



Islamic Eschatology: The Mahdi's Return

by Harry Morin

One of the basic tenets of the Islamic religion is the belief in the Last Day. Like Christians, Muslim people also believe in a Day of Judgment that leads to an eternal heaven or an eternal hell. They believe the Day of Judgment will be foreshadowed by a variety of signs to warn the world of impending judgment. Some of the signs are general. They include moral decay, religious sectarian violence, religious apathy, hypocrisy, world fires and smoke, and major landslides. The major signs include the rise of the sun from the west, as well as the rise of three major Islamic figures: Ad-Dajjal, Isa Al-Masih and Al-Mahdi.

Ad-Dajjal

According to Islamic tradition, thirty religious imposters will appear from time to time on the world scene claiming to be true messengers of God. Each one of these imposters is labeled Ad-Dajjal, which means “the false one” or “the liar.” The last of these imposters plays a major role in Islamic eschatology. He is known as Al-Masih Ad-Dajjal, “the false Messiah” or “the false Christ.” Though the majority Sunni Muslims and the minority Shi’ite Muslims disagree and differ in some of the details, here are the more popular beliefs they have about Ad-Dajjal.

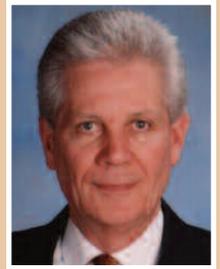
He will emerge in the last days prior to the Day of Judgment. At that time, the world will be suffering from severe drought and famine. Ad-Dajjal will be a man bearing the appearance of a hideous monster. He will be blind in one eye, which will protrude like a grape. Written between his two eyes will be the Arabic word for infidel. He will originate from an area between Syria and Iraq. He will be a Jew with no children, but will have a following of seventy-thousand Jews that will rise out of Iran. He will roam the earth to inflict the worst evil and



Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? –Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



The lead article of this issue will give you a lot to think about. Islamic influence is prevalent throughout the world; and you need to be aware of how Muslims view the future.

Jane Goodwin, in her book *Price of Honor*, provides a revealing glimpse of what most Sunni Muslims believe about the role of Jesus in the last days. Goodwin visited Kuwait and was a guest at a Qur'anic studies class for women run by *The Society of Islamic Heritage Revival*. Their religious teacher was a 33-year old Kuwaiti woman who holds an M.A. from the University of Southern California. This dynamic Kuwaiti feels that the revival of Islam may portend the end of the world...and that Jesus will play a central role in the events leading to the final hour. Goodwin quotes her:

It is now time for Islam to spread. There is a hadith that says that Islam will rule the world just before the world

ends. At that time, there will be a war between Muslims and Jews, a lot of killing. Jesus Christ will guide the Muslim troops as a Muslim. We believe he will come again and break the cross. He will show he was a prophet, not the son of God. The world will benefit when it is Muslim. Everyone will feel at ease" (p. 188).

It is important to note that minority Shi'ite Muslims have a different perspective. Most Shi'ite identify the last-day savior figure not as Jesus, but as the Mahdi (the divinely guided one). According to Shi'ite tradition, the Mahdi was the Twelfth Imam (successor and descendant of Muhammad) who miraculously disappeared and will one day reappear to establish righteousness on earth. I hope the lead article will prompt you to pray for and understand Muslims. Then, when the opportunity comes you will be equipped to share the truth about Jesus with them.



Muslim World News



Iraq

KIDNAPPERS MURDER CHURCH ELDER IN MOSUL

Grieving Christians in Iraq's northern city of Mosul completed three days of mourning for a murdered Presbyterian Church elder, only hours before another Iraqi clergyman was grabbed off the streets of Baghdad. Identified only as 69-year-old Elder Munthir, the murdered Christian had been kidnapped after leading worship services at the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Mosul on November 26. His body was found four days later. According to one Mosul source who described the kidnappers' conversations, "They said, 'We will cut his throat. We will take revenge for the Pope's words...We will kill all the Christians, and we will start with him.'" In Baghdad, the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate confirmed that another clergyman—Father Samy Abdulahad—was kidnapped as he left his church in the Al-Sinaa district.—*Compass*

Eritrea

ERITREA IMPOSES NEW CONTROLS ON CHURCH

The government of Eritrea wrested

financial and personnel control away from the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the day after security police jailed nine staff of a Christian aid agency. In an ultimatum delivered to the church's Asmara headquarters on December 5, the state demanded that all offerings and tithes collected through the Orthodox Church be deposited directly into a government account. Asmara sources also confirmed that on December 4, security officials arrested nine truck drivers working for Samaritan's Purse, an international aid agency ordered to leave the country last month. In addition, local Christians report that gospel singer Helen Berhane, released in late October after more than two years in jail for refusing to recant her faith, is recuperating at her home in Asmara.—*Compass*

Iran

IRAN ARRESTS LEADERS OF HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT

Iranian secret police began to raid and arrest leaders of the Islamic republic's indigenous "Jesus Only" movement on December 10, arriving unannounced in the early morning hours to search their homes in Tehran, Karaj, Rasht and Bandar Anzali. Several members of the

house church movement have been called in for interrogation and then released, but eight remain under arrest. According to one source, those arrested face 10 accusations, including evangelization activities and actions against the national security of Iran.—*Compass*

Pakistan

CHRISTIAN COUPLE SENTENCED FOR BLASPHEMY

Two Pakistani believers were sentenced to 15 years in prison and a fine of 25,000 rupees each for burning the Koran. On October 18, 2006, Boota and James Masih, a married couple, were asked to clean a Muslim family's store and burn the garbage when they finished. The two gathered all the garbage in a donkey cart and burned it outside the home. Some Muslim neighbors saw the burning and discovered Koranic papers in the fire. An angry mob gathered and planned to burn Christian homes and churches. Police controlled the mob by arresting Boota and James, even though they are illiterate and did not know the contents of the garbage. Despite reforms, blasphemy laws are consistently implemented in the persecution of Pakistani Christians.—*VOM*

persecution ever known to humankind.

According to Islamic tradition, Ad-Dajjal will claim to be a true messenger of God, and then proceed to claim divinity. He will have the power of miracles to bolster his claims. Evil spirits will be at his command. They will take on the human forms of the deceased to deceive the world into thinking Ad-Dajjal has the power to resurrect the dead. Ad-Dajjal will carry out his diabolical scheme for about forty years. Then he will be defeated by another important figure in Islamic eschatology—Isa Al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah), son of Mary.

Isa Al-Masih

According to most Muslims, the Qur'an teaches that Isa Al-Masih (Jesus) will be "*a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment)*;" Qur'an 43:61. The Qur'an offers no details, but there is a wide variety of tradition that deals with this issue. Most Muslims believe Jesus is presently in heaven. Yet, it is important to remember that Muslims reject the crucifixion account. They refuse to accept a story which leaves the prophet of God, Jesus, wrongfully betrayed and defeated at the hands of pagan Romans. Instead, they believe that God miraculously rescued Jesus from humiliating death and lifted him directly into heaven. However, Muslims believe Jesus' mission is incomplete. They expect Jesus to return to earth to correct the alleged hoax of the crucifixion and to lead everyone to the true religion of God—Islam. Then, after he fulfills that mission, he will die a natural death.

According to tradition, God lifted Jesus into the second heaven to be with John the Baptist. From there, Jesus will return in the end times when the earth is in the terrible grip of Ad-Dajjal. One tradition describes Jesus descending upon the tower of a mosque in Damascus. There he will join Muslims in their Islamic prayer. Then he will chase after Ad-Dajjal and kill him.

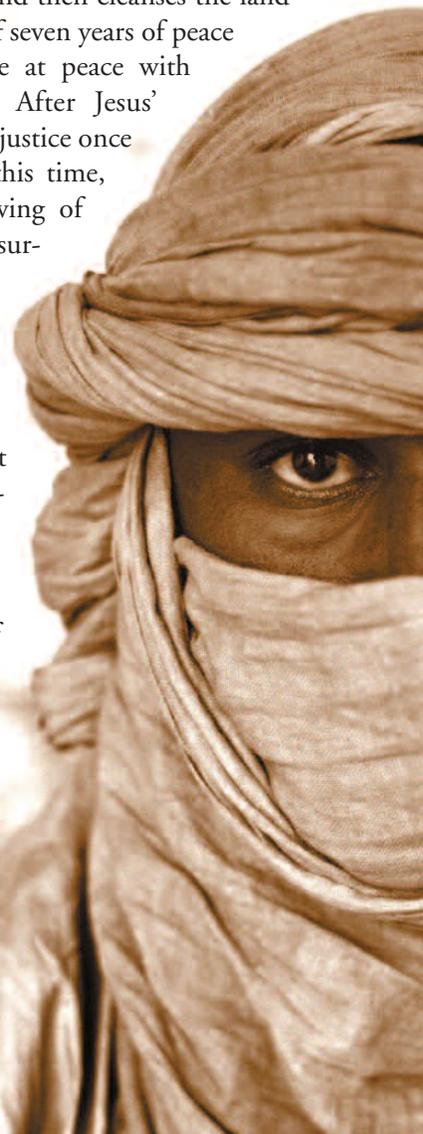
With the removal of Ad-Dajjal, Jesus will reign over the whole earth as a just ruler. According to tradition, he will govern according to the laws of the Qur'an and fully espouse the teachings of Islam. He will break all crosses to refute the crucifixion. He will kill all pigs to uphold the reli-

gious law that forbids the consumption of pork. By these two acts, Christians and Jews supposedly will rally to his cause and embrace Islam. During Jesus' reign, Islam is expected to engulf the whole world. While on earth, Muslims believe Jesus will marry, have children and live for forty-five years. Upon his death, Jesus will be buried in Medina, in a grave beside Muhammad. On the Day of Resurrection, God will then raise both Muhammad and Jesus together.

One interesting sidelight in the traditions about Jesus' return is the mention of Gog and Magog, tribes of ungodly savages who commit atrocities in the earth. After the defeat of Ad-Dajjal, they rise up against Jesus and threaten to kill him. But Jesus prays and God responds. God sends infectious insects upon the enemies and destroys them all. The stench of the dead is so unbearable that Jesus again prays for God's intervention. This time, God sends giant birds to carry off the corpses, and then cleanses the land with wind and rain. A period of seven years of peace follows. Even the animals live at peace with humankind and each other. After Jesus' death, however, disbelief and injustice once again corrupt the earth. But this time, God intervenes with the blowing of two trumpets signaling the resurrection and the judgment.

Al-Mahdi

There is yet one more Islamic figure who plays a prominent role in the unfolding of the Last Days. Muslims know him as Al-Mahdi, the Guided One. Sunni traditions say little about him. Basically, they describe him as a descendant of Muhammad who will appear in the end times to establish worldwide justice and peace. His arrival will be heralded by followers waving black flags from the border region of Iran and



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Afghanistan. Sunni Muslims do not claim to know his identity and therefore he remains an obscure figure.

For the Shi'ites, the Mahdi plays the most important role in the Last Days. He is the long awaited savior who will save humankind from destruction. Sunnis claim he has not appeared yet. But the Shi'ites claim he already appeared—they claim to know his identity. They believe his arrival will be the return of their last great community leader, the Twelfth Imam of the 10th century A.D.

After the death of Islam's prophet in the seventh century A.D., Shi'ites contended their rulers must be descendants of the prophet, through the line of his daughter, Fatima, and her husband Ali. Each one of these succeeding rulers bore the title Imam. Shi'ites have exalted their Imams to almost divine status. They believe that each Imam was indwelt by a divine light of spiritual illumination which allegedly shined its brightest in the life of Islam's prophet and continued to radiate in the lives of his ruling descendants, the Imams.

The Twelfth Imam is believed to have mysteriously disappeared in the 10th century A.D. to escape persecution. Shi'ite Muslims believe he is still alive in a metaphysical plane of existence and will return to the earthly material plane in the last days to inaugurate an Islamic world order.

Shi'ite traditions also mention Ad-Dajjal and Jesus, but the Mahdi plays the dominant role. He rules as God's vice-regent. Jesus is a secondary figure who assists the Mahdi and follows him in the Islamic prayer. For the Shi'ites, the Mahdi represents the climatic final deliverer who rescues the human race and ushers

in an era of world peace. His forces of righteousness defeat the forces of evil in one final apocalyptic war.

This is why Shi'ites bristle with resentment when Western world powers promote social orders and forms of government as the sole solution to the world's ills. For Shi'ites, the only one who can bring the right solution is the Mahdi. In light of present day world events, Shi'ites likewise believe the Day of Judgment is at hand, which means that the appearance of the Mahdi is imminent. The more religious minded Shi'ites are keen on setting the stage for his arrival. They are zealous in preparing a suitable religious environment fit for his return. This means a resurgence of orthodox Islamic practice and a stronger devotion to the teaching of their Imams.

In a recent speech to the United Nations, the president of Iran included this prayer that reflects Shi'ite sentiment: "O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace." It is this fervor for the Mahdi that will shape foreign policies and actions of the Shi'ite communities, especially of Iran, the bastion of Shi'ism. Shi'ite Muslims will do their utmost to prevent any leading world power from usurping from the Mahdi his alleged divine role as savior and deliverer of the world.

Like the Shi'ites of Islam, people worldwide yearn for a savior to come. But praise be to God, the Savior already came two thousand years ago. Unfortunately, *"the god of this age has blinded the eyes of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ..."* But the glorified Christ shall one day return and He will do so in divine majesty and splendor. Until then, it behooves Jesus' followers to unravel the distortions that diminish His glory in the eyes of Muslims.

Yes, Jesus shall return to reign as sovereign King. But before anyone of any religious persuasion can embrace His kingdom, he must first be saved from another kingdom—the kingdom of sin. It is imperative that we do all we can to introduce people, including Muslims, to Jesus as Savior. Only then can they prepare for the return of Jesus as King.

Afghanistan

Population: 23,000,000

Religions: Muslim 97.5%, Parsee 1.5%, Christian .02%

Official Languages: Pashto 50%, Dari 35%

Peoples: Indo-Iranian 87%, Turkic 11%, Other 2%

Shattered by 27 years of USSR occupation, civil war and Taliban misrule—Afghanistan has been a country in turmoil. Despite international rebuilding efforts, the Afghan economy remains stunted. Regrowth is hampered by lack of funds, lawlessness and factionalism. Opium remains as Afghanistan's top cash crop.

Afghanistan has been the stage for conflict throughout its history, and is no stranger to foreign conquest. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1988-1989, the country was wracked with civil war—from which the radical Taliban emerged. The Taliban, with its stringent interpretation of Islam, enabled the Al Qaeda terror network to operate from Afghan territory; essentially bringing about its own demise, as U.S. forces destroyed the Al Qaeda infrastructure and removed the Taliban from power.

In 2004, the new government approved a constitution, but all freedoms remain tempered by Islamic interpretation. There is little prospect for full religious freedom. Afghanistan has over 48,000 mosques, but no registered churches. Estimates place the number of Christians in Afghanistan at approximately 5,000.

Unreached People Group

Hazara

Population: 1,600,000 **Religion:** Muslim 99%

Language: Hazaragi

The name Hazara is Persian for “one thousand.” Today there are more than 1.6 million Hazara, who live mostly in the central mountains of Afghanistan and along the border of Iran. The Western Hazara are predominately a nomadic people who migrate according to the seasons. The Eastern Hazara live together in flat-roofed mud houses. They raise sheep on the treeless mountaintops which surround them.

Most Hazara people speak Hazaragi, a mixture of Mongol and Turkish words. The roots of their language come from their history. The Hazara are considered ancestors of Genghis Khan, the Mongol leader who invaded Afghanistan in 1219.

Despite the fact that the Hazara live in a land rich in natural resources, they still lack sufficient health care. Because of the lack of doctors and clinics in the country, diseases such as tuberculosis and dysentery go untreated.

There are about 50 Hazari Christians, and no known churches.

*Pray
that...*

...the entire Bible will be translated into Hazaragi.

...God will reveal Himself to these precious people through dreams and visions.

...God will call Christian workers to the Hazara.





JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, March 2, 2007. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Turkey. Currently, almost 99 percent of Turkey's 70 million people are Muslim.

...for an evangelical church in Aceh province, Indonesia. Militant Muslims set fire to the building and the congregation is now meeting in a nearby house. The pastor and his pregnant wife were forced to flee and are still in hiding.

...for 17-year old Raihana Hussain, the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants to Australia. She survived a knife attack from her father after telling her parents she was leaving Islam. In the struggle, her mother was killed.

Friday, March 9, 2007. Please pray

...for the Muslims of London, England. London has become "Europe's capital of Islam." Along with 700 mosques and 1,200 Qur'anic schools, nearly every university in London has an active Islamic society openly propagating Islam. More than one million of London's 11 million residents are Muslims.

...for effective discipleship among Muslim Background Believers (MBBs).

...for Shi'ite Muslims awaiting the Mahdi, a messiah-like figure. Pray that many will come to know Jesus, the true Messiah.

Friday, March 16, 2007. Please pray

...for three Malian MBBs baptized in December, 2006. Pray that God would protect and place a guiding hand on them.

...for Iranian lay pastor Hamid Pourmand. He has been released from prison, but he and his family still need much prayer. A former army officer, Pourmand no longer has employment, assets or a home.

...for an Iranian Christian couple forced to flee their northern city after planting a church of 200 members.

Friday, March 23, 2007. Please pray

...for the Darfurian refugees in Chad as they continue to spill over the border. Pray that churches and other Christians will be able to assist these devastated people.

...for Christians in Eritrea. Approximately 2,000 Eritreans are currently incarcerated solely for religious reasons.

...for Muslims in America. In 2005 alone, 96,000 immigrants from Muslim countries became permanent U.S. residents.

Friday, March 30, 2007. Please pray

...for God to continue to draw Muslims to Himself through dreams and visions, and the Word of God.

...for Nigeria. The violence against Christians continues, with churches being burned down and individuals attacked or threatened on baseless charges. Pray for pastors and congregations who have lost homes and churches.

...for 13 MBBs in Begi, Ethiopia, forced to flee due to death threats. Pray that God will give them strength to persevere.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. –1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!*



Friday, April 6, 2007. Please pray

...for “Abdalla,” a Kenyan MBB abandoned by his family after declaring faith in Jesus. He now disciples a group of underground believers. Pray that God would bless his labors to bring more Muslims to Christ.

...for the Church in Indonesia. The law makes it almost impossible to obtain a building permit—requiring member’s signatures, agreement of 60 non-Christian neighbors, and approval from civic authorities and interfaith community forums. Pray that these restrictions would be eased.

...for Muslims in Libya. Bibles are being smuggled in—and the hunger is overwhelming.

Friday, April 13, 2007. Please pray

...for distribution of the modern Turkish Bible—translation was completed in 2001. Pray for distribution of God’s Word across the whole of Turkey.

...for Muslims in Yemen. Pray that God would stir whole families to seek Christ together for salvation, strength and unity.

...for the Church in Uzbekistan. The government has announced plans to more than quadruple the fines for unregistered religious activity. A fine could now be up to 600 times the minimum monthly salary.

Friday, April 20, 2007. Please pray

...for Christians in Iraq. The situation remains dire as threats of kidnapping or death remain constant.

...for Sufi Muslims in Syria. Pray that through Christian broadcasts, dreams and visions, seeking Sufis would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

...for a Jordanian MBB brought before a sharia court on apostasy charges. He escaped to Syria, only to be arrested for smuggling in Kurdish Bibles. He and his family have since gained political asylum in the U.S. Pray that God would continue to guide his footsteps.

Friday, April 27, 2007. Please pray

...for a pastor and his son in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan. A few months back, they were assaulted by a mob of eighty Muslims. All religious books were removed from their house and burned. The pastor is still recovering from serious head wounds.

...for the people of Pakistan. The Northwest Frontier Province is trying to impose a Taliban-like office to oversee private morals and adherence to Islamic principles. Pray that the national government will reject this law.

...for a Christian discipleship center in Benin. The center was ransacked on the order of a local imam and the Muslim landlady threatened for allowing Christians on her property. Pray that God would bless this ministry.