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## Islam and Burning People Alive

Posted By [Dr. Stephen M. Kirby](#) On February 6, 2015 @ 12:14 am In [Daily Mailer,FrontPage](#) | [57 Comments](#)

In December 2014, Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh, a 26-year-old Jordanian Air Force pilot, was flying his F-16 in Syria in support of a U.S.-led coalition raid on the Islamic State (IS). During this mission his plane crashed near Raqqa, and he was captured by IS fighters. On February 3, 2015, Lt. al-Kaseasbeh was burned alive by IS. An IS-released video of the burning was titled *Healing the Believers Chests*, an apparent reference to 9:14 of the Koran.

Outrage was immediate, along with the claims that Islam not only prohibited Muslims from killing fellow Muslims, but also prohibited the burning of captives. As seems to have become usual in matters involving violence done in the name of Islam, there is more to this story.

Lt. al-Kaseasbeh was a Muslim fighting for the King of Jordan, in coalition with non-Muslim governments, against the Islamic Caliphate of IS. This combination would allow IS to declare their captured pilot a Hypocrite (*Munafiq*), someone whose external appearance was that of a Muslim, but who, by fighting for a secular government in coalition with non-Muslims against the new Caliphate, was actually showing his inner disbelief in Islam.

Here are some of the things the Koran says about Hypocrites: Allah has cursed them and prepared the fires of Hell for them (e.g., 4:145, 9:68, 9:73, and 48:6); and Allah commanded Muhammad to "strive hard against" and "be harsh" to the Hypocrites (9:73).

So IS was not killing a fellow Muslim; they were killing a Hypocrite who was already cursed by Allah and condemned to Hell, and against whom Allah had commanded Muslims to be harsh.

But doesn't Islam prohibit burning people alive? To answer this question, we need to first look at Muhammad, who spoke for Allah (4:80) and is considered the standard of perfect conduct for Muslims (33:21). Muhammad had no qualms about burning people.

In December 627 Muhammad led an attack against the Al-Mustalaq tribe. Because that tribe fought back, Muhammad ordered their fortifications to be set on fire, even though the Muslims knew there were women and children inside.

Around June 628, when Kinanah bin al-Rabi of the Jewish Bani al-Nadir tribe would not reveal where his conquered tribe's treasures were hidden, Muhammad ordered one of his soldiers, "Torture him until you extract what he has," so a fire was built on Kinanah's chest until Kinanah nearly died.

In October 630 there was some resistance among the Muslims (Hypocrites) toward a military expedition Muhammad was planning against the Byzantines at Tabuk. Muhammad heard that these Hypocrites were gathered in a particular house, so he ordered that the house be burned down on top of them. The Hypocrites managed to escape from the flames.

In June 632, after Muhammad's death, an attack on Ubna that he had earlier ordered took place. The leader of the Muslim force said,

*... the Messenger of God commanded me and this was his last command to me: ...to raid them, without inviting them [to Islam], and to destroy and burn.*

*The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi, p. 549*

And Muhammad even considered burning down Muslims' houses around them to compel their attendance at congregational prayers:

*It was narrated that Abu Hurairah said: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'I was thinking*

*of commanding that the call to prayer be given, then I would tell a man to lead the people in prayer, then I would go out with some other men carrying bundles of wood, and go to people who do not attend the prayer, and burn their houses down around them."*

*Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 791*

So Muhammad's statements and actions show that during his lifetime it was permissible for Muslims to burn people alive. This was continued after Muhammad's death.

After Muhammad died there were many Arab tribes that left Islam. This resulted in the Wars of Apostasy (*Riddah Wars*) under Abu Bakr, the first of the four "Rightly Guided" Caliphs (so named because they are believed to have held the most firmly to the teachings of Muhammad). The commander of each army that Abu Bakr sent out had a letter to be read to the tribe before it was attacked. The letter explained that if the tribe did not return to Islam, the army commander

*will not spare any one of them he can gain mastery over, [but may] burn them with fire, slaughter them by any means...*

*The History of al-Tabari: The Conquest of Arabia, p. 57*

Abu Bakr even set the example when a captive who had fought against the Muslims was brought to him. Abu Bakr

*ordered a fire to be kindled with much firewood in the prayer yard (musalla) of Medina and threw him, with arms and legs bound, into it.*

*The History of al-Tabari: The Conquest of Arabia, p. 80*

The commander of one of the Muslim armies was Khalid bin al-Walid. Here is a command that Abu Bakr gave to Khalid:

*...kill them by every means, by fire or whatever else.*

*The History of al-Tabari: The Conquest of Arabia, p. 100*

And Abu Bakr gave Khalid a specific command when he sent him against the Bani Hanifah in Al-Yamamah:

*Kill their wounded, seek out those of them who flee, put the captives among them to the sword and strike terror among them by killing and burn them by fire. And I warn you against contradicting my orders. Peace (be upon you).*

*Abridged Biography of Prophet Muhammad, p. 345*

Khalid took Abu Bakr's admonitions to heart and was known for burning many captives alive. Abu Bakr's response was,

*I shall not sheathe a sword that Allah had unsheathed against the 'unbelievers.'*

*The Origins of the Islamic State, p. 148*

The burning continued, as Ali, the fourth "Rightly Guided" Caliph (656-661), ordered people to be burned alive for being hypocrites.

So we can see that the burning-to-death of the captured pilot can be fully supported by Islamic doctrine, and it even falls under Allah's admonition found in 8:57 of the Koran:

*So if you gain the mastery over them in war, punish them severely in order to disperse those who are behind them, so that they may learn a lesson.*

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