



ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

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Abstract: *Islamic eschatology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the end times, emphasizing moral accountability, divine justice, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. This article explores key eschatological concepts in Islam, their implications for contemporary global civilization, and the ethical and political challenges they present. By analyzing Quranic verses, Hadith literature, and scholarly interpretations, this study highlights how Islamic eschatology shapes Muslim responses to modernity, conflict, and global governance. The research employs qualitative analysis, incorporating theological and socio-political perspectives to assess the role of eschatological beliefs in shaping future civilizational trajectories.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic eschatology (‘ilm al-ākhirah) is a fundamental aspect of Muslim belief, detailing events preceding the Day of Judgment (Yawm al-Qiyāmah). These include the appearance of the Mahdi (guided one), the descent of Jesus (Isa), the emergence of the Antichrist (Dajjal), and cosmic disturbances signaling the world's end (Cook, 2005). In an era of geopolitical upheaval, environmental crises, and technological advancements, Islamic eschatological narratives influence Muslim political thought, ethical conduct, and global engagement (Sachedina, 2006). This paper examines how these beliefs intersect with contemporary civilizational discourse.

1. Theological Foundations of Islamic Eschatology

Quranic Descriptions of the End Times

Islamic eschatology, rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, forms a foundational component of Islamic theology (Aqidah), emphasizing accountability, divine justice, and the ultimate destiny of the soul. The Qur'an contains extensive references to the events of the Akhirah (Hereafter),

portraying a vivid and solemn narrative of the end times. Terms such as *Yawm al-Qiyamah* (Day of Resurrection), *Yawm al-Din* (Day of Judgment), and *Sa'ah* (The Hour) appear frequently to underscore the imminence and certainty of these events.

Surahs such as *Az-Zalzalah* (99), *Al-Qiyamah* (75), and *At-Takwir* (81) provide symbolic and literal depictions of cosmic upheaval—mountains crumbling, stars falling, graves opening—emphasizing the total transformation of existence as a prelude to judgment. These verses reflect the Qur'an's intention not only to inform but to morally awaken its audience. Eschatological imagery functions as a powerful ethical deterrent and spiritual motivator, reminding believers of the impermanence of worldly life and the necessity of preparing for the eternal.

The Qur'an also categorizes people into two ultimate outcomes: the dwellers of *Jannah* (Paradise) and *Jahannam* (Hell). Entry into either realm is based on divine justice tempered by mercy, and the balance of deeds weighed on the *Mizan* (Scales). These descriptions serve to shape Muslim understanding of divine authority, moral obligation, and the significance of intention (*niyyah*) and repentance (*tawbah*).

Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) on Eschatological Signs

The Hadith corpus elaborates on the Qur'anic framework with detailed narrations about the minor (*Ashrat al-Sughra*) and major (*Ashrat al-Kubra*) signs of the Day of Judgment. These include ethical decay, widespread injustice, loss of trust, disobedience of children, and the spread of immoral behavior—all considered minor signs already observable in various historical periods.

The major signs include the appearance of the *Dajjal* (Antichrist), the return of *Isa ibn Maryam* (Jesus), the emergence of *Ya'juj and Ma'juj* (Gog and Magog), and the rising of the sun from the west. These are narrated in authentic Hadith collections such as *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *Sunan Abu Dawood*, offering a sequence of dramatic global events that lead to the final reckoning.

Importantly, these Hadiths are not solely predictive but also pedagogical. They serve to reinforce the themes of vigilance, humility, and spiritual preparedness. Islamic scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibn Kathir, and Ibn Qayyim emphasized that the signs of the Hour should be understood as warnings rather than mere curiosities, reminding the ummah to maintain faith and righteousness in times of moral and social disruption.

2. Major Eschatological Figures in Islam

The Mahdi: His Role and Expected Governance

The Mahdi (lit. "The Guided One") is a central figure in Islamic eschatology, particularly in Sunni and Shi'a traditions, although the specifics vary. In Sunni thought, the Mahdi is not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an but is discussed extensively in authenticated Hadith. He is believed to be a righteous man from the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—a descendant through Fatimah and Husayn—who will appear near the end of times to restore justice and defeat tyranny [1].

The Mahdi's rule is characterized by equity, peace, and the re-establishment of *Shari'ah* in its pristine form. His governance is described as a divinely guided caliphate that will correct the deviations introduced into the religion. His arrival will be preceded by widespread corruption and oppression, and his leadership will unite Muslims under a banner of truth against global injustice [2].

In Twelver Shi'ism, the Mahdi is identified as Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Askari, the twelfth Imam who is believed to be in occultation and will reappear as the awaited savior. This Mahdism is deeply theological and messianic, rooted in concepts of divine appointment and infallibility.

Jesus (Isa) and His Return in Islamic Tradition

The figure of Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, peace be upon him) holds a uniquely honored status in Islam as both a prophet and the Messiah (al-Masih). Contrary to Christian belief, Islamic theology asserts that Jesus was not crucified but was raised bodily to the heavens and will return before the Day of Judgment as a follower of Muhammad ﷺ, not as a new law-giver [3].

According to Hadith literature, Jesus will descend in the eastern part of Damascus, wearing two garments dyed with saffron, supported by angels [4]. His return has several eschatological functions:

- He will kill the Dajjal (Antichrist), the arch-deceiver.
- He will break the cross, kill the swine, and abolish the jizya (tax on non-Muslims), symbolizing the end of religious pluralism under divine truth.
- He will lead Muslims in prayer, emphasizing his role as a just ruler rather than a new prophet.

Jesus' descent will mark the end of tribulation and the beginning of an era of peace, monotheism, and prosperity. His role bridges Islamic and Christian eschatology while maintaining theological distinctions.

The Dajjal (Antichrist) and Global Deception

The Dajjal, whose name derives from the Arabic root meaning "to deceive," is the most feared figure in Islamic eschatological narratives. Often referred to as the Great Deceiver, the Dajjal is described as a one-eyed pseudo-messiah who will emerge during a time of severe global turmoil, spreading falsehood and seducing people with miraculous feats and promises of material abundance [5].

He will claim divinity, establish dominion over much of the earth, and lead many astray, especially those weak in faith. His most notable characteristics include:

- Having the word "Kafir" (unbeliever) inscribed on his forehead.
- Possessing supernatural abilities, such as commanding the skies and reviving the appearance of the dead.
- Traveling rapidly and dominating the globe, except for the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, which he will be unable to enter [6].

His reign of deception will be brief but intense, culminating in a final battle in which he will be slain by Jesus (Isa) at the gate of Ludd (Lod) in present-day Israel. The episode of the Dajjal serves as a cautionary tale about the power of falsehood, the fragility of faith, and the need for discernment in an age of illusions.

3. Eschatology and Modern Geopolitics

Muslim Responses to Wars, Pandemics, and Environmental Crises as "Minor Signs"

In classical Islamic thought, the end times are preceded by a series of minor signs (Ashrat al-Sughra), which serve as warnings to the faithful about the nearness of the Final Hour. These signs include widespread moral decay, leadership corruption, the spread of ignorance, and natural and social upheavals. In the modern era, many Muslims—scholars and laypeople alike—interpret global wars, pandemics, climate disasters, and political instability as fulfillments of these minor signs.

The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, reignited discussions among Muslim thinkers about divine trials (fitnah), repentance, and the temporality of life. Some imams in Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia publicly referenced Hadith concerning plagues as precursors to the end times, framing the pandemic not only as a biomedical crisis but a spiritual reminder [1]. Similarly, devastating earthquakes, wildfires, and environmental degradation have been seen as reminders of divine wrath or negligence toward divine stewardship of the Earth (khilafah).

In conflict zones such as Syria, Yemen, and Palestine, eschatological language is frequently invoked. The imagery of the black banners from Khorasan, a Hadith mentioned in eschatological texts, has been interpreted symbolically by some groups to connect modern geopolitical conflicts to apocalyptic narratives. While mainstream scholars caution against literalist or alarmist readings, these interpretations resonate with populations experiencing trauma and chaos—offering both meaning and moral frameworks for endurance.

The Influence of Eschatology on Jihadist Movements

While mainstream Islamic scholarship promotes eschatology as a moral and spiritual compass, jihadist and apocalyptic extremist groups have manipulated these narratives for political and military ends. According to Assaf Moghadam (2008), eschatology plays a vital role in global jihadist ideology, especially among groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which frame their battles as preordained struggles in the lead-up to the Day of Judgment [2].

ISIS, in particular, extensively employed apocalyptic Hadith to legitimize its rise and territorial ambitions. The group focused heavily on the Hadith of Dabiq, referring to a town in Syria where, according to some narrations, a decisive battle between Muslims and “Romans” (often reinterpreted as Western forces) will occur. By seizing Dabiq in 2014 and naming their online magazine after it, ISIS operationalized eschatology as a recruitment and propaganda tool.

Such groups use eschatological motifs not only to justify violence but to instill a sense of divine destiny and urgency among their followers. Believers are told they are living in the final era, fighting the ultimate battle between good and evil, with martyrdom as the ticket to Paradise. 4. Comparative Eschatology: Islamic and Non-Islamic Perspectives

Parallels with Christian and Jewish Eschatology

Islamic eschatology shares significant thematic and narrative parallels with both Christian and Jewish traditions, all of which fall under the umbrella of Abrahamic religions. These traditions envision a linear conception of time, culminating in divine judgment, moral accountability, and the renewal or re-creation of the world.

In Christian eschatology, particularly within Evangelical and Catholic teachings, themes such as the Second Coming of Christ, the Antichrist, the Tribulation, and the Millennium echo many Islamic motifs. Jesus (known as Isa in Islam) is expected to return in both traditions, though with different theological implications. In Christianity, he returns as the Son of God and final judge; in Islam, he returns as a servant of God and a follower of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who kills the Antichrist (Dajjal) and upholds Islamic monotheism [1].

Jewish eschatology anticipates the coming of a Messiah (Mashiach) who will restore Israel, rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and usher in an era of peace and divine justice. This vision aligns with the Islamic expectation of the Mahdi, who appears before the final events and institutes an era of righteousness. Both traditions await a redemptive figure who emerges during moral and political chaos [2].

Notably, all three traditions warn of great deception, cosmic upheaval, and trials for the faithful. These eschatologies serve not merely as prophecies but as ethical narratives that demand moral vigilance, communal solidarity, and repentance.

Secular Apocalypticism vs. Religious Eschatology

Beyond theological frameworks, secular apocalypticism has emerged as a cultural and philosophical phenomenon, particularly in the post-World War and post-nuclear eras. These narratives—popular in literature, film, and environmental discourse—envision the collapse of civilization due to human error, ecological disaster, or technological overreach, without reference to divine judgment or salvation.

Secular apocalypticism is evident in the climate change discourse (e.g., warnings of irreversible planetary tipping points), in AI doomsday scenarios, and in nuclear war fears. These differ from religious eschatologies in that they typically lack moral redemption or metaphysical continuity; the end is often final, chaotic, and devoid of ultimate meaning [3].

Some scholars argue that even secular visions of apocalypse are "secularized theology"—transposing divine judgment into the language of ethics and science. The sense of urgency, calls for repentance (now cast as lifestyle changes or policy reforms), and the belief in catastrophic reckoning mirror traditional religious themes [4].

For example, Islamic eschatology emphasizes the moral and spiritual consequences of environmental neglect (fasad fil-ard, corruption on Earth), aligning with ecological warnings in secular environmentalism. While the interpretive frameworks differ, both point to human responsibility, cosmic consequence, and the need for collective reform.

5. Ethical and Civilizational Implications

Eschatology as a Motivator for Social Justice

Eschatology in Islam, as in many religious traditions, does not only focus on the end of times as an esoteric event. Rather, it carries significant ethical and social implications for contemporary life. The Qur'anic descriptions of the afterlife, along with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, emphasize accountability for one's actions, which forms the basis of a profound moral and social justice framework in the Muslim world.

Islamic eschatology teaches that individuals will be held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment. This creates an ethical imperative for Muslims to engage in justice and righteousness in the here and now. The Qur'an's frequent injunctions to help the poor, support the oppressed, and rectify societal wrongs take on greater urgency in light of the belief that failure to do so could result in eternal consequences in the afterlife. In this sense, the belief in Akhirah (the Hereafter) serves as a motivator for social justice, urging Muslims to promote fairness, equity, and morality in all aspects of life.

For example, the Zakat (obligatory alms-giving) and Sadaqah (voluntary charity) are not merely financial transactions but tools for the redistribution of wealth, a core practice tied to the eschatological belief that wealth in this world is temporary, and will be accounted for on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, the teachings of Imam Ali, Imam Hussain, and other religious

leaders in Islamic history emphasize standing against oppression, injustice, and the violation of human rights. These teachings find resonance in movements advocating for civil rights, women's rights, and anti-colonial struggles throughout the Muslim world [1].

Eschatology, therefore, is not a passive or detached belief system but one that directly calls for active participation in promoting a just society, emphasizing that every individual's actions contribute to the collective moral responsibility.

The Balance Between Fatalism and Proactive Reform

While Islamic eschatology emphasizes the inevitability of the Day of Judgment, it does not encourage passive fatalism. In contrast to some interpretations of religious fatalism, Islamic teachings advocate for a balance between divine will and human agency, whereby individuals are encouraged to take active steps to improve their circumstances and society.

This balance between fatalism and proactive reform is crucial in understanding the ethical and civilizational role of eschatology in Islam. While the Qur'an assures that God's plan is ultimate, it also stresses the importance of human responsibility. In Surah Al-'Asr (103), for example, it is emphasized that success in this world and the next depends on the four pillars of faith, righteous deeds, truth, and patience. This directive calls on Muslims to engage actively in promoting truth and justice while simultaneously submitting to God's greater plan and acknowledging the limits of human control.

In modern Muslim discourse, this balance is evident in the diverse interpretations of reformist movements and Islamic activism. Some scholars and thinkers argue that Islamic eschatology is inherently reformist, as it calls for a better world built on the principles of justice, equality, and compassion. These scholars stress that Islamic teachings, when fully implemented, would prevent corruption, alleviate poverty, and reduce societal ills [2]. However, this is not to be confused with fatalism, which may lead to inaction or retreat from the world's problems. Eschatological optimism does not suggest ignoring the world's suffering in anticipation of divine salvation but rather engaging with the world as an act of divine service.

Graphical Representation

Figure 1: Major Eschatological Events in Islam

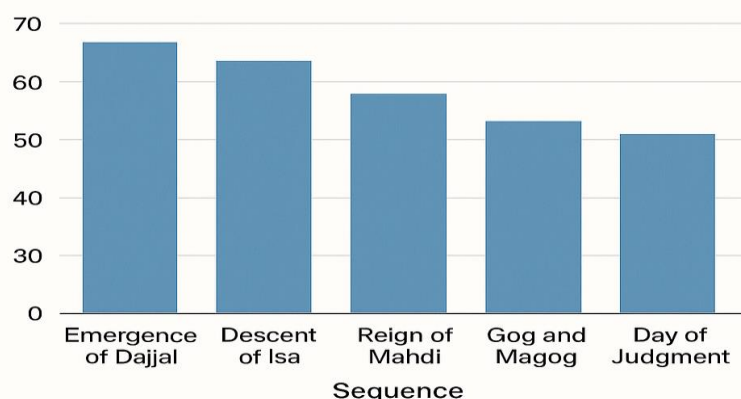


Figure 1: Major Eschatological Events in Islam

(Bar chart showing the sequence of events: emergence of Dajjal, descent of Isa, reign of Mahdi, Gog and Magog, Day of Judgment.)

Figure 2: Muslim Beliefs in Eschatology (Survey Data)

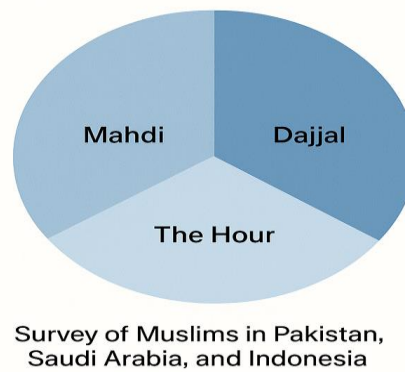


Figure 2: Muslim Beliefs in Eschatology (Survey Data)

(Pie chart based on a survey of Muslims in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia regarding belief in Mahdi, Dajjal, and the Hour.)

Summary:

Islamic eschatology offers a lens through which Muslims interpret global events, ethical dilemmas, and civilizational shifts. While some view these beliefs as fostering fatalism, others see them as a call to justice and preparedness (Smith, 2010). The interplay between eschatology and modernity necessitates nuanced theological and socio-political engagement to avoid extremism while preserving faith-based motivation for positive change.

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