

UNLOCKING THE TRUTH SERIES

JIM DENISON

RADICAL  
ISLAM

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHY DO THEY STILL HATE US?

WAS BIN LADEN'S DEATH JUST?

SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR ON TERROR



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# FOREWORD



At age 15 I was ready to die for my religion of Islam. Born and raised in a devout Muslim home in South Asia, I was trained to become an Islamic leader—but God had other plans. One night as a young man I dreamed I was burning in a lake of fire, and that began my quest for the true God, a journey that led me to the feet of Jesus.

Setting foot on American soil for the first time as a young adult, I had never met a Christian, never seen a church, and never really knew what a genuine American/Christian—for me these terms were synonymous at the time—was like, only the propaganda I had learned in the *madrassas* (Islamic schools).

The events of 9/11 are still painfully raw for many. Ten years later questions remain about the world's fastest growing religion and the worldview of its 1.6 billion adherents. While not all Muslims are terrorists, the threat of radical Islam is a real and serious issue the next generation will have to face.

The copy of Dr. Jim Denison's book that you now hold provides a timely, insightful interpretation of this movement in our times. I find Dr. Denison's understanding of radical Islam to be accurate and balanced. His intellectual brilliance and excellent communication skills engage and support readers in navigating these complex issues.

Not only is Jim a brilliant scholar, but he also has first-hand experience working with Muslims in East Malaysia and in my native country of

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Bangladesh, the third largest Islamic nation in the world. I have seen his compassion for Muslims as we ministered together, sitting on the concrete floor of a village mosque and *madrassa* in dialogue with imams, *madrassa* teachers, and children who were memorizing the entire Qur'an—such *madrassas* that serve as potential breeding grounds for terrorism.

Dr. Denison is a dear friend, and it has been a privilege to sit under him as my pastor for more than 10 years at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas. He is a sought-after speaker and prolific writer; we have been honored and blessed to hear his remarkable teaching on radical Islam at our Gospel For Muslims annual Muslim Background Believer's C Conference.

I pray *Radical Islam* reaches the hands and hearts of Jesus' followers across America and the globe. Dr. Denison's work will equip us to better understand our post-9/11 world and the role of radical Islam, helping us to fight terrorism with the love and hope that Jesus brings.

**Dr. Abraham Sarker**  
Founder and President, Gospel For Muslims



# INTRODUCTION



## The Greatest Threat We've Ever Faced

On September 11, 2011, Ground Zero will be open to the public for the first time in ten years.

The roof of Tower One, often called the Freedom Tower, will eventually stand 1,368 feet tall, the same height as the original One World Trade Center. With its spire added, it will stand 1,776 feet tall, symbolic of the year of our independence.

Tower Two is expected to reach a height of 1,350 feet; Tower Three will stand 1,255 feet high; and Tower Four is planned for a height of 946 feet. Hundreds of trees have been planted across the 16-acre site. Two memorial pools will mark the footprints of World Trade Center Tower One and Tower Two. The National September 11 Memorial and Museum opens on the 10th anniversary of the worst terrorism attack in our nation's history.

I made my first visit to the World Trade Center several years before 9/11. Standing on the sidewalk, I tried to see the tops of the Twin Towers, but failed. If I had lain on the ground I still couldn't have seen them—they were that tall.

Last year I returned to Ground Zero for the first time since 9/11. I stood at the site and remembered that horrific day. Staring into the morning skies, my mind flashed back to television images of skyscrapers burning and people

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jumping to their deaths. Then the towers collapsed to the ground in a hideous cloud of debris and dust. Looking back over the 10 years since that shocking morning, it seemed that the nation we were before the War on Terror had vanished with them.

The statistics alone are staggering:

- ◆ 2,750 died in the World Trade Center, including 343 fire-fighters and paramedics, 23 New York City police officers, and 37 Port Authority officers. Ten thousand others have been treated for injuries.
- ◆ Only six people who were in the towers at the time of the attacks survived.
- ◆ When the Pentagon was attacked, 125 military personnel were killed, along with 64 airplane passengers.
- ◆ Forty-five died aboard United Flight 93.<sup>1</sup>

Since 9/11, terrorism attacks around the world have continued unabated. In 2002, a bombing in Bali, Indonesia, killed 202 people from 21 countries and injured 240. In 2003, a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv, Israel, killed three and injured more than 50. Later that year, 14 bombers in Casablanca, Morocco, killed 33 and injured 100. Still later that year, bombings in Istanbul, Turkey, killed 50 and injured 700. In 2004, explosions in three Madrid train stations killed 170 and injured 500. In 2005, explosions in London's transportation network killed 37 and injured 700. In 2010, terrorists attacking a train in Moscow killed 39 and injured 71. All these deaths can be directly attributed to the teachings of radical Islam.

Meanwhile, the costs of fighting the War on Terror continue to escalate. As of June 6, 2011, 6,043 American troops had died in Iraq and Afghanistan and 43,964 had been injured. Estimates regarding Iraqi and Afghan casualties range from 150,000 (80percent civilians)<sup>2</sup> to more than a million.<sup>3</sup>

## THE GREATEST THREAT WE'VE EVER FACED

At this writing, the United States has spent more than \$1.283 trillion on the war effort. This is nearly the amount we spent on Vietnam (\$738 billion), Korea (\$341 billion) and World War I (\$334 billion) combined (all figures in today's dollars). It is estimated that we may spend another \$600 billion in medical care for injured military personnel.<sup>4</sup>

In the 10 years since 9/11, *Time* magazine devoted 13 cover stories to terrorism issues. *The New York Times* published 70,831 stories on terrorism-related subjects. Can you think of any issue that has dominated our news over the last decade more than radical Islam?

Here's my point: after 10 years, multiplied thousands of deaths and injuries, and trillions of dollars spent, most Americans still don't know why our enemy hates us. Stop people on the street and ask them why we fought World War II; if they know history at all they'll be able to answer your question quickly. We knew that we were fighting Communist expansion in Korea and Vietnam and that we were defending Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein in Operation DESERT STORM.

But ask Americans why terrorists flew three planes into buildings and attempted a fourth attack on that terrible day 10 years ago. "Because they hate us," they'll say. If you ask them why they hate us, they don't know.

This book is written to answer that question.

I am convinced that radical Islam constitutes the greatest threat the West has ever faced. It is imperative that we understand our enemy—who they are, what they believe, and how to defeat them. Otherwise, the next 10 years will be harder than the last 10.

The good news is that this is a war we can win. The bad news is that if we don't, 9/11 will have destroyed more than the Twin Towers. Our values and way of life are at stake, more than ever before in our history. Let's learn why and what you can do about it today.

June 2011

Dallas, Texas

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## ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.history.com/topics/9-11-attacks>, accessed June 11, 2011
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq\\_War\\_documents\\_leak#cite\\_note-53](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War_documents_leak#cite_note-53), accessed June 11, 2011.
3. [http://www.opinion.co.uk/Newsroom\\_details.aspx?NewsId=120](http://www.opinion.co.uk/Newsroom_details.aspx?NewsId=120), accessed June 11, 2011.
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## CHAPTER ONE



# WHO WAS USAMA BIN LADEN? WAS HIS DEATH JUST?



America's "most wanted" fugitive looks eerily like me. Glen Stewart Godwin was born a month after I was. We're both 6 feet tall with medium build, dark hair and green eyes. That's where the similarities end. Godwin escaped from Folsom Prison in 1987, where he was serving a sentence for murder; he was later arrested and imprisoned in Guadalajara, where he escaped again.

He is joined on the FBI's "Most Wanted" list<sup>2</sup> by Jason Derek Brown, an avid golfer who speaks fluent French, holds a Master's Degree in International Business, and allegedly killed an armored car guard outside a movie theater and then fled with the money. Other members of his infamous fraternity include a Russian mobster, a kidnapper, a man who murdered his wife and children, and until May 2, 2011, Usama bin Laden.

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The FBI's website describes bin Laden as "the leader of a terrorist organization known as al-Qaeda, 'The Base.' He is left-handed and walks with a cane." Unlike Glen Godwin and most of his fellow fugitives, whose rewards are \$100,000 each, the bounty on bin Laden was \$25 million. Who was he? Why was he such a threat to our nation? How did he die? Was his death just?<sup>3</sup>

### **If the Vanderbilts were Arabs**

Cornelius Vanderbilt was the fourth of nine children born to a modest family on Staten Island. He left school in 1805 at age 11 and built a railroad and shipping empire that made him one of the world's wealthiest men.

Mohamed bin Laden<sup>4</sup> was Saudi Arabia's version of the Vanderbilt success story. The future father of Usama bin Laden and 53 other children was born in 1908 in Yemen. The region, known as Hadramout, is famous for towering mud-brick structures and the engineers who built them. It is one of the most ancient places on earth, tracing its lineage to Seba, the grandson of Ham and son of Cush (Genesis 10:7) who founded the Sabean, the ancestors of modern-day Yemen.

Mohamed Bin Laden's father died when he was still a child. He soon joined a camel caravan and walked to the port city of Mukalla, sailed to Africa, and found work in Ethiopia. There his right eye was damaged—some reports claim the injury was an accident, while others blame a teacher's blow—so that he wore a glass eye for the rest of his life.

He eventually made his way to Jeddah, an ancient city beside the Red Sea that serves as the gateway to Mecca. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims come through the city every year on the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest city. Mohamed got a job working for pilgrims as a porter, then sold fruit from a donkey.

He soon found a job as a builder, and was successful enough to found his own small company in 1931. He was not tall (he stood 5 feet, 8 inches), could barely read and never learned to write, but he was a natural leader and excellent organizer. He could do complicated math in his head and was

brilliant with finances. His company found work in small construction projects, and then fortune intervened.

Abdulaziz ibn Saud founded the modern nation of Saudi Arabia in 1932. About this time oil was discovered on the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian American Oil Company, or Aramco, was formed to develop the finds. Mohamed bin Laden was soon employed by Aramco as a mason and bricklayer. His excellent work came to the attention of the royal family, who invited him to begin working on their palaces.

No one knows exactly how bin Laden first met ibn Saud, the King of Saudi Arabia, but the two formed a partnership that revolutionized the nation. Bin Laden's company was employed to build mosques, then a series of dams and reservoirs to supply water to Mecca. When bin Laden paved the 350-mile road from the port city of Jeddah to Medina, Islam's second-holiest city, his national reputation was secured.

Over time, bin Laden's construction company would rebuild the tourist sites of Mecca and Medina, as well as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and every major road in the Kingdom. He became the largest customer of Caterpillar dirt-moving equipment on the planet. His company became the richest in Saudi Arabia, growing to more than \$5 billion in assets and employing more than 35,000 people; his was known as the wealthiest non-royal family in the kingdom.

Mohamed bin Laden soon branched out into telecommunications, engineering, concrete, and consulting. His operations sold soft drinks, built the Kuala Lumpur airport, and partnered with such firms as General Electric and Citigroup. Many members of his family moved to homes in the West. (On September 11, 2001, 12 lived in the Boston area alone.)

Bin Laden was famous for his charity, on one occasion paying for surgery in Spain for a man who had lost his sight, on another occasion building a well and mosque for a village in need. Following his lead, his family has since contributed large sums to endow fellowships at Harvard, Oxford and Tufts.

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He married 22 times, though he was never married to more than four wives at a time (thus following Islamic law). He fathered at least 54 children; the 17<sup>th</sup> was named “Usama.” Mohamed bin Laden died on September 3, 1967 when his airplane, piloted by an American, crashed and burned.

### “A shy kid, very nice, very considerate”

Usama bin Laden was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 10, 1957, the only child of his mother, Alia Ghanem, and his father. He was the seventh son of his father. Usama means “the Lion” and was the name of one of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions. His mother was about 15 when he was born.

Shortly after their divorce, his father arranged for her to marry an employee named Muhammad al-Attas, by whom she had three more sons and a daughter. Usama was raised in their modest white stucco home in Jeddah. He eventually inherited 2.27 percent of his father’s company, a net worth which exceeded \$25 million.

His mother remembers her first-born as “a shy kid, very nice, very considerate. He has always been helpful. I tried to instill in him the fear and love of God, the respect and love for his family, neighbors and teachers.”<sup>5</sup> As a boy he enjoyed watching television; *Bonanza* was his favorite show. When he was 10, Usama was enrolled briefly in a boarding school north of Beirut, Lebanon. Ironically, it was run by the Quakers, a Christian group that emphasizes pacifism. We wonder how different history would have been if Usama had remained their student.

He returned home to Jeddah, where his mother enrolled him in the Al-Thaghr Model School, a very elite private high school. Like his fellow students, Usama wore Western clothing and learned English. Here he met a physical education teacher whose influence would change his life.

The man was a follower of the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamist organization dedicated to the overthrow of Western influence in the Middle

East. At the age of 15, Bin Laden was attracted to the gym teacher's after-school study group; he would later refer to his immersion in its ideology as his "conversion." He began fasting on Monday and Thursday in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad, and became increasingly impassioned by the plight of the Palestinians.

He was also engaged in his family's business by this time, receiving enough money to buy several luxury cars and pursue horseback riding, his favorite hobby. He went big-game hunting in Kenya and mountain climbing in Turkey. He enrolled in Jeddah's King Abdulaziz University in 1976 to study business administration. Muhammad Qutb, one of the intellectual leaders of radical Islam, was a lecturer at the university. Here bin Laden read *Signposts*, by Muhammad's brother Sayyid, one of the foundational documents of their militant movement. Among his teachers was Dr. Abdullah Azzam, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and founder of Hamas (the radical movement that seeks to destroy Israel).

While in college, bin Laden married Najwa, a daughter of his mother's brother; he was 17, she was 14. She soon became pregnant and gave birth to a son, Abdullah, the first of their 11 children.

Though bin Laden later claimed to have graduated from university, independent accounts state that he left school a year short of graduation to work in his family's business. He secured an apartment in Jeddah, where he took a second wife in 1982. She held a Ph.D. in child psychology and taught at King Abdulaziz University; the couple had one child, a son. A few years later he married again, to a woman who held a doctorate in Arabic grammar and would bear him three daughters and a son. He would later take a fourth wife, who bore him three children as well.

As their family grew, bin Laden insisted that his children be raised in a very strict environment. Cartoons and television were banned (except for news programs); his children could not drink from straws, as they were unknown during the time of the Prophet. They made one trip to the West, seeking medical treatment for a son who suffered from hydrocephalus.

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Bin Laden began working for the family company in Mecca, managing projects and using his ability with English to work with Western engineers. His income at this time was at least \$150,000 a year.

### **Building “the Lion’s Den”**

By this time the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was several years old. More and more Muslims were rallying to the Afghan cause, especially those who were motivated by militant ideology. Dr. Azzam, bin Laden’s university teacher, had become a fundraiser for the Afghan resistance. He led his former student into the cause, turning his life from business to war and eventually to the Tuesday morning that changed our nation forever.

The Soviet oppression of Afghanistan represented everything about non-Muslims which bin Laden had come to hate. He interpreted their invasion as an attack on Islam itself and began rallying support for the Afghan resistance.

His primary weapon was financial. Bin Laden and Azzam established the Maktab al-Khidmat, the Services Bureau, which they used to set up a recruiting network for fighters and finances. Azzam ran the network, while bin Laden financed it by raising enormous funds for the war effort.

How was he able to secure such support? Giving to charity is one of the “five pillars” of Islam. Many wealthy families in Saudi Arabia arrange for their benevolence through a trusted third party that serves as their financial advisor. Given his contacts throughout Saudi society, bin Laden worked with many estates to channel funds to the fight for Islam in Afghanistan.

He not only waged “financial jihad”—he also provided personal hospitality for Arab recruits on their way to the front lines. Azzam then led bin Laden to join the war effort in Afghanistan personally. Here he came to the attention of a brilliant Egyptian eye surgeon who was a leader of the resistance: Ayman al-Zawahiri. The doctor, six years older than bin Laden, soon became a mentor to him. He drew bin Laden into his circle and became his personal physician. Bin Laden had already contracted malaria and nearly died of pneumonia. By

this time he had developed other physical ailments that would plague him for the rest of his life: low blood pressure, weight loss, muscle fatigue, back pain, and intestinal discomfort. (Some physicians suggest that he may have suffered from Addison's disease, a diagnosis that would explain his symptoms.)

Bin Laden and Zawahiri built a small band of fighters loyal to their leadership. They built a base that they named "the Lion's Den" in honor of Usama. When he led them into battle in the spring of 1987, bin Laden stepped from business manager to battlefield hero. Towering over most of his soldiers (reports list his height as 6 feet 4 inches to 6 feet 6 inches), the willingness of this extremely wealthy tycoon to risk his life personally for the cause elevated his status to near myth among his followers. In gratitude for his military leadership, bin Laden was given a trophy from a dead Russian officer—the Kalikov AK-74 assault rifle with which he was so often pictured in the years afterward.

## **From freedom fighters to international terrorism**

When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, bin Laden consolidated his soldiers into a permanent militia. He and Zawahiri joined forces to lead their movement. On August 20, 1988, they and their followers established their formal organization, Al Qaeda Al-Askariya ("The Military Base"). They were 30 in number.

Using his strengths in fundraising, business management, and political connections, bin Laden began expanding his organization. He and Zawahiri built an impressive leadership council, including experts in military operations, weapons procurement, computers, media, tanks, mortars, and explosives. New recruits filled out forms in triplicate, swore themselves to secrecy, and pledged an oath of allegiance to bin Laden. Single members received \$1,000 a month in salary; married members were paid \$1,500. Every member received a month of vacation and a paid round-trip ticket home each year; there was a health care plan for the entire group. They constructed a constitution and by-laws, and became an attractive employer in a region where jobs were meager.

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By 1989 bin Laden had received some \$18 million from the family business (some place the number as high as \$30 million), funds he dedicated to his organization. He returned to Saudi Arabia at the age of 31 as a war hero and began supporting Islamist rebels in South Yemen in their fight against their communist government.

Then came Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. From there he could advance on the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and seize control of the bulk of the world's oil supply. Bin Laden offered the support of his militia in expelling Saddam's advance, promising to marshal 100,000 volunteers in defense of his homeland.

At this time the Saudi army numbered only 58,000 men, facing an enemy with a standing army of nearly a million men. Bin Laden promised to defeat Iraq as his forces had defeated the Soviets, but his government turned instead to the hated "infidels" of the West, allowing Americans on sacred Saudi soil. Usama was outraged, and made his anger clear. He founded the Advice and Reform Committee, an organization with offices in Sudan and London that was devoted to anti-Saudi propaganda. He also continued his support for the rebels in Yemen, a movement that worried the Saudi government. On May 1, 1991, bin Laden left his native land as an exile.

He took his four wives and numerous children to Khartoum, Sudan. A 1989 coup there had installed a militant-Islamist regime whose ideology was attractive to bin Laden. He soon began channeling funds to his adopted base of operations; some reports place the figure as high as \$350 million.

He set up an "Islamic Army Shura" to coordinate the terrorist groups with which he was building alliances. His organization began branching into multiple theaters of operations, sending money and materials to jihadist groups in Jordan, Eritrea, the Philippines, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, and Chechnya. These efforts cemented al-Qaeda as a keystone for international jihad.

Bin Laden lived in a luxury villa and worked out of an office in Khartoum's business district. During this time his family in Saudi Arabia made

numerous attempts to persuade him to cease his militant activities and return home, but he rebuffed them all. His mother even made one such effort. In 1993, his family expelled him as a shareholder in their companies; in 1994 they repudiated him publicly.

During his years in Sudan, bin Laden expanded al-Qaeda from a group of combat fighters into an international terrorist organization. In 1996, under pressure from Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Sudanese government expelled him. Ironically, they offered to extradite him to the U.S. or Saudi Arabia, but both refused to take him. He moved his family again, this time returning to Afghanistan.

## Declaring war on America

In 1996, bin Laden connected with Mullah Muhammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban, and moved his operations to Omar's base in Kandahar. As in Sudan, his financial support for Taliban leaders soon secured their support for his leadership. He provided them with great quantities of cash and imported Toyota Land Cruisers for their use. He funded hospitals and distributed food. Here he married a fourth wife and had a 20<sup>th</sup> child.

He soon published his first personal declaration of war against America and the West. It runs to 19 single-spaced pages in English. In his *fatwa* (a legal pronouncement issued by a religious leader) he stated of his followers, "They have no intention except to enter paradise by killing you. An infidel, and enemy of God like you, cannot be in the same hell with his righteous executioner."<sup>6</sup>

The next year, bin Laden granted an interview to CNN's Peter Arnett. He branded America "the leader of terrorism and crime in the world," citing the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and characterized his movement as "fulfilling a duty which God, Praise and Glory be to Him, decreed to us."<sup>7</sup>

During these years and moves, bin Laden continued to expand his al-Qaeda network. In 1998 he reunited with Zawahiri. The two issued a *fatwa* that laid the foundation for terrorism to come: "The ruling to kill the Americans

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and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”<sup>8</sup> This decision to target civilians was apparently prompted by Zawahiri and rejects the protection of noncombatants that is consistent with more traditional Islam.

In May 1998, bin Laden granted another interview to an American journalist, this time speaking with ABC’s John Miller. In explaining his intention to attack noncombatants, bin Laden claimed:

The terrorism we practice is of the commendable kind for it is directed at the tyrants and the aggressors and the enemies of Allah, the tyrants, the traitors who commit acts of treason against their own countries and their own faith and their own prophet and their own nation. Terrorizing those and punishing them are necessary measures to straighten things and to make them right. Tyrants and oppressors who subject the Arab nation to aggression ought to be punished.<sup>9</sup>

As self-proclaimed leader of militant Islam, bin Laden had provided financial and rhetorical support for his movement. But his organization had not yet attacked its enemies directly. On August 7, 1998 (the eighth anniversary of the United States’ landing in Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Storm), two of his cells struck al-Qaeda’s first blow against the United States. Suicide truck bombers attacked our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 and injuring more than 4,500. Bin Laden was eventually indicted by our federal government for his role in this crime, a charge that stood until his death.

By this time he had met Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, a Pakistani who had joined the militant cause. When Muhammed’s nephew was arrested by U.S. forces, he conceived of a reply that would become known as the “planes operation.” Muhammed initially wanted to hijack 10 planes and use them to attack American targets. Bin Laden felt the plan was too ambitious; the two eventually settled on a smaller strategy that bin Laden agreed to finance.

In attacking our embassies, bin Laden assaulted our political leadership.

On October 12, 2000, he struck against our military when al-Qaeda suicide bombers attacked the USS. *Cole* in a Yemeni port, killing 17 Americans and wounding 39 others. The Clinton administration responded by mounting a cruise missile attack on Afghanistan which nearly killed bin Laden. Usama's motivation for the bombing was clear, and explains the strategy behind the 9/11 attacks that followed the next year: "We did the *Cole* and we wanted the United States to react. And if they reacted, they are going to invade Afghanistan and that's what we want . . . Then we will start holy war against the Americans, exactly like the Soviets."<sup>10</sup>

In 2001, bin Laden merged his organization formerly with Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad, growing his movement to a core of 200 people, a 122-person martyrdom brigade and several dozen foot soldiers. Then came Khalid Sheikh Muhammad's strike against American targets on Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001. When the U.S. responded by invading Afghanistan and Iraq, bin Laden was delighted: "I am rejoicing in the fact that America has become embroiled in the quagmires of the Tigris and Euphrates. . . . Here is America today, screaming at the top of its voice as it falls apart in front of the whole world."<sup>11</sup>

Usama bin Laden had achieved his goal. His actions against the West provoked a military response that he could characterize as an attack on Islam itself. He was convinced that Muslims around the Arab world would rally to the defense of their faith under his leadership. They would expel American influence from their lands, topple governments loyal to the West, push Israel into the sea and build a base for global Islamic expansion.

## Exile and death

The results were not what he expected. Most of the Muslim world rejected his attacks on innocent Americans as unwarranted and viewed them as violations of the Qur'an. The United States' military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan were successful in scattering bin Laden's organization and killing or capturing many of his key leaders.

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Bin Laden was forced into hiding himself. Forced to communicate with the outer world through occasional videotapes, he maintained a stealth existence.

Meanwhile, terrorists captured after the 9/11 attacks identified one of bin Laden's most trusted couriers, a protégé of Khalid Sheikh Muhammed, the confessed mastermind of 9/11. Intelligence officers sought this courier for two years, then tracked him for two more. In August 2010 they discovered that he lived with his brother and their families in an unusual and extremely high-security building.

The three-story, fortress-like compound is eight times larger than nearby houses. It is located in Abbottabad, a summer resort 35 miles north of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The house stands a third of a mile from the Pakistan Military Academy. The town is headquarters for the Second Division of the Northern Army Corps; many officers retire there.

The compound is surrounded by 12- to 18-foot outer walls topped with barbed wire and contains two security gates. Few windows face the outside; the terrace has a seven-foot privacy wall. Residents burned their trash rather than putting it on the street for collection. The property is valued at \$1 million but has no telephone or Internet service. Authorities determined that the residents had no explainable source of wealth and that it was far too secure to shield a mere courier. They concluded that the compound likely harbored bin Laden.

Authorities intended to capture the terrorist but assumed he would resist. They launched a helicopter raid on the compound early on Sunday morning, May 1, dropping members of an elite Navy SEALs team into the building. Bin Laden was hiding there with his youngest wife.

After 40 minutes of fighting, the SEALs found bin Laden and shot him in the head and chest. Three other adults were killed as well: two of his couriers and one of his adult sons. Two others were wounded. President Obama and senior government officials watched the operation in real-time in the White House Situation Room.

Bin Laden was identified through facial recognition techniques. One

of his wives living with him in the compound identified him as well. CIA analysis found a “virtually 100 percent” match between his DNA and that of several members of his family.

His body was taken to Afghanistan after he was killed in Pakistan. Finding a country willing to accept the remains of the world’s most wanted terrorist would have been difficult. His burial would also have created a shrine to him as a martyr in the mind of radical Islamists.

The body of Usama bin Laden was handled in accordance with traditional Islamic practice requiring burial within 24 hours. It was washed in accordance with Islamic custom, placed in a white sheet and then inside a weighted bag. A military officer aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* in the North Arabian Sea read religious rites translated into Arabic. The body was then placed on a board and lowered into the sea.

## Was bin Laden’s death just?

I was working at home on the evening of May 1 when my wife called to tell me that the president was about to make an announcement of historic significance. I rushed to the television, where commentators were speculating as to the nature of the event. Word soon began leaking that Usama bin Laden had been killed. By the time President Obama made his formal announcement, much of the world had already heard the news.

The response in America was almost universal euphoria. He had been our “most wanted” criminal for a decade and was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Americans and war expenditures nearing a trillion dollars. If he had died in a bombing raid or while firing on American soldiers, few would have raised questions regarding the manner of his death. But he was unarmed when he was killed by Navy SEALs during a raid that our forces initiated on his compound. Was it right for our soldiers to take his life in this way?

Pragmatic factors soon became clear: the SEALs had no way to know if bin Laden was armed or even wired with explosives; they were in Pakistan without permission of that government and operating in a closing

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time window; if they had captured bin Laden, what kind of security nightmare would we face in imprisoning and trying him?

While these practical considerations may well justify the split-second decision by the SEALs to fire on bin Laden, the issue raises for many the larger question of “just war”—when is aggression against an enemy justified?

The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history. In World War I, 39 million people died (30 million were civilians); in World War II, 51 million died (including 34 million civilians); since World War II, approximately 150 wars have killed an estimated 16 million people worldwide. Were these wars just? How are we to measure?

### **“Total pacifism”**

“Total pacifism” proponents argue that war is never justified under any circumstance. They might adopt non-violent means of opposing their enemies such as hunger strikes or public rallies, but they refuse to take up arms against others. Many cite Jesus’ admonition: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

However, his words related to personal slander rather than self-defense or war. The left hand was never used in public in Jesus’ culture; if I strike you on the right cheek with my right hand, I must slap you with the back of my hand. This is not a life-threatening attack but an insult. The context of Jesus’ words clarifies their relational intent: “If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (vs. 40-42). His injunction was not intended to address the issue of just war.

Nonetheless, total pacifists believe that it is always wrong to injure or kill others, whatever their aggression toward us. They would obviously consider the killing of bin Laden to be immoral, whatever its circumstances.

## “Initiatory war”

At the opposite end of the spectrum, “initiatory war” proponents argue that war is justified to protect ourselves from real or perceived threats. They assert that the technology of modern warfare makes it possible for an enemy to launch strikes such as 9/11 without warning, requiring us to anticipate such attacks and prevent them through any means necessary. For instance, while our declaration of war in response to Japan’s December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor was easy to justify morally, many lives would have been spared if we had launched a preemptive attack against Japan’s fleet on December 6.

Initiatory war supporters often claim justification for their position in God’s command that his people initiate war against the Canaanites whose lands they had come to claim. He ordered them to destroy the inhabitants of Jericho (Joshua 6:5) and Ai (Josh. 8:1-2); after Joshua’s death, he sent his people on continued attacks against various Canaanite peoples and cities (cf. Judges 1:1-4).

These people had done nothing to the Hebrews. They had not attacked them and were defending lands that had been theirs for centuries. But God knew that if they were left alive in the Promised Land, their paganism, idolatry and immorality would infect his people and lead to their rebellion against his word and will.

Moses warned the people about sins they would encounter among the Canaanites: “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead” (Deuteronomy 18:10-11). The Canaanites were under his judgment precisely as a result of such sins: “because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you” (v. 12). So he led his chosen people to launch a preemptive attack against their Canaanite enemies. Those who advocate initiatory war find justification here for their position.

Of course, this logic is not compelling for everyone. First, the Hebrews

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were under direct mandate of the God who is “holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3); what human leader can claim such divine character and omniscience? Second, the conquest of Canaan was a one-time event necessary to create the nation through whom God would one day bring the Savior of the world, not a strategy prescribed for all people at all times. Third, if it is morally appropriate to initiate aggression against a nation or person merely because they have the capacity to harm us, what real or potential enemy are we not justified in attacking?

### “Just war”

In the middle position, “just war” proponents believe that aggression against others can be justified under certain conditions. Cicero was the first to argue for such an approach,<sup>12</sup> but St. Augustine (AD 354-430) set forth its classic formulation:

- ◆ Just cause —a defensive war, fought only to resist aggression.
- ◆ Just intent—fought to secure justice, not for revenge, conquest, or money.
- ◆ Last resort—all other attempts to resolve the conflict have clearly failed.
- ◆ Legitimate authority—military force is authorized by the proper governmental powers.
- ◆ Limited goals—achievable, seeking a just peace.
- ◆ Proportionality—the good gained must justify the harm done.
- ◆ Noncombatant immunity—civilians protected as far as is humanly possible.

As you can see, the application of each criterion can be debated. Did we “resist aggression” by invading Afghanistan and Iraq to prevent further attacks by al-Qaeda? Did we defend Kuwait from Saddam Hussein in 1990 only to

“secure justice,” or were our oil interests a motivation? When have we reached “last resort,” so that we can be certain that all other attempts to resolve the conflict have failed?

How are we to define the “proper governmental powers” for each nation? For instance, Saddam Hussein claimed that Iraq’s constitution authorized him to invade Kuwait. Is armed aggression “limited” to military activity, or is nation-building sometimes needed to create a “just peace”? Who determines that the good gained has justified the harm—the winners or the losers? Must armed forces sometimes engage noncombatants in order to end the war, as with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

## **The killing of bin Laden**

By these standards, was the killing of Usama bin Laden just? Pacifists would of course reject all armed aggression; those who support initiatory war would claim that bin Laden posed a mortal threat to our soldiers and nation. It seems to me that the action against bin Laden met each of the seven just war criteria: it responded to his aggression against America, seeking to secure justice after all other attempts to arrest him had failed; it was authorized by the president, advanced peace by removing al-Qaeda’s most significant leader, led to a greater good for America and the West, and protected noncombatants as far as possible.

Whatever our position on bin Laden’s death, Christians should view his passing with regret. Jesus taught us to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Our Lord’s heart is clear: “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

## **Do terrorists deserve the death penalty?**

One other question regarding the life and death of Usama bin Laden remains to be addressed: should his killing be viewed as a kind of capital

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punishment? How should we view the death penalty, especially with regard to terrorists?

“Capital punishment” derives its name from the Latin *caput*, meaning “head, top or leader.” A “capital” crime is the most serious, a crime at the top of the list. Punishment for such a crime is thus “capital” as well.

Abolitionists and supporters debate three issues. One is *retribution*. Supporters argue that capital punishment is the equivalent and appropriate response to capital crimes, and that victims of a capital crime deserve justice. In their view, Usama bin Laden’s death would be a justified consequence of his crimes and may bring some measure of closure to the survivors of 9/11. Abolitionists counter that enforcing the death penalty brutalizes society, and that life in prison is a worse punishment than death. They claim that killing people for killing people is illogical and teaches violence to society.

A second issue is *premeditation*. Supporters claim that capital punishment, if consistently applied, would have a deterrent effect on premeditated crime. Finding and killing bin Laden sends a signal to other terrorists that they cannot evade the consequences of their actions. Abolitionists argue that most murders are not premeditated and that evidence for deterrence is mixed at best. For example: in 2008 the average murder rate for states using capital punishment was 5.2 per 100,000 people; in states without a death penalty it was 3.3 per 100,000. However, another study indicates that each execution decreases homicides by about five.

A third argument relates to *protection of society*. Supporters state the obvious: a murderer who is executed cannot murder again. Usama bin Laden is no longer a danger to America. Abolitionists cite DNA evidence exonerating some convicts, including several who had been executed by the state. They point to the disproportionate number of minorities who are executed in the United States as evidence of discrimination. And they cite economic factors: Florida, for instance, spends \$3.2 million per execution, six times the cost of life imprisonment.

Biblical arguments can be cited on both sides of the argument. In support of capital punishment:

- ◆ “For your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man’” (Genesis 9:5-6).
- ◆ “If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone’s animal must make restitution—life for life” (Leviticus 24:17-18).
- ◆ “Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again” (Deuteronomy 13:10-11).

Theologians who argue against capital punishment counter that the Genesis statement is descriptive of that early period in human history, not prescriptive for all time. They note that the Leviticus and Deuteronomy injunctions are not repeated in the New Testament, a key test in determining whether Old Testament laws retain prescriptive force today. And they point out that God did not seek the death of Cain, Moses or David for their capital crimes.

Both sides can cite Paul’s assertion:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who

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do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience (Romans 13:1-5).

Proponents point to the “sword” wielded by the state as endorsement of capital punishment for criminals like bin Laden; opponents relate the reference to punishment, not execution.

## Conclusion

Usama bin Laden was an obscure member of a prominent Saudi family who became the global face of terrorism. His story is not yet done. Consider the insight of Khaled Abou El Fadl, a recognized Islamic scholar and professor at the UCLA School of Law. He warns that Usama bin Laden is “representative of underlying currents in contemporary Islam” and calls his followers “the children of a profound dissonance and dysfunctionality.”<sup>13</sup>

As we will see, bin Laden's “children” are the greatest threat our children have ever faced.

## ENDNOTES

1. Arabic can be difficult to transliterate into English. While bin Laden's first name is usually spelled “Osama” in English, “Usama” is closer to the original Arabic and is the spelling followed in most government documents.
2. <http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/topren>, accessed 17 June 2011.
3. Sources consulted for this chapter include: Jed Babbin, *In the Words of Our Enemies*

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(Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007); Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War with America* (New York: Random House, 2003); John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History*, updated edition (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007); Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003); *The 9/11 Commission Report*, authorized edition (New York: W.W. Horton, n.d.); and Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9-11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006). This chapter is especially indebted to Steve Coll's authoritative study of the bin Laden family: *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008).

4. "Mohamed" is the most frequent English spelling of bin Laden's first name. For purposes of consistency, I will spell all other occurrences of the name as "Muhammad," the most common English transliteration of the Arabic.
5. Quoted in Coll, 158.
6. Quoted in Babbin, 9.
7. *Ibid.*, 13.
8. *Ibid.*, 13.
9. *Ibid.*, 16.
10. Quoted in Coll 511.
11. *Ibid.*, 568.
12. <http://www.allsaintsville.org/Week%203-%20Just%20War%20%28Augustine%29.pdf>
13. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam From the Extremists* (New York: HarperOne, 2007) 101.

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# JIM DENISON

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James C. Denison, Ph.D., is a cultural apologist, building a bridge between faith and culture by engaging contemporary issues with biblical truth. He founded the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture in February 2009.

Having lived and traveled extensively in the Muslim world, Dr. Denison has wide expertise on the subject of Islam. He has also taught world religions for 25 years with four seminaries. He has spoken in China, Cuba, Brazil, Australia, Europe, Israel, Greece, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Turkey and served as a short-term missionary to East Malaysia, in Southeast Asia. He also leads frequent study tours in Israel, Greece, and Europe.

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Dr. Denison currently serves on the board of the Baylor Health Care System and as Chair of the Advisory Board for Dallas Baptist University. He teaches Ph.D. seminars and graduate-level classes for Dallas Baptist University and serves as a teaching fellow for the B. H. Carroll Theological Institute. He has taught on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and at McAfee School of Theology, and has served on the boards of Dallas Baptist University, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, and the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University.

Prior to founding the Forum, Dr. Denison was pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, a 10,000-member congregation in Dallas, Texas. He also pastored churches in Midland and Mansfield, Texas, and in Atlanta, Georgia. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion and Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and received a Doctor of Divinity degree from Dallas Baptist University.

He is the author of six books:

*Wrestling with God: How Can I Love a God I'm Not Sure I Can Trust?*

*The Bible—You Can Believe It: Biblical Authority in the*

*Twenty-First Century*

*The Myth and the Manger*

*Life on the Brick Pile: Answers to Suffering from the Letters of Revelation*

*Seven Crucial Questions About the Bible*

*It's Your Mission: The Church's Responsibility to the Least of These*

Dr. Denison writes a daily devotional and a cultural commentary available at [www.denisonforum.org](http://www.denisonforum.org). His devotional is distributed around the world to more than 19,000 subscribers. He writes for *The Dallas Morning News*, contributing weekly to the “Texas Faith Forum.”

His wife, Janet, is an author and speaker ([www.janetdenison.com](http://www.janetdenison.com)). They live in Dallas and are the parents of two sons: Ryan, a ministry student at Truett Seminary; and Craig, a student at Dallas Baptist University.



# ENDORSEMENTS



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