

Does Islam Allow Beheading?

The beheading of non-Muslims seems to have become a regular occurrence for terrorist groups claiming to be following the doctrines of Islam. Since Islam is based on the commands of Allah found in the Koran, and the teachings and example of Muhammad (the *Sunnah*), let's see what these two sources have to say about beheading non-Muslims.

The Koran

The beheading of non-Muslims is supported in the Koran. There are two verses that specifically deal with beheadings:

Chapter 8, Verse 12

(Remember) when your Lord revealed to the angels, "Verily, I am with you, so keep firm those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who have disbelieved, so strike them over the necks, and smite over all their fingers and toes."

This verse pertained to the Battle of Badr, in which the Muslims believed they had been assisted by angels. Ibn Kathir explained that in this verse Allah commanded the angels to do the following to the enemy:

...strike them on their foreheads to tear them apart and over the necks to cut them off, and cut off their limbs, hands and feet.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 4, p. 274

The *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* (p. 379) explained that "strike their necks" meant to "behead them."

One might claim that this verse states what Allah had commanded only the angels to do when they reportedly helped the Muslims during the Battle of Badr. Consequently, the command to behead the enemy would not be applicable for the Muslims themselves. However, Ibn Jarir, an authoritative Islamic scholar, stated that the command to the angels in this verse to *smite over all their fingers and toes* was actually also a command to the Muslims to do the same to their enemies (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, p. 274). Therefore, it would be implied that Allah's command to the angels to *strike them over the necks* would then also be a command to the Muslims to do the same.

Nevertheless, Allah's command about beheading was later repeated directly to the Muslims in terms of how to deal with non-Muslims:

Chapter 47, Verse 4

So, when you meet (in fight – Jihad in Allah's Cause) those who disbelieve, smite (their) necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them, then bind a bond firmly (on them, i.e. take them as captives)...

The Sunnah

Muhammad also approved of beheadings and ordered many to be done:

1. On one occasion, Muhammad sent one of his warriors to behead a

Muslim (*strike his neck*) who had illegally married a woman.

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2608

2. On another occasion, Muhammad sent Ali to behead a man (*strike his neck*) who reportedly had illegal sexual intercourse with one of Muhammad's female slaves.

Sahih Muslim, No. 2771

3. After the Battle of Badr in March 624, Muhammad ordered the beheading of Uqba bin Abu Mu'ayt, a non-Muslim who had been captured during the battle.

The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi, p. 57

4. Around September of 624, Muhammad wanted to kill Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf, a Jewish poet in Medina who had criticized him and written poetry offensive to Muslim women. Muhammad sent a small group of Muslims who tricked Ka'b into coming out of his house. They killed him, cut off his head, and gave it to Muhammad; Muhammad "praised Allah on his being slain."

Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir, Vol. 2, p. 37

5. Around April of 627, after the defeat of the Jewish Bani Qurayzah tribe,

Muhammad supervised the beheading of 600-900 males of the tribe, non-combatants included. He also ordered the beheading of one woman.

The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam, pp. 35-38; *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 464-466

6. In May of 627, Muhammad sent a Muslim warrior, ‘Abdullah b. Unays, to kill Sufyan b. Khalid. ‘Abdullah befriended Sufyan, joined him in his tent, killed him, and then cut off his head. ‘Abdullah brought Sufyan’s head back to Muhammad, and Muhammad praised ‘Abdullah.

The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi, p. 262

7. Around June 628, Muhammad ordered the torturing of Kinanah bin al-Rabi and his brother, both of the Jewish Bani al-Nadir tribe; after the torture, both were beheaded.

The Life of Muhammad, p. 515; *The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi*, p. 331

8. In November 629, a large group of the Jusham tribe, under the command of Rifa’ah b. Qays, had camped at al-Ghabah. Muhammad sent three Muslims to gather information or to bring back Rifa’ah. They killed Rifa’ah and beheaded him. The three Muslims then returned to Medina and presented Rifa’ah's head to

Muhammad. Muhammad rewarded the leader with thirteen camels.

The Life of Muhammad, pp. 671-672

9. Muhammad specifically said, “If someone changes his religion [leaves Islam] - then strike off his head!”

Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas, 36.18.15

10. And Muhammad even said it was permissible to behead a person who denied a verse of the Koran:

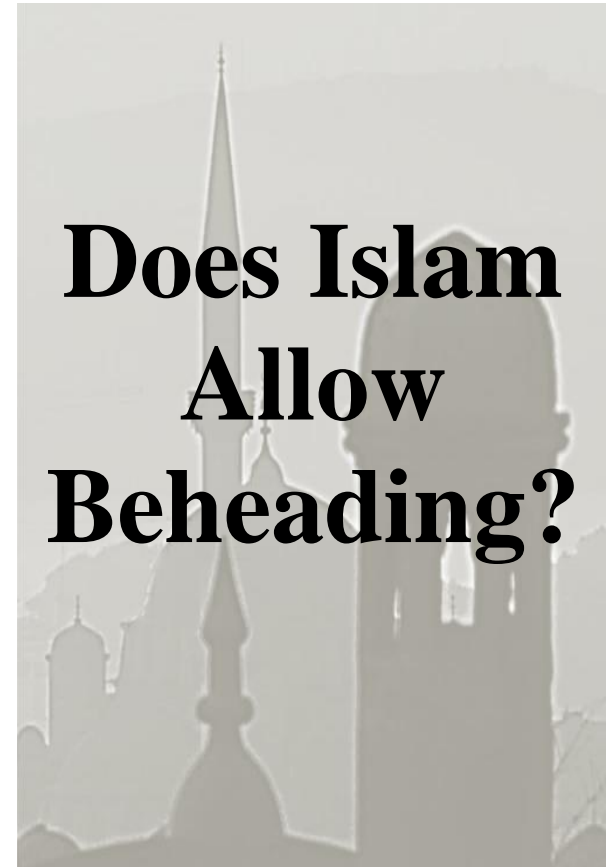
It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that the Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever denies a Verse of the Qur'an, it is permissible to strike his neck..."

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2539

So Islamic doctrinal support for beheading, even of non-combatants and captives, is found in the Koran and in the teachings and example of Muhammad.

***In Rome on May 12, 2013, Pope Francis canonized 800 Italian men who had been beheaded by Muslims outside the Italian town of Otranto in 1480; their crime was refusing to convert to Islam after surrendering to the superior Muslim army. As we can see from this brochure, the Muslims were simply following the commands found in the Koran and the teachings and example of Muhammad when they beheaded the 800 Christian captives.

Dr. Kirby is the author of five books on Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*. His books are available on Amazon.com.



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