

## Christian and Islamic Eschatology

What do Islamic and Christian followers believe about the endtimes and how does each belief influence the religion?

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## **Introduction**

Many people believe that Christian and Islamic eschatology is very similar, and in most ways it is but the core and personal values of each religion differ greatly. This essay will explore the theologies of the end times of each religion, showing their similarities and differences. This essay will also look at how the views and beliefs of each religion affect the practices of the believers. My research question, that I will be attempting to answer throughout this paper, is What do Islamic and Christian followers believe about the endtimes and how does each belief influence the religion? This Research Question is a deserving topic to investigate because both Islam and Christianity are considered the top two in organized religion and also both religions have suggested that the end times are upon this world making it a relevant topic. In this essay I will be focusing on the major aspects of each religion's eschatology, which is the study or investigation of the end times, and how that affects their individual cultures. Both of these religions have many writings on the beliefs of the end times, each stating the different signs and actions that will take place before Judgement Day, which for both religions, is the day that either Jesus for Christianity or Allah for Islam will come back to Earth and gather all of the faithful followers, leaving the unbelievers behind to suffer many trials and tribulations. Also, many of those beliefs in the end times have caused Christians and Islamists to have certain influences on customs that they practice and rituals that they follow. I chose this topic because I was interested in delving deeper into the end times of two different religions. Christianity and Islam are not only both two major religions but both have had many different persecutions in recent years and have been in the news multiple times. Also, both religions have theologians and eschatologists saying that the end times are upon mankind making it relevant to today's society.

## **Islamic Eschatology**

To begin with, I will explain the background and fundamentals to Islamic eschatology. In the Quran it states, *“The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew”* (Quran 29:64). Islamic eschatology is the study of end times. This is referring to the day that Allah will return which has two names in Arabic, *Yawm ad-Dīn*, the Day of Judgement and *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, the Day of Resurrection. It is believed that on this day, Allah, which is the Arabic word for God, will have his final judgement on humanity. On this day, Allah will come to our world and will end all life on earth. This will be followed by resurrecting all of the dead and judging them, deciding who will go to heaven, or Jannah as is the Arabic word, and who will go to hell, or Jahannam, as is the Arabic word. In the Quran it states, *“Every soul will taste death. Then to Us will you be returned”* (29:57). The Quran also says that this time is known only to Allah and no other although there are signs and events that are predicted to happen before Allah is to return to earth, *“15. Lo! the Hour is surely coming. But I will to keep it hidden, that every soul may be rewarded for that which it striveth (to achieve) Surah 20:15”*. It is said that when he returns, he will obliterate all of mankind. Although the Quran does talk about the end times in a few passages, most of the signs and prophecies are explained in the hadith which is a collection of sayings from Mohammed. In the hadith, twelve major signs are summarized that will happen before the return of Allah. These signs will be predated with lawlessness and turmoil in the world. In the Quran there are five main things about the Last Judgement day that are described. The first is that only Allah knows the exact time that the Day will occur. The second is that only Allah will be able to bring forth the Day. The third is that those who have died before Allah has come will be resurrected and think that only a brief amount of time had passed. The fourth is Allah will resurrect everything and everyone. The fifth and final point that the Quran makes is that the people who worshipped and

believed in false gods will suffer in Jahannam for eternity after being judged by Allah. The hadith discusses more of the signs that will show when the Day is near. Within the hadith, there is an entire chapter devoted to discussing the end times or The Last Hour as it is referred to in chapter. The chapter is the 41st book and discusses details of the Last Hour and the return of Jesus, whom Muslims believe will come back to precede Allah before he arrives on Earth for Judgement Day. There are many minor and major signs that the hadith prophesies will happen. All of these signs lead up to one moment referred to as “The Hour” which is the time of the resurrection and judgement. The beginning of these signs is marked with the arrival and revealing of the Antichrist or Dajjal which is the Arabic word. There is a great deal of controversy as to when these signs will occur. Most Islamic scholars separate the signs into three different time periods. The first time period is one of the minor signs. There are over fifty different minor signs, many of which portraying commonplace tendencies within society. Others of the minor signs show things that will occur before the appearance of the Dajjal. Also, many of the minor signs predict environmental disturbances on the earth as is stated in this verse, “1. *When the heaven is cleft asunder, 2. When the planets are dispersed, 3. When the seas are poured forth, 4. And the sepulchres are overturned, 5. A soul will know what it hath sent before (it) and what left behind.*” Surah 82:1-5. *Al-Infitar*. The minor signs also include the second period of the end times in Islamic eschatology. The major signs indicate the start of the third time period. There are ten major signs and they are known all together as *alamatu's-sa'ah al-kubra* which means the major signs of the end. All of the major signs are decisive events pointing to the “Hour”. The beginning sign is the appearance and rise to power of the Dajjal. Then Jesus will return and there will be many tribulations and phenomenons occurring in the world. Also there will be much destruction and chaos throughout the earth. Finally “The Hour” will come,



followed by the Day of Reckoning which will be a time of horrible pain and agony. This will then be followed by the Day of Judgement when Allah will come to judge all of mankind and when he is finished all will cross the bridge that is over Jahannam. Those who are condemned will fall but the ones who have earned their place in Jannah will continue to the other side where they will come to a pond called the Pool of The Prophet where they will drink and their spiritual desires will be fulfilled. Then Muhammad will intercede to Allah to allow the believers into paradise and they will enter Jannah and live there for eternity.

### **Christian Eschatology**

Next, I will explain the concepts and beliefs in Christian eschatology. The end times in the christian society have always been an important and popular topic, especially within the last last decades. Many forms of entertainment have predicted what it will look like based on biblical references and verses. Some of these include the bestselling novel series Left Behind By Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins and the multiple movies based on the series. This has caused many Christians to believe that the end times are are near. Christian eschatology is one of the most studied parts of Christian theology. In a quick summary, Christian eschatology is the study of where a person's soul will go after they perish and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The main texts used in the study are the Old and New Testaments found in the Bible. The beginning of end times is debated among Christian eschatologists because many believe that the Second Coming will happen and then the Tribulation will begin while others believe the opposite, that the Tribulation will occur and then the Second Coming Coming will happen. These are called the pre- and post- Tribulation theories. I will discuss pre-Tribulation because it is considered by most Christian scholars to be correct. In Paul's episcopal to Thessalonica he says, "The Lord

himself will descend from heaven... and the dead in Christ will rise first." This is the Second Coming or Rapture as many like to call it, Jesus will come to earth a second time, hence the name, and gather all of his believers who are on earth. The Second coming of Christ is believed that everyone will be able to see and hear as Jesus descends to earth once again to bring his believers up to Heaven. These people will vanish without a trace and leave the unbelievers behind to go through a time period referred to as the Tribulation. In the Bible it describes the Second Coming as an hour that only God the Father knows and it will come at a time when it is least expected as it says in Matthew, *"Of that day and hour no-one knows; no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."* (Mt 24:36-39). The Tribulation will be a horrible time, one of many chaotic disasters both from men and from nature. Many theologians believe that the Tribulation will last for seven years, a number that is often found in the Bible and is considered perfect. This is because of the seventy weeks prophecy in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. The first sixty-nine weeks represent the time period before the second coming and the final week represents the Tribulation. In Daniel it describes it as, *"The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it will be with a flood, and till the end of the war, desolations are determined. Then he will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of the week, he will bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations will be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation which is determined is poured out on the desolate."* (Dan 9:26-27). Although it is hard to tell, this prophecy combined with others tells of *"the prince who is to come will destroy*

*the city*” who is the Antichrist, will make a seven year contract with Israel, promising to rebuild the sacred temple of God and start making sacrifices to God, but it is predicted that in the middle of that seven year period, he will start to set himself up as a god to be worshiped. When the Antichrist comes, right after the Second Coming, there will be three and a half years of prosperous living in the world and then there will be three and a half years of total horror. After the seven years, Armageddon will occur. This will be the great battle between the armies of heaven and the armies of Hell. In the book of Revelations, John describes it as, *“I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and with righteousness he judges and makes war.”* (Rev 19:11). This is describing Jesus as he comes with his army of angels to defeat and destroy Satan and the Antichrist. This also gives a short description of what will happen before the battle begins. The army of heaven is described as a numerous amount of warrior angels and the resurrected believers and the believers taken up to Heaven with Jesus. Then, as is stated in the book of Revelation, the army of Heaven will be triumphant over Satan’s army. Then Satan will be thrown into a fiery prison and kept there for a thousand years. *“I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”* (Rev 20:1-3). Christ will reign on earth for that thousand years and there will be peace throughout the land, this time period is referred to as The Millennium. During this reign, animals and humans alike will revert back to their original beings as God had created them. There will be no killing and it is implied that everyone will return how it was in the Garden of Eden. At the end of Christ’s thousand year reign on earth, Satan will be released and let



out to deceive the nations one last time. Satan will amass a huge army but it will end in destruction as it states in Ezekiel, *"I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed. I will rain down on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him: flooding rain, great hailstones, fire and brimstone."* (Ezek 38:22). Then, once Satan is defeated for good and thrown into the lake of fire with the Antichrist, The Last Judgement day will proceed. It is described by John as, *"... great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."* (Rev 20:11,13-15). Then God will create a new Heaven and a new Earth and all of mankind who believed in him and followed him would reside there for eternity. The throne of God and Jesus would be in the center with a river flowing out of it leading to the Tree of Life, the one found in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve ate from. Also in Revelations it says, *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there will be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev 21:4). This symbolizes the retracting of the curse that God placed on mankind in the beginning with Adam and Eve.

### **Influence on Muslims**

Next I will be discussing how each religion's view of the end times influences beliefs and customs within each religion. In the Islamic religion, it is stated that all who do not believe in the Allah will be sentenced to eternal death and pain and suffering. This causes many Muslims to be

devoted to following the Quran and hadith in order to please Allah and reap bountiful gifts in the afterlife. In the Quran it states, *"Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord... and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants"* (3:15). In Islamic households the practice of tawhid, which is the worship of Allah, is above everything else because they want to please him so as to obey his commands and follow his will. This causes many Muslims to look at events differently, interpreting them in ways to see if they fit with what the Quran is describing. This also affects the way that they pray and worship Allah, because if they believe that the coming is soon, they would try to gain his favor and obey him more than ever. Also, the Muslims have a statue that is called Iman, or faith. It comprises of six pillars each having to do with a certain way of living or how to act. One of those pillars is Judgement Day. It serves as a reminder to believers in the Islamic culture that it could occur at any moment and reminds them that they should always be aware of events within the world. Many Muslims refer to this verse in the Qur'an, *"O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best (way) and best in result."* (4:59). This is explaining that you should always obey Allah and the Last Day. It is important for Muslims to believe in the Last Day because it gives them hope that Allah will return and give retribution to all of the unbelievers in the world. Also, they desire Allah to judge them and find them worthy of Jannah, *"Am I to desire someone other than Allah as a judge when it is He Who has sent down the Book explained in detail?" Those We have given the Book know that it has been sent down from your Lord with truth, so on no account be among the doubters."* (6:114). Another influence the Second Coming has on Islamic culture are the values within a family. Family is very important within the culture

of Islam, because they do not know the time when the Earth will be judged by Allah or how much time they have left on Earth; Because of this they have very close knit families, and a great respect towards elders because of their wisdom and knowledge they have obtained over the years.

### **Influence on Christians**

Christianity is influenced in a way very similar to that of the Islamic religion. Both religion's beliefs of the end times are similar which cause the influences of the end times on the religions to also be similar. Many theologians believe that there will be different types of rewards for those who lived for God. Some say that the more reverently you worshipped and served God on Earth, the more gifts you will receive in Heaven, *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Mt 5:12). The same with those who do not follow God, the more you despise him and blaspheme him the worse pain and suffering you will feel in Hell. This motivates many Christians to continue to worship and follow God to the best of their ability so that they can reap the rewards that God will give to them when they go to Heaven. Another way that the end times influence the Christian faith, is the dispute and division over when the Second Coming will happen. This has caused a great deal of debate within the different denominations and also affects the way that the followers live their life because one believes there will be a seven year period of Tribulation and the other believes Jesus will come back first and then the seven year period of Tribulation. The people who believe that there will be a seven year period of Tribulation before the Second Coming do not believe that they have to live for God until that time period. This can affect how a person lives their life and the different actions they take in their life. One denomination of

Christianity, called Pentecostals, will have special services where the congregation members will speak in an Angelic language. They believe this is a heavenly language that prophesies certain events and is a direct contact to God. Many who follow the Pentecostal denomination, believe that in the end times more people will begin to speak in that language and prophesize on the end times. Another reason the end times influence Christians, is because it makes them realize that God is the only one who will judge them in the end. He will be the supreme Judge so everything they do is in view of that fact and is trying to please him in hopes of being pardoned for their sin. They acknowledge that he will judge them in the end of times "*For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead*" (Acts 17:31 NIV). Christians also believe that everything they do will one day be judged by God. It is written in the Bible that God has a book called the Book of Life which has recorded every deed ever done by man. This causes Christians to realize that God will look at everything that have ever done on Judgement Day and whoever name is not found worthy in the book will be punished for eternity, "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" (Rev. 20:15). Also, in the end if a Christian goes to Heaven, they will spend eternity with someone they have worshipped on earth. This will cause many Christians to want to be in the presence of God forever.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, in this essay, I discussed the major aspects of eschatology in the Islamic and Christian religions and showed how they influenced each religion. Through this investigation I found that both religions have very similar views on the end times and how they will play out. They also both are influenced by eschatology in similar ways. Each religion feels



like they have a duty to perform for God or Allah before the Second Coming. This being said many of the main things differ within each religion and show that no religion is exactly alike. Although both Islamic and Christian eschatology have similar ideas and beliefs, the core views differ greatly each affecting their religion in a different manner. Throughout the research of this question, I was constantly finding new ways that the eschatology was incorporated into everyday life for each of the different religions. This made me realize how important beliefs and prophecies are to the multiple religions in the world, especially the end times because this is where the followers believe they will spend the rest of their lives and live for eternity. This Research Question was a very thought provoking topic to investigate because both religions have very interesting views on their beliefs of the end times. My research question, which was What do Islamic and Christian followers believe about the endtimes and how does each belief influence the religion? Throughout this essay I tried to give the key factors of eschatology for each religion and give a detailed summary of what each religion believed about the endtimes. In my research I discovered many new things I had never known about in both the Islamic and Christian religion and I believe that it is very important to know about major religions in the world around us.



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