

1. Introduction

In light of the question whether the Islam is a religion of peace or not,¹ several lists are given below. The first list contains an overview of the battles fought by the prophet Muhammad himself.² This is followed by a list of armed battles named the Apostasy Wars, led by Abu Bakr, the successor of Muhammad. Then comes a list of all four successors and the way they died, together with a list of battles they fought.³ Upon the death of the fourth leader, less than 30 years after the death of Muhammad, a major split took place. The last list shows the leaders of the two branches of Islam after the split and the wars that have been waged. All the violence is connected to the teachings in the Qur'an about jihad and to the last words of Muhammad on his death bed. He gave three instructions. The first one was: "Expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula," The second one was: "Consider the [tribal] deputations lawful, as I do." The third instruction was forgotten.⁴ It is important to remember that the lists and overviews are based mostly on Islamic sources. Very likely more battles and armed conflicts took place in the name of Islam.

2. The prophet Muhammad

After Muhammad fled to Medina in 622 AD, he gained more followers. In 623 AD he and his converts began to raid caravans to fund the movement. As he grew more powerful, he moved from raiding caravans to raiding tribes. According to Islamic sources, Muhammad ordered and undertook the following armed actions:

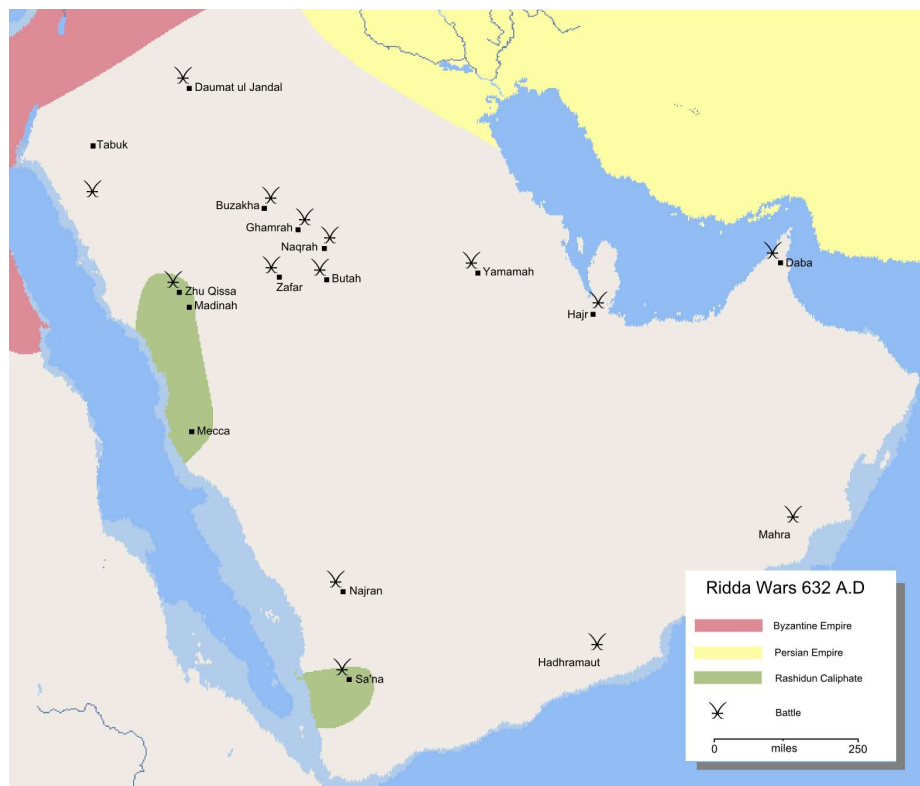
623: Invasion of Waddan.	626: Battle of Banu Mustalaq Nikah.
623: Invasion of Safwan.	627: Battle of the Trench.
623: Invasion of Buwat.	627: Battle of Ahzab.
623: Invasion of Dul-'Ashir.	627: Invasion of Bani Quraiza.
624: Battle of Badr.	627: Invasion of Bani Lahyan.
624: Invasion of al-Kudr on Bani Salim	627: Battle of Ghaiba.
624: Battle of Eid-ul-Fitr and Zakat-ul-Fitr.	628: Conquest of Fidak
624: Invasion of Bani Qainuqa'.	628: Battle of Khaibar.
624: Invasion of Sawiq.	628: Invasion of Wadi al-Qura.
624: Battle of Ghatfan.	629: Battle of Mu'tah
624: Battle of Bahran.	630: Conquest of Mecca.
625: Battle of Uhud; 70 Muslims are killed.	630: Battle of Hunein.
625: Invasion of Humra-ul-Asad.	630: Battle of Autas.
625: Battle of Banu Nudair.	630: Siege of Taif.
625: Battle of Dhatur-Riqā.	630: Battle of Tabuk.
626: Invasion of Badr.	631: Mosque demolished where opposition
626: Invasion of Dumatul-Jandal.	was growing
Total: 33 violent or armed conflicts	

Besides this list, the Islamic sources mention a number of armed expeditions against tribes and people groups, including Jews and Christians, which were not led by Muhammad, but ordered

or permitted by him. Some of these were in response to rumors about opponents planning attacks on the Muslims or to take revenge, while others were to force non-Muslims to become Muslims or to pay taxes to Muhammad. During the expeditions the men were often killed, while the women and children were taken as booty. As Muhammad's power grew, his methods to frighten both enemies and (new) believers became more violent. In the end he threatened those who would not come to the early morning prayer to be burned.⁵ This gives insight into how 'voluntarily' these converts had embraced Islam.⁶ Also, not included in the list are the opponents Muhammad ordered to be killed, of which at least three are documented in Islamic sources.

3. Apostasy Wars

After Muhammad died, many tribes rebelled against his successor Abu Bakr. At least three people claimed to be a prophet and found a willing following among the Arabian tribes. These were Tulayha near Madinah, Musaylima in the North-East of today's Saudi Arabia and Sajjah in that same region.⁷ Abu Bakr immediately came into action and in 633, one year after Muhammad's death, he had fought against all the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and forced them into submission to his leadership. These battles became known as the Ridda Wars.⁸ According to Islamic sources, the only people who remained faithful to Islam after Muhammad's death were the people of Muhammad's own tribe in Mecca. This makes one wonder why all the other tribes left, when under the leadership of Abu Bakr. If Islam provided the answers to life's problems, as many Muslims claim today, then surely people would gladly and willingly submit.



The Apostasy Wars led by Abu Bakr⁹

4. Muhammad's successors

a) Muhammad's first four successors 632-661 AD ¹⁰

Name of leader	Period of rule	Unique Relationship	Cause of death
Abu Bakr	632-634	most faithful companion and father-in-law of Muhammad	illness?
Umar ibn al-Khattab	634-644	father-in-law of Muhammad	murdered
Uthman ibn Affa	644-656		murdered
Ali ibn Abu Talib	656-661	nephew and son-in-law of Muhammad	murdered

Note that at least three of the four successors died a violent death, and all of that within the timespan of less than 40 years. All this information comes from Islamic sources.

i. Abu Bakr:

The Apostasy Wars to resubmit the Arabian tribes to Islam:

632: Battles of Zu Qissa, Zu Abraq. Buzakha, Zafar and Naqra. Campaigns against Bani Tamim and Mosailima.

633: Campaigns in Bahrain, Mahra (Oman), Central Yemen and Hadramaut. Raids in Iraq. Battles of Kazima, Mazar, Walaja, Ullais, Hira, Al-Anbar, Ayn al-Tamr, Dawmat al-Jandal and Firaz.

Other wars to spread Islam:

634: Battles of Bosra, Damascus and Ajnadin.

Total 24

ii. Umar

634: Battles of Namaraq and Saqatia.

635: Battles of Bridge, Buwaib and Fahl, Conquest of Damascus.

636: Battles of Yarmuk and al-Qādisiyyah, Conquest of Madain.

637: Conquests of Syria and Jerusalem, Battle of Jalula.

638: Conquest of Jazirah.

639: Conquest of Khuzistan. Advance into Egypt.

640: Battle of Babylon in Egypt.

641: Battle of Nihawand; Conquest of Alexandria in Egypt.

642: Conquest of Egypt.

643: Conquests of Azarbaijan and Tabaristan (Mazandaran).

644: Conquests of Fars, Kerman, Sistan, Mekran and Kharan.

Total 23 (all battles in Egypt counted as one major battle)

Overview of Violence in Early Islam



iii. Uthman

646: Campaigns in Khurasan, Armenia and Asia Minor.

647: Campaigns in North Africa. Conquest of the island of Cyprus.

648: Campaigns against the Byzantines.

650: First conflict between Arabs and Turks. Defeated outside the Khazar town of Balanjar.

Total 7 (with the campaigns in North Africa being against several nations)

iv. Ali

656: Battle of the Camel.

657: Battle of Siffin.

658: Battle of Nahrawan.

659: Conquest of Egypt by Mu'awiyah I.

660: Ali recaptures the Hijaz and Yemen from Mu'awiyah.

Total 5

All in all then, the first four successors of Muhammad fought at least 60 battles in a period of about 30 years.

After the death of Ali, the first great split occurred in Islam. The Shi'ites followed Hassan, the eldest son of the by Kharijites murdered Ali as the rightful successor. The Sunnites saw in Moe'awija, the nephew of the by Muslim rebels murdered Uthman the rightful successor.

a) Sunnites– The Umayyad Caliphate 661-750 AD ¹¹

Name of leader	Period of rule	Unique Relationship	Cause of death
Mu'awiyah I	661-680	Nephew of Uthman	natural death
Yazid I	680-683	Son of Mu'awiyah	accident
Mu'awiyah II	683-684	Son of Yazid	illness
Marwan I	684-685	Son of Hakam	illness
Abd al-Malik	685-705	Son of Marwan	natural death
al-Walid I	705-715	Son of Abd al-Malik	unknown?
Sulaiman	715-717	Son of Abd al-Malik	illness
Omar	717-720	Nephew of Sulaiman	murdered
Yazid II	720-724	Son of Abd al-Malik	illness
Hisham	724-743	Son of Abd al-Malik	illness
al-Walid II	743-744	Son of Yazid, grandson of Abd al-Malik	murdered
Yazid III	744	Son of al-Walid	illness
Ibrahim	744	Son of al-Walid	murdered
Marwan II	744-750	Son of Muhammad	murdered

Note the causes of death of these leaders. Of at least 4 of them it is known that they died a violent death.

Army campaigns during the Ummayyad Caliphate:

- 666: Attack on Sicily
- 670: Advance in North Africa up to Tunisia. Conquest of Kabul.
- 672: Capture of the island of Rhodes. Campaigns in Khurasan.
- 674: The Muslims cross the Oxus. Bukhara becomes a vassal state.
- 677: Occupation of Samarkand and Tirmiz. Siege of Constantinople.
- 682: Uqba bin Nafe marches in North Africa to the Atlantic, is ambushed and killed at Biskra. The Muslims evacuate Kairouan and withdraw to Burqa.
- 687: Battle of Kufa between the forces of Mukhtar and Abd Allah ibn Zubayr. Mukhtar is killed.
- 691: Battle of Dayr al-Jaliq. Kufa falls to Abdul Malik.
- 692: The fall of Mecca. Death of ibn Zubayr. Abdul Malik becomes the sole caliph.
- 695: Kharijites' revolts in Jazira and Ahwaz. Battle of the Karun. Campaigns against Kahina in North Africa. The Muslims advance in Transoxiana and occupy Kish.
- 700: Campaigns against the Berbers in North Africa.
- 711: Invasion of Gibraltar and conquest of Spain
- 712: Conquest of Multan
- 716: Invasion of Constantinople.
- 732: Battle of Tours in France.
- 740: Battle of the Nobles.
- 741: Battle of Bagdoura in North Africa.
- 744: Battle of Ain al Jurr.
- 746: Battle of Rupa Thutha.
- 748: Battle of Rayy.
- 749: Battles of Isfahan and Nihawand.
- 750: Battle of Zab.

So, during a period of about 80 years many campaigns took place against nations in North Africa and battles were fought against nations in Europe and Asia. Also, a number of internal conflicts were solved through violence.

b) Sunnites – Beginning of the Abbasid Caliphate 750 AD ¹²

Abu-Abbas al-Saffah was the first Caliph of the Abbasids from 750 until his death in 754. He named himself as-Saffāh, “the blood-shedder,” because of his savage attacks. ¹³

In order to keep the Umayyad Dynasty from returning to power, Abu-Abbas al-Saffah ordered that all the remaining members of the family were executed.

One grandson of Hisham, Abd ar-Rahman I, survived and established a kingdom in Al-Andalus (Moorish Iberia).¹⁴

c) Shi'ites – followers of Ali and his sons 661-? AD ¹⁵

Name of leader	Period of rule	Unique Relationship	Cause of death
Hassan	661-670	Eldest son of Ali, grandson of Muhammad	murdered
Hussein	670-680	Second son of Ali, grandson of Muhammad	murdered
Ali	680-712	Son of Hussein	murdered
Muhammad	712-732	Son of Ali	murdered
Ja'far	732-765	Son of Muhammad	murdered
Musa	765-799	Son of Ja'far	murdered
Ali	799-817	Son of Musa	murdered
Muhammad	817-835	Son of Ali	murdered
Ali	835-868	Son of Muhammad	murdered
Hassan	868-874	Son of Ali	murdered
Muhammad	874-?	Son of Hassan	unknown

Note that most if not all of the Shi'a leaders died a violent death.

5. Conclusion

For a religion to be taken as peaceful, one would expect its founder to solve conflicts with his enemies in a peaceful way. Also, one would assume that its adherents follow in the footsteps of their leader and solve problems in the same manner.

Considering the history of the battles the Islamic prophet Muhammad has fought and how he regularly silenced opponents by killing them, ¹⁶ we can conclude that his successors followed his example indeed.

Some Muslims explain that the violent events recorded in the Islamic sources are mainly the result of self defense. Though this might be true in some cases, to interpret all the battles in North Africa, Asia and Europe as self defense is impossible, because there the Muslims were not fighting in their own territory but deliberately advancing into other nations.

In view of the many Qur'an verses from the Medina period, which call the believers to fight their enemies and kill the unbelievers, this should not surprise us.

We have to conclude that the successors were faithful to their mission. That means that, as long as the whole world has not been submitted to Islam yet, it will not promote peace.

Finally, the violent way in which conflicts between Muslims themselves often were (and are) solved, indicates that, even if everyone on earth embraces the teachings of Muhammad at its deepest level, there will not be peace. True Islam cannot be called a religion of peace. ¹⁷

¹ See 'Is Islam a religion of peace?' at <https://godlovesishmael.com/site/en/articles-and-studies-us/>

² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_expeditions_of_Muhammad

³ www.christianapologeticsalliance.com/2015/01/21/wars-of-early-islam/; carm.org/chronology-of-early-islam

⁴ *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*, David Powers. p247

⁵ "The Prophet said, "No prayer is harder for the hypocrites than the Fajr [pre-dawn] and the 'Isha' [evening] prayers" The Prophet added, "Certainly I decided to order the Mu'adh-dhin (call-maker) to pronounce Iqama [second call to prayer] and order a man to lead the prayer and then take a fire flame to burn all those who had not left their houses so far for the prayer along with their houses." " *Sahih al-Bukhari* Volume 1, Book 11, # 626, see also #617. For more information about burning people in early Islam, see <https://myislam.dk/articles/en/kirby%20islam-and-burning-people-alive.php>

⁶ According to the Hadith, Muhammad undertook 19 invasions, submitting the conquered people to Islam. This is besides the battles where he was met with strong resistance. "I asked Zaid bin Al-Arqam, "In how many Ghazawat did you take part in the company of Allah's Apostle?" He replied, "Seventeen." I further asked, "How many Ghazawat [invasions] did the Prophet fight?" He replied, "Nineteen." " *Sahih Bukhari* Volume 5, Book 59, #747

⁷ www.islambasics.com/chapter/the-wars-of-apostasy

⁸ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridda_Wars

⁹ commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammad_adil-Riddah_wars.PNG

¹⁰ The succession of Muhammad hadn't been organized before his death. After his death in 632 his nephew and son-in-law Ali was not elected, but the companion Abu Bakr. He became the first Caliph or successor. After the death of Abu Bakr, Umar became the new Caliph.

Umar was mortally wounded in an assassination attempt by the Persian slave Piruz Nahavandi during morning prayers in 644.

After the assassination of the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, the Companions of Muhammad in Medina selected Ali to be the new Caliph who had been passed over for the leadership three times since the death of Muhammad. In 661 CE, Ali was assassinated by Ibn Muljam as part of a Kharijite plot to assassinate all the different Islamic leaders meaning to end the civil war, whereas the Kharijites failed to assassinate Mu'awiya and 'Amr ibn al-'As.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashidun_Caliphate

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umayyad_Caliphate

¹² www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/2058/Abu-al-Abbas-as-Saffah

¹³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As-Saffah

¹⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umayyad_Caliphate

¹⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Imams

¹⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_expeditions_of_Muhammad

¹⁷ This raises the question whether peace loving religions exist at all. In the eyes of many Westerners religion is the cause of many conflicts in the world.

Looking at the teachings and life of the prophet Jesus and his followers, we find the following:

1. The teachings of Jesus

a) Jesus taught the people to treat their enemies they would treat their friends.

He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 38-39 ESV.

And, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" Matthew 5:43-46 ESV.

His conclusion was: 'You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Matthew 5:48 ESV.

b) Concerning fellow believers, Jesus taught his followers that they should always forgive each other and that, whoever continued to be angry with his brother, would be judged for it.

'Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times." Matthew 18:21-22 ESV. And "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Matthew 5:21-22 ESV. Jesus illustrated the seriousness of forgiving each other by a story about a man who was forgiven a great debt and who was unwilling to forgive someone else a small debt. (Matthew 18:23-35).

The core of Jesus' teaching can be summed up with the words of Matthew 5:9 (ESV)
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

2. Jesus' actions

Jesus never took up a weapon or ordered his followers to kill someone or even attack his enemies. When he was arrested, one of his followers used a sword once. Immediately Jesus reproached him for it and even healed the cut off ear of the opponent (Luke 22:50-51, John 18:10-11).

Jesus never used violence against his enemies – He never tried to move the Pharisees out of the way. Instead, he patiently interacted with them and tried to open their eyes for the injustices they did in the name of God.

Jesus never ordered fire from heaven to stop his opponents, even though he was tempted to do so (Luke 9:54).

The only time he used any kind of physical violence was when he turned over the tables in the temple. The opponents didn't even get wounded. (Matthew 21:12, John 2:14-15). Thus he was always respectful to the people.

When his enemies killed him, he didn't pray for revenge, but asked the Father to forgive them! (Luke 23:34).

After he was arrested, shortly before his death, he told the political leader who had the power to free him, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." John 18:36 ESV.

In summary, Jesus always taught in word and deed that he didn't come to establish an earthly Christian (political) kingdom but a heavenly one (in the hearts of people).

3. The actions of Jesus' followers

How did his followers deal with opposition? And how did they seek to obey the command to spread the message of their master?

Besides the incident, when Peter cut off the ear of someone, nothing violent ever happened. Peter himself didn't even fight back or take revenge on the Pharisees or authorities when they captured him. They did that more than once for the sole reason that he spoke boldly about Jesus as the crucified and risen Son of God, through whom forgiveness has come to all who believe in Him. (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 12:1-19). Clearly Peter changed from a potentially violent person into a peaceful man.

When Stephen did many miracles, the leaders arrested him and stoned him. As he was dying, he prayed in the same way Jesus had done at the cross, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Acts 7:60 ESV.

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned without having committed any crime, they prayed to God and sang praises to Him, instead of scolding their persecutors. And when the doors of the prison miraculously opened through an earthquake, they didn't run away, even though they had the right to do it. (Acts 16:16-28)

During the next 300 years of Christianity, many followers of Jesus were persecuted, martyred and killed. None sought the death of their enemy. Instead, they bravely followed the example of Jesus, who never took revenge but trusted in the heavenly Father, who judges righteously.

Looking at the teachings of Jesus and the history of early Christianity, one can state with confidence that true Christianity promotes peace in this world. It doesn't seek to build an earthly kingdom for God, but a heavenly kingdom, where God rules in the hearts of the people. Peter is a beautiful example of what happens when God rules in someone's heart. He changes people into peacemakers. He wants to do that with you too.

For more information about the core teachings of Jesus, look up *The true Believers* at <https://godlovesishmael.com/site/en/articles-and-studies-us/>