac.

⁶Jews who have abandoned God's Word and are not submissive to the Divine Will.

⁷The Kaaba, a cube-shaped shrine at the heart of the Great Mosque of Mecca.

and: "Take to yourselves Abraham's station for a place of prayer." And We made covenant with Abraham and Ishmael,⁸ "Purify My House⁹ for those that shall go about it and those that cleave to it, to those who bow and prostrate themselves."¹⁰ . . .

When his Lord said to him, "Surrender," he said, "I have surrendered me to the Lord of all Being."
And Abraham charged his sons with this and Jacob¹¹ likewise: "My sons, God has chosen for you the religion; see that you die not save in surrender."¹²

Why, were you witnesses, when death came to Jacob? When he said to his sons, "What will you serve after me?" They said, "We will serve thy God and the God of thy fathers
Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, One God; to Him we surrender."
That is a nation that has passed away;¹³ there awaits them that they have earned, and there awaits you that you have earned; you shall not be questioned concerning the things they did.

And they say, "Be Jews or Christians and you shall be guided." Say thou: "Nay, rather the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith; he was no idolater."
Say you: "We believe in God, and in that which has been sent down on us

and sent down on Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes,¹⁴ and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets, of their Lord; we make no division between any of them, and to Him we surrender."

And if they believe in the like of that you believe in, then they are truly guided; but if they turn away, then they are clearly in schism;¹⁵ God will suffice you for them; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing; the baptism of God; and who is there that baptizes fairer than God?¹⁶

Him we are serving.
Say: "Would you then dispute with us concerning God, who is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and to you belong your deeds; Him we serve sincerely. . . .

It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West.¹⁷

True piety is this:
to believe in God, and the Last Day,
the angels, the Book, and the Prophets,
to give of one's substance, however cherished,
to kinsmen, and orphans,
the needy, the traveler, beggars,
and to ransom the slave,
to perform the prayer,¹⁸ to pay the alms.
And they who fulfill their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship, and peril,

⁸Jews (the progeny of Jacob) who surrender to God, and are Muslims by reason of that submission, no longer exist.

⁹The Twelve Tribes of the Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt.

¹⁰Schism means separation. They have separated themselves from Islam.

¹¹Here the Quran juxtaposes the Christian sacrament of baptism, the ceremony of initiation into the Christian faith, with God's baptism of the Word.

¹²In prayer.

¹³The ritual prayer performed five times daily by all observant Muslims.

⁸See notes 5 and 9.

⁹According to this surah, Abraham and his elder son, Ishmael, were commanded by God to cleanse the Kaaba of its idols, whose worship Muslims consider to be the worst of all possible sins. Muhammad cleansed the same sanctuary of idols following his triumphant reentry into Mecca in 630.

¹⁰Associated with Adam, Abraham, and Ishmael, the Kaaba is the focal point of a Muslim's daily prayer and the sacred spot around which pilgrims on *hajj* (note 21) circulate in a series of ritual ceremonies.

¹¹Notes 4 and 5.

¹²By surrendering to God, Abraham and his sons and grandsons were Muslims.

these are they who are true in their faith,
these are the truly godfearing. . . .

O believers, prescribed for you is
the Fast,¹⁹ even as it was prescribed for
those that were before you — haply you
will be godfearing —
for days numbered; and if any of you
be sick, or if he be on a journey,
then a number of other days. . . .

And fight in the way of God with those
who fight with you, but aggress not: God
loves not the aggressors.

And slay them wherever you come upon them,
and expel them from where they expelled you;
persecution is more grievous than slaying.
But fight them not by the Holy Mosque,²⁰

until they should fight you there;
then, if they fight you, slay them —
such is the recompense of unbelievers —
but if they give over, surely God is
All-forgiving, All-compassionate.

Fight them, till there is no persecution
and the religion is God's; then if they
give over, there shall be no enmity
save for evildoers.

The holy month for the holy month;
holy things demand retaliation.

Whoso commits aggression against you,
do you commit aggression against him
like as he has committed against you;
and fear you God, and know that God is
with the godfearing.

And expend in the way of God;
and cast not yourselves by your own hands
into destruction, but be good-doers; God
loves the good-doers.

Fulfill the Pilgrimage²¹ and the Visitation
unto God; but if you are prevented,

¹⁹The annual fast during the month of *Ramadan* when observant Muslims refrain from all food, drink, and other physical pleasures from sunrise to sunset.

²⁰The Great Mosque of Mecca (see note 7).

then such offering as may be feasible. . . .
And when you have performed your holy rites
remember God, as you remember your fathers
or yet more devoutly. . . .

God

there is no god but He, the
Living, the Everlasting.
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep;
to Him belongs
all that is in the heavens and the earth.
Who is there that shall intercede with Him
save by His leave?

He knows what lies before them and
what is after them,
and they comprehend not anything of
His knowledge save such as He
wills.

His Throne comprises the heavens and
earth;
the preserving of them oppresses Him not;
He is the All-high, the All-glorious.

No compulsion is there in religion.
Rectitude has become clear from error.
So whosoever disbelieves in idols
and believes in God, has laid hold of
the most firm handle, unbreaking; God is
All-hearing, All-knowing.

God is the Protector of the believers;
He brings them forth from the shadows
into the light. . . .

Those who believe and do deeds of
righteousness,
and perform the prayer, and pay the alms —
their wage awaits them with their Lord,
and no fear shall be on them, neither shall
they sorrow. . . .

²¹All adult Muslims who are able to make the journey must embark on the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once before death. See sources 58 and 60.

God charges no soul save to its capacity;
standing to its account is what it has earned,
and against its account what it has merited.

Our Lord,
take us not to task
if we forget, or make mistake.

Our Lord,
charge us not with a load such
as Thou didst lay upon those before us.

Our Lord,
do Thou not burden us
beyond what we have the strength to bear.

And pardon us,
and forgive us,
and have mercy on us;
Thou art our Protector.
And help us against the people
of the unbelievers.