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## A GLIMPSE ON ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY



The Mahdi on his Steed

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Like Christianity, Islam predicts the end of the world. Unlike most Christians, many Muslims believe and anticipate the moment Islam will rule the earth. If Christian eschatology is hard to define, the details and consistency of Islamic eschatology is even more confusing. Nevertheless, this article will attempt to shed some light on the importance and significance of the topic. Minor and major Islamic signs will be discussed. Major Islamic eschatological personalities will be portrayed. Finally, a comparison with the Bible is attempted.

### DIFFICULTY OF STUDYING ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY

Before diving into the details of the events and personalities, one must clarify that studying Islamic eschatology is an arduous task which is full of surprises, contradictions, and fairytale like stories. The first surprise is that the Qur'an is silent on the subject. Despite the fact that history and the hadith are full of stories where Mohammed prayed against the Dajjal (will be revealed later in this paper) and continually taught and preached about the Day of Judgment; Allah, Mohammed's god, chose to be

silent on the topic in the Qur'an. Neither eschatological personalities, nor end times events are clearly described in the Qur'an. The only exceptions, which have to do with the Day of Judgment, are vague verses. One of these verses links the return of Isa (Islamic Jesus) to the final hour of judgment. "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore, have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way" (43:6).

The Qur'an is very clear about the hour of judgment. Numerous verses assure the Muslims that they will stand in judgment before Allah. For example: "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and the Day that the Hour of Judgment is established" (45.027); "And we used to deny the Day of Judgment, Until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain (74, 46-47)"; or "Say: 'Think ye to yourselves, if there come upon you the wrath of Allah, or the Hour (that ye dread), would ye then call upon other than Allah if ye are truthful!'" (6.040).

In all fairness, another Qur'anic verse is thought to have a link with another eschatological figure. Some Islamic scholars, such as Ibn Kathir, Ikrima and Wa'il ibn Da'ud, have reported that "disgrace in this world" in the following verse "For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to come, an exceeding torment" (2.114) is referring to the Mahdi's (will be revealed later in this paper) emergence. However, an objective examination of the text shows that there is not even a remote connection between the context of the text and the end times or judgment.

The student of Islamic eschatology has no option but to resort to the Hadith, which is the compilation of the sayings and deeds of Mohammed. This fact contributes to the complication of unpacking Islamic eschatology because the Hadith is not reliable and sometimes contradictory. For example, the most respected Hadith collector, Al-Bukhari examined 600,000 samples of Hadith, memorized 200,000,<sup>1</sup> but pronounced all as unauthentic except 7,295.

Another reason that makes studying this topic challenging is that Muslim scholars differ in their interpretation. For instance, Shaykh Sayyid Ash-Shablanji argues, based on Mugatal ibn Sulayman's verdict, that verse 43:61 (which has already been discussed as linking Isa to the Hour) is actually referring to the Mahdi.<sup>1</sup> Muslim commentators are often in disagreement. Ibn Katheer quotes the following when Isn Masud found out someone else contradicting his teaching: "When he (Ibn Masud) heard about this, he became angry and sat up, and said: 'O people, whoever knows a thing, let him say it; but whoever does not know, let him say, 'Allah knows best.' It is a part of knowledge, when one does not know something, to say 'Allah knows best.'"<sup>2</sup> So, finding the absolute meanings of Islamic eschatological teachings is almost an impossible task.

### WHY SHOULD WE, CHRISTIANS, CARE?

A well-reputed Christian scholar in Islamic studies in the middle east once uttered, "both religions (referring to Christianity and Islam) are competing to dominate the world." Sadly, many Christians think the same way. In reality, Islam is the only religion that is really seeking the domination of the world.<sup>3</sup> The Bible emphasizes a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This Lordship is individual, and its domain is internal. On the other hand, Islam does not care about the individual. It seeks to rule nations; hence the Islamic evangelistic tactics search for ways to control a

society over a long period of time as opposed to converting one person at a time.<sup>4</sup> The root cause of this phenomenon is the eschatological belief that Islam will rule the earth. The most referred Qur'anic verses that support this claim are "It is He Who hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it)" (9:33; 48:28; 61,9) and "The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will)" (3:19).

Average Christians do not care about eschatology. Don Richardson suggests that Christians assume that those who study eschatology are weird, that eschatology is impossible to understand, and that it is irrelevant compared to other Christian topics.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the same topic in Islam is much more on the forefront of Muslim leaders' strategies and teachings. For instance, Omar Ahmed, the Chairman of the Board of the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), once said: "Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Qur'an should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on earth."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, this topic takes a much important position in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an stresses that the belief in the "last days" is second in importance to the belief in Allah, followed by the belief in angels, scriptures, and prophets. For instance, "It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers..." (2:177)

Finally, another reason why every Christian should be aware of Islamic eschatology is because Islam is on the rise and it is motivated by its eschatological predictions to rule the world. For example, Al-Araby quotes an Islamic leader saying to his American counterparts "Thanks to your democratic laws, we will invade you; thanks to our religious laws, we will dominate you."<sup>7</sup> So, regardless if Islamic theology is valid or not, Christians ought to be aware of it because it is fueling the rise of Islam and the clash between the East and the West.

## MINOR AND MAJOR SIGNS

The Islamic Hadith indicates different signs for the hour of Judgment. These signs are divided into two categories, minor and major signs. Minor signs lead up to the major signs which in turn lead up to the end of this world. The minor signs are supposed to occur well before the Day of Judgment. The minor signs may not necessarily be strikingly extraordinary. Hence, Muslim scholars could easily justify the occurrence of most of them. The major signs are those which will occur closer to the Day of Judgment. They are somewhat bizarre and particular. They have yet to happen.

The minor signs are scattered through the Hadith. Depending on the method of counting and other criteria, they can number from fifty to over hundred. Some minor signs could be similar to biblical eschatological events such as earthquakes and wars. The author will not expand on the minor signs for the sake of space. However, the most important ones are: increase of ignorance<sup>8</sup>, rise of alcohol consumption and illegal sexual intercourse<sup>9</sup>, Apostasy<sup>10</sup>, frequent earthquakes and spread of plagues<sup>11</sup>, women outnumber men<sup>12</sup>, unqualified people assume leadership<sup>13</sup>, great casualties of war between two groups of the same religion<sup>14</sup>, appearance of 30 false prophets<sup>15</sup> and the establishment of caliphate in the holy land<sup>16</sup>.

Muslim scholars differ on the major signs although one Hadith clearly enumerates ten of them:

*Thereupon he (Mohammed) said: It will not come until you see ten signs before and (in this connection) he made a mention of the smoke, Dajjal, the beast, the rising of the sun from the west, the descent of Jesus son of Mary (Allah be pleased with him), the Gog and Magog, and land-slidings in three places, one in the east, one in the west and one in Arabia at the end of which fire would burn forth from the Yemen, and would drive people to the place of their assembly.*<sup>17</sup>

Islamic scholars tend to add or subtract from that list. Other major signs are also often enumerated such as the destruction of the Ka'bah and the recovery of its treasure, a wind taking the souls of the believers, the lifting up of the Qur'an into heaven, or the sounding of a trumpet.<sup>18</sup> In general, Islamic scholars agree that the Mahdi will show first followed by the Dajjal; then Isa will descend. As for the other major signs, there is no clear consensus over the flow of the events, nor their meaning and explanation.

Many of these signs are more riddles than signs. Some Muslim scholars explain them metaphorically. For example, the rising of the sun from the west has been explained as Islam appearing in the Western world. "The Hour will not come until the sun rises from the West. When the people see it, whoever is living on earth will believe, but that will be the time when - No good will it do to a soul to believe in them then, if it believed not before' " (Al-Bukhari 6:73). Christian scholars, such as Samuel Shahid, argue that the origin of this sign is actually found in the Bible, specifically in Isaiah 13:13 and 34:4.<sup>19</sup> The speaking beast sign is very strange and has received various interpretation attempts from Islamic scholars. The idea of a speaking animal is also found in the Bible in Numbers 22 where Balaam's donkey speaks. Nevertheless, this sign is taken from the Qur'an. "And when the Word is fulfilled against them (the unjust), we shall produce from the earth a beast to (face) them: He will speak to them, for that mankind did not believe with assurance in Our Signs." (27:82)

The smoke sign is taken from an obscure Qur'anic passage. "Then watch thou for the Day that the sky will bring forth a kind of smoke (or mist) plainly visible" (44:10). This verse is also disputed. Some scholars, like Ibne Masood, strongly argue that the smoke in this verse is not the smoke referred to in the Hadith regarding the end days. It is however attributed to some famine that plagued the Arabs. The smoke is explained as the haze of the desert sun. On the other hand, Ibne Kathir argues that the majority of Ulama (scholars) endorse the verse as eschatological.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Shahid suggests that the origin of this concept could have been taken from the Hanif beliefs or simply from the ninth chapter of Revelation.<sup>21</sup>

According to Islam, Gog and Magog are two evil tribes who are imprisoned behind a wall by a righteous king called Dhu'l-Qarnayn (meaning the one with two horns). Some Hadith indicate that the king had performed the Islamic hajj with Abraham, yet other Islamic scholars associate him with Alexander the Great. In any case, Allah will one day allow these tribes to break through that wall to spread corruption, and kill people. However, Allah, answering Isa's prayer, will send some sort of worms in the napes of their necks which will wipe them out.<sup>22</sup> These tribes are mentioned twice in the Qur'an in 18:83-99 and "Until the Gog and Magog (people) are let through (their barrier), and they swiftly swarm from every hill" (21:96). The Bible mentions eschatological events related to Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20. Christian scholars disagree on the fulfillment of these

prophesies. Some argue that these references point to the same futuristic event. Others claim that these passages prophesy two different eschatological events. Nevertheless, the concept of God keeping souls (or spirits) in prison until the end days is not foreign to the Bible either (2 Peter 2:4; 1 Peter 3:19). Also, the concept of creatures getting out of the earth to inflict pain and kill people is also found in Revelation 9. Are all these references related? Is it possible that Mohammed paraphrased the Bible according to his own interpretation?

As for the three land-slidings, the Sunni Hadith does not provide much explanation. The Shi'a Hadith refers this sign to the emergence of the Syrian man, known as the Sufyani. This man will oppose the Mahdi yet will be defeated. This event will help the Mahdi to gain control over the Middle-East.<sup>23</sup> The last major sign to appear before the Day of Judgment is the fire which will come out from the Yemen and gather the people in the place of their assembly.

### THREE IMPORTANT PERSONALITIES



In Islam, three eschatological personalities are awaited: the Mahdi, Isa, and the Dajjal. Often, Sunnis confuse the Mahdi as Isa based on a short Hadith that is doomed weak or forged.”<sup>24</sup> The word “Mahdi” in Arabic means “he who is guided aright” or “to lead in the right way”.<sup>25</sup> The awaited leader must be from among the family of Prophet based on various Hadith such as, “the world will not come to pass until a man from among my family, whose name will be my name, rules over the Arabs.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that the Shi'a are more devout to the Mahdi, both factions, Sunni and Shi'a, anticipate this ruler. However, they differ on the place where he shall appear. The Shi'a believe that the Mahdi will be waking up from an occultation in Iran whereas the Sunnis expect him to be a normal man showing up in Mecca.<sup>27</sup> This leader will occur when the world is in turmoil, however, “he will fill the earth with justice as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. He will rule for seven years.”<sup>28</sup> This leader is expected to unite the Muslims and rule the world. “He will pave the way for and establish the government of the family [or community] of Muhammad . . . Every believer will be obligated to support him.”<sup>29</sup> Also, this man is expected to conquer Israel. The following is a very famous Hadith that is often quoted in Islamic fundamental circles. “The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him...”

The second important personality is the prophet Isa, the Islamic Jesus. Isa's anticipated appearance is in east Damascus.<sup>30</sup> The Hadith has made Isa famous in four main functions. Firstly, despite the fact that he is an important prophet, he will refuse to lead the prayer in the presence of the Mahdi but giving him the honor. Second, when Isa will rally behind the Mahdi, he will help him unite the Muslims under one authority as they might be fighting each other. The following Hadith culminates these two functions:



Isa

Dajjal

*The Messenger of Allah said: A section of my people will not cease fighting for the truth and will prevail until the Day of resurrection. He said: Jesus, son of Mary would then descend and their [Muslims'] commander [the Mahdi] would invite him to come and lead them in prayer, but he would say: No, some amongst you are commanders over some*<sup>31</sup>

Another function of Isa is witnessing to the Jews and the Christians. *He will supposedly prove to all the Jews and the Christians that he never died on the cross.*<sup>32</sup> This role is based on "And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them (4:159). *Finally, Isa will turn around to destroy anyone who still believes in the cross and persecute the Jews.* Another famous Hadith supports these functions: "The Prophet said: There is no prophet between me and him, that is, Jesus. He will descent (sic) (to the earth). He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish jizyah. Allah will perish all religions except Islam"<sup>33</sup>

The final personality and the weirdest one is the Dajjal. The word Dajjal means liar, fake or deceiver; hence the Dajjal is the Islamic antichrist. Various hadith are simply too fairytale like to be mentioned in this paper. Nevertheless, the Dajjal is believed to be a Jew who will oppose the Mahdi and Isa. He will be one eyed (Hadith contradicts on which eye is the bad one).<sup>34</sup> He will have the word "infidel" written on his forehead but it could only be read by Muslims.<sup>35</sup> He will perform miracles and claim to be divine. The Dajjal will be forbidden to enter three cities - Mecca, Medina and Damascus.<sup>36</sup> A simple recitation of the first ten verses of Surat al Kahf should be a shield from his evil; hence Muslims are encouraged to memorize that Qur'anic passage. Isa is supposed to kill the Dajjal.<sup>37</sup>

### **CAN ISLAM BE THE FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECIES?**

The goal of studying Islamic theology is not to seek the truth since truth is only found in the Bible. The question remains, can Islam be what the Bible has been describing? Numerous parallels exist between biblical and Islamic eschatology. Most importantly, both present three personalities. The

Bible considers the Antichrist and the False Prophet, who belong to the same worldwide religious system, plus King Jesus, who shall return to earth to defeat the other two. Time will tell if Islam is indeed the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. For now, some obvious observations will be pointed out.

First, The Bible emphasizes that the final kingdom will be “a divided kingdom” (Dan 2:41). Islam has always been divided since the death of its founder.

Second, that kingdom “will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it” (Dan 7:23). Islam is more than a religion. It is a political, economic, social, and military system, all under a religious umbrella. Its goal is to crush any other religious and legal system.

Third, the ruler of his kingdom, the Mahdi, “will intend to make alterations in times and in law” (Dan 7:25). Is it possible that Daniel was pointing to the Islamic calendar and the shari’a law? In modern history, whenever Islam overpowers a nation such as Afghanistan, Sudan, or Saudi, it establishes the very harsh and rigid shari’a law on all citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims.

Fourth, the Bible makes reference to the fact that the “beast” will be fatally wounded yet he manages to survive to the whole earth’s amazement (Rev 13:3). Robert Livingston believes that historically Islam had received a blow at the death of the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey) when the caliphate system was abolished (1918). Yet, over the past century Islam has been returning to prominence on the worldwide scene. Muslims are growing in numbers and fundamental Islam is getting more popular.<sup>38</sup> Is the beast awakening?

Fifth, Revelation predicts that those who refuse to worship the beast will be beheaded (Rev 20:4). In modern days, what political system, other than Islam, beheads?

Sixth, both flavors of Islam, Sunni and Shi’a, call for the destruction of Israel. The Bible prophesizes the attempted destruction of Jerusalem (Zech 14:2; Ezek 38:9-12; Matt 24:1, 2, 16-22). Would the Iranian regime follow through on its threats to destroy Israel? <sup>39</sup> Both Sunni and Shi’a fundamentalists are calling for the return to the Caliphate system. Could the awaited Isa of the Sunni be the False Prophet (Isa is a prophet) who will bridge the huge sunni-Shi’a gap and unite the Islamic umma under the Shi’a Mahdi? The Bible clearly defines such relationship in Revelation 13. What if an important Islamic figure succeeds in brokering a peace treaty in the Middle-East? Wouldn’t he be “worshiped” by the East and the West?

In conclusion, the notion of the emergence of an Islamic eschatological figure is not foreign anymore in our day and age. Various Muslim individuals have claimed to be the Mahdi in history yet the End has not happened yet. On the other hand, evangelical Christians never lacked the imagination of ascribing the antichrist title to various historical persons and institutions. Yet, they have been wrong. Nevertheless, Islam is not just a hypothetical answer to biblical prophecies. It does have a fully developed eschatological theory. Islam provides real rationale for today’s major world events and trends. Muslim leaders are anticipating the occurrence of Islamic eschatological events. Plus, the future of Islam is promising chaos to the world and self-supremacy. Islam is not about to go away; it is growing. Will Islam be the fulfillment of biblical prophecies? Again, time will tell...

***Editor’s Note: Jeremiah Kry (assumed name) is a former seminary student of Dr. Schnittger. Jeremiah is a Christian involved in Islamic evangelism.***

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- <sup>2</sup> Ibn Katheer, *The Signs Before the Day of Judgment*,
- <sup>3</sup> Don Richardson (2003). *Secrets of the Koran*. Regal
- <sup>4</sup> Rosemary Sookhdeo. (2005). *Stepping into the Shadows*.  
Wilshire, United Kingdom: Isaac Publishing.
- <sup>5</sup> Joel Richardson (2006). *AntiChrist: Islam's awaited Messiah*.
- <sup>6</sup> Pipes. *CAIR: Moderate Friends of Terror*. New York Post,  
April 22, 2002
- <sup>7</sup> Al-Araby (2003). *The Islamization of America: The Islamic  
Strategy and the Christian Response*. The Pen Vs. The Sword
- <sup>8</sup> Al-Bukhari 6:259
- <sup>9</sup> Al-Bukhari 8:800
- <sup>10</sup> Abi Dawud #1992
- <sup>11</sup> Al-Bukhari 9:286
- <sup>12</sup> Al-Bukhari 1:162; 1:167; 9:288
- <sup>13</sup> Al-Bukhari 1:56
- <sup>14</sup> Al-Bukhari 4:801; 9:69
- <sup>15</sup> Ahmad 5:395
- <sup>16</sup> Abi Dawud #1045
- <sup>17</sup> Muslim # 6931
- <sup>18</sup> Ibn Katheer
- <sup>19</sup> Samuel Shahid (2005), *The Last Trumpet*, Xulon Press
- <sup>20</sup> Ahmad Ali, *Major Signs before the Day of Judgement*
- <sup>21</sup> Samuel Shahid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ahmad Ali & Ibn Katheer.
- <sup>23</sup> Samuel Shahid.
- <sup>24</sup> Arif and Izzat. P14
- <sup>25</sup> Mahdi. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*.
- <sup>26</sup> Tirmidhi Sahih, Vol. 9, P. 74; Abu Dawud, Sahih, Vol. 5, P.  
207.
- <sup>27</sup> Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini, *Al-Imam Al-Mahdi: The Just  
Leader of Humanity*, translated by Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina.
- <sup>28</sup> Abu Dawud, Sahih, Vol. 2, p. 208; Fusul al-muhimma, p. 275
- <sup>29</sup> *Abu Dawud*, Narrated by Umm Salamah, Ummul Mu'minin
- <sup>30</sup> Muslim Book 041, Number 7015
- <sup>31</sup> Muslim, Book 001, Number 0293
- <sup>32</sup> *Mufti Muhammad Shafi and Mufti Mohammad Rafi  
Usmani. Signs of the Qiyama and the Arrival of the Maseeh*
- <sup>33</sup> Abu Dawud, Book 37, Number 4310, Narrated by Abu  
Hurayrah; and Bukhari Volume 3, Book 43, Number 656
- <sup>34</sup> Muslim Book 041, Number 7005 reported by Ibn Umar; and  
Number 7010 reported by Hudhafa
- <sup>35</sup> Muslim Book 041, Number 7009, reported by Anas b. Malik
- <sup>36</sup> *Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 88, Number 248*, Narrated by Anas  
bin Malik:
- <sup>37</sup> Muslim, Book 041, Number 6924, reported by Abu Huraira
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Livingston (2004), *Christianity and Islam: The Final  
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