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### **ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY: ITS ORIGINS AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is also concerned with end times (eschatology). Islamic view of history is strictly linear and moving toward the end of time. Many Qur'anic verses appeal to the last days of the world and its numerous horrors. Quran clearly teaches that the present life of a man is only a preparation time for paradise or hellfire. According to the widely known translation of the Holy Quran by Yusuf Ali, "...Every soul shall have a taste of death: And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of Life): For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception..." (3:185) [1].

Admittedly, Quran is a supreme source of Islamic theology. For this reason, it is important to note each subfield of systematic theology is derived from the Qur'anic accounts. Generally, Quran in itself contains numerous eschatological verses. It is crucial to pay attention to ayahs with a strict accent on eschatology:

1) "...and on the Day of Judgment, they shall be consigned to the most grievous penalty. For Allah is not unmindful of what ye do..."» (2:85);

2) "...As for those who sell the faith they owe to Allah and their own pledged word for a small price, they shall have no portion in the Hereafter: Nor will Allah (Deign to) speak to them or look at them on the Day of Judgment, nor will He cleans them (of sin): They shall have a grievous penalty..." (3:77);

3) "...Allah! There is no god but He: of a surety He will gather you together against the Day of Judgment, about which there is no doubt. And whose word can be truer than Allah's?... " (4:87);

4) "...As to those who reject Faith, – if they had everything on earth, and twice repeated, to give as ransom for the penalty of the Day of Judgment, it would never be accepted of them, theirs would be a grievous penalty..." (5:36);

5) "... If thou couldst see, when the angels take the souls of the Unbelievers (at death), (How) they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): "Taste the penalty of the blazing Fire..." (8:50);

6) "...Verily Allah has cursed the Unbelievers and prepared for them a Blazing Fire..." (33:64);

7) "...When the Sky is cleft asunder; When the Stars are scattered; When the Oceans are suffered to burst forth; And when the Graves are turned upside down; (Then) shall each soul know what it hath sent forward and (what it hath) kept back..." (82:1–5);

8) "...Woe, that Day, to those that deny – Those that deny the Day of Judgment. And none can deny it but the Transgressor beyond bounds the Sinner! When Our Signs are rehearsed to him, he says, "Tales of the ancients!" "By no means! but on their hearts is the stain of the (ill) which they do! Verily, from (the Light of) their Lord, that Day, will they be veiled. Further, they will enter the Fire of Hell..." (83:10–16) [1].

As we can see, there are a few eschatological connotations in the quoted ayahs: First, the idea of the Day of Judgement. Second, a vision of hell and eternal punishment. Third, a prophecy of the last day and cataclysms. Undoubtedly, there are many other verses of the Quran in which eschatological motives are emphasized. However, they also can be categorized in the proposed manner above. Nevertheless, in order to understand Qur'anic eschatology, it is necessary to turn our attention to the works of Islamic theologians and exegetes.

Commenting on eschatological verses of the Qur'an, prominent Islamicists Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck write, "...So intense is the Qur'anic concern for and insistence on the day to come when all will be held accountable for their faith and their actions, that the ethical teachings contained in the Book must be understood in the light of this reality..."

[4, p. 2]. As we can see, Qur'anic eschatological accounts are firmly connected to ethics. It is important to note that this type of eschatology is common for all Abrahamic religions. Besides, Islamic eschatology emphasizes true faith.

Acclaimed Islamic theologian Imran Hossein explains this point in the following way: "...Prophet Muhammad has provided a description of the Last Age that would precede the end of history. Many Signs of the Last Day reveal grave events that would occur in the Last Age. These events would seem like an evil storm blowing through the world while sifting the grain (i.e., those who have true faith) from the husk (those who have no faith)..." [2, p. 38]. Of course, the Islamic view of the last age is quite comprehensive. It includes, Imran Hossein states, the belief that the earth would function as a habitat for a limited duration. The earth would one day be transformed into a dust bowl. This implies that the end-time, which witnesses the death of the earth, would be preceded by an age of a constantly diminishing supply of (fresh) water, leading, eventually, to the extreme scarcity of water. According to Hoisein, Muhammad described that last age as the age of Fitnah, and the Qur'an warned that all of mankind would be targeted and that Allah's Punishment would be terrible [2, p. 61].

Concerning the concept of the last days, Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck state that all of human history, moves from the creation to the eschaton. Preceding the final judgment will come signs (both cosmic and moral) signaling the arrival of the Hour as well as the specific events of the resurrection and assessment. Within this overall structure is the individual cycle which specifies the events of creation, death, and resurrection. According to scholars, there are two dimensions of Islamic eschatology: collective and individual. In this case crucial to consider them in the following structure:

1. Collective time:
  - 1.1. Creation
  - 1.2. Signs of the Hour
  - 1.3. Events of the day of resurrection
  - 1.4. Final consignment
  - 1.5. Eternity

Correspondingly there is also an individual dimension of Islamic eschatology. Its structure can be pictured in the following way:

2. Individual time:
  - 2.1. Birth
  - 2.2. Death
  - 2.3. Existence in the grave (or elsewhere) awaiting the resurrection
  - 2.4. Participation in events to be experienced collectively [4, p. 5–6].

While we have mentioned more “general signs” of the approaching last hour in keeping with the Islamic viewpoint, there also is a list of more specific signs. In his acclaimed book “*Surah Al-Kahf* and the Modern Age” Imran Hossein notes, moral decadence and natural cataclysms will be accompanied by the coming of Djalal (Antichrist). Such an apocalyptic perspective is inevitable for the whole world. According to a Muslim theologian, the Djalal attack would be global in scope and all of mankind would be targeted: “people would stick blindly and stubbornly to falsehood as well as to corrupted teaching and reject Quran” [3, p. 180]. It is interesting that according to Imran Hosein, Djalal is the mastermind behind the emergence of secular materialist Western civilization. More specifically, Djalal’s impact is seen in modern thought and lifestyle. As we have mentioned above, this period in Islamic tradition is called Fitnah (a time of great temptation).

One remarkable event is ahead of us in the period of Djalal. According to Islamic tradition, Allah would raise Imam al-Mahdi from amongst the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Then, Djalal would attack him in order to destroy him. The only prophet who would stop Djalal is Jesus son of Mary. He would descend from heaven and kill the false prophet. Only then would the long and horrid night of temptation and evil end [3, p. 181].

Islam claims to be a prophetic religion with a strong emphasis on future events. For this reason, eschatology is one of the most important subfields of Islamic systematic theology with strict ethical, social, and historical connotations.

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