

# “I’m a Muslim – Ask Me Anything,” Answers 7-10

by Hugh Fitzgerald



[Answers 1-6 here.](#)

7. Muslims often claim that Muhammad only attacked in self-defense. Among the clear exceptions to that claim was his attack on the inoffensive farmers of the Khaybar Oasis. They had not attacked Muhammad, did not even realize that they were supposedly at war with him. Having recently agreed to the Treaty of Hudaibiyya with the Meccans, which caused some grumbling among his followers (who could not foresee that he would soon find a way to breach that agreement) Muhammad wanted to placate his followers, and an attack on the wealthy farmers of Khaybar would provide the booty that he could then divide among them. Essentially, Muhammad attacked the Khaybar

Oasis because its inhabitants were an easy target, completely unprepared for attack – they are described in the hadith as getting ready in the morning to go out into their fields when Muhammad’s warriors suddenly appeared – and above all, rich enough to be worth attacking.

8. According to the Qur’an, Muslim men are allowed to have up to four wives at one time (Qur’an 4:3). But Muhammad had between eleven and thirteen wives, with between nine and eleven at the same time. If Muslim Interlocutor (M.I.) denies this, quote the hadith of Bukhari:

Sahih al-Bukhari 268–“Anas bin Malik said, ‘The Prophet used to visit all his wives in a round, during the day and night and they were eleven in number.’ I asked Anas, ‘Had the Prophet the strength for it?’ Anas replied, ‘We used to say that the Prophet was given the strength of thirty (men).’ And Sa’id said on the authority of Qatada that Anas had told him about nine wives only (not eleven).”

The rules that were set down for everyone else did not, in this case, apply to Muhammad. Islamic tradition justified this by noting Muhammad’s extraordinary virility (“given the strength of thirty men”) Now Islamic apologists claim that the reason for so many wives was to cement political alliances with the various Arab tribes to which the wives belonged.

In any case, whatever the justification given, it is surely worth bringing up the issue; onlookers will not be impressed with the M.I.’s explanation(s), but will likely see this an example of Muhammad’s hypocrisy, making one rule for himself and a different one for everyone else, and that is exactly the point you wish to make.

9. Yes. Muhammad bought, sold, and captured slaves.

He bought slaves: “Jabir (Allah be pleased with him) reported: There came a slave and pledged allegiance to Allah’s Apostle (may peace be upon him) on migration; he (the Holy Prophet)

did not know that he was a slave. Then there came his master and demanded him back, whereupon Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said: Sell him to me. And he bought him for two black slaves, and he did not afterwards take allegiance from anyone until he had asked him whether he was a slave (or a free man)." (Muslim 3901).

He owned slaves: "Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah's Apostle was on a journey and he had a black slave called Anjasha, and he was driving the camels (very fast, and there were women riding on those camels). Allah's Apostle said, 'Waihaka (May Allah be merciful to you), O Anjasha! Drive slowly (the camels) with the glass vessels (women)!'" (Bukhari 8.73.182).

He captured slaves, including women to be used as sex slaves. in Qur'an 33:50, Allah tells Muhammad "Prophet, We have made lawful to you the wives to whom you have granted dowries and the slave girls whom God has given you as booty." At Khaybar, the beautiful 17-year-old Safiya was first taken as booty by one of Muhammad's followers, but ultimately the Prophet claimed her. The fact that he then freed her (as the M.I. may mention) and made her one of his wives does not obviate the fact that he first possessed Safiya as a slave (having just had her husband Kinana tortured and executed, and killed her father and other male relatives as well, as you should make a point of noting). If the M.I. replies that Muhammad freed many slaves, you should be quick to agree – he freed 63 in all, and his wife Aisha freed 67 – but remind onlookers that over his lifetime he kept many more. Even if Muhammad urged his followers to be more humane in the treatment of slaves, and even, at times, to free one or more, this is *not* the same thing as opposing the institution of slavery. Muhammad continued to own slaves, including female sex slaves, throughout his life. The bizarre remark by Reza Aslan, CNN's new resident expert on religions, that "if you know anything about Islamic history, the very first thing that Muhammad did was outlaw slavery," is flatly contradicted by the

biographical details of Muhammad's life, as set out in Qur'an, Hadith, and Sira.

10. The M.I. will insist that Muhammad instructed his followers to treat slaves well, and set out rules for their decent treatment, and this claim is correct. You can respond by even adding that he manumitted 63 of his own slaves over his lifetime, and often urged his followers to do so as well, as a way of expiating their sins. But you will insist that this does not amount to disapproving of slavery as such, and that Muhammad never denounced the institution of slavery in itself, nor did he call for its abolition. He legitimized, rather, because he was a slave-owner himself, and the Model of Conduct, the practice of slavery by Muslims over the past 1400 years until in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, outside pressures from *non-Muslim* powers stopped it wherever possible. This had consequences for many tens of millions of people enslaved by Arab Muslims, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa.. The slave trade in Africa that began the earliest, and lasted the longest, and claimed the largest number of victims, was that of the Muslim Arabs, who took a special interest in castrating young black boys in the bush, and bringing those that survived the operation – 10-20% – to serve as eunuchs in the harems of the Muslim world.

Possibly here is the place to state what the M.I. cannot deny, that slavery ended in the Muslim lands only under Western pressure, and as late as 1962 in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and that Arabs still enslave black Africans in Mauritania today; that should provide a salutary shock for onlookers. Slavery has also been justified recently by Islamic scholars in Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, as well as Mauritania. Those onlookers can be further reminded that the Arabs from the northern Sudan enslaved hundreds of thousands of Christian and pagan blacks in the southern Sudan during the Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). Lest the M.I. insist that no Islamic authority nowadays defends slavery, you can respond with, for example,

this from a 2006 interview with an Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, of the Iranian Assembly of Experts (80 respected theologians), who stated,

*Today, too, if there's a war between us and the infidels, we'll take slaves. The ruling on slavery hasn't expired and is eternal. We'll take slaves and we'll bring them to the world of Islam and have them stay with Muslims. We'll guide them, make them Muslims and then return them to their countries.*

That should be the last word in this Q-and-A exchange on slavery in Islam.

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