

Chapter 22. The end times.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. While he watches, the heifer is to be burned--its hide, flesh, blood and offal.¹ The Bible

The combustive mixture of religion and politics, especially in the volatile Middle East, is frightening. That Christians and Jews see building a new temple on land now occupied by a Muslim Mosque as essential to bringing out their messiah is more frightening still.

Jews, Christians and Muslims have similar end times myths. Each predicts that soon world conditions will worsen, international leaders will rise, major battles will be fought and a messiah will appear, rewarding believers with everlasting heavenly life.

For Jewish people, a necessary step to bringing about the end times is a purification ritual using a red heifer born in Israel and conducted at a special new temple to be built on the Temple Mount, in an area now occupied by the Al-Asqa mosque—the same mosque Osama bin Laden mentioned in his letter in the previous chapter. As weird as it sounds, breeding and sacrificing a red heifer is considered essential. The Temple Institute says:

Perhaps it would be difficult for some to believe that a cow could be so important. But in truth, the fate of the entire world depends on the red heifer. For G-d² has ordained that its ashes alone are the single missing ingredient for the reinstatement of Biblical purity--and thereafter, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. . . . [T]he ashes of the red heifer rectif[y] humanity's most basic flaw: despair. The despair brought about by the loss of the Temple and the Divine Presence amongst us.³

Around the time of building the temple, the story says, there will be a great battle involving Gog and Magog,⁴ a messiah will be recognized, and 40 years later, all the dead in Israel will be resurrected.⁵ All Jews will return “home” to Israel. Everyone will recognize the Jewish god and as the only god and Jewish religion as the correct religion. The world will live in peace.⁶

The Temple Institute, located in Jerusalem, already has prepared ritual vessels to be used at the new temple, as well as garments to be worn by the high priest. They also are working on raising a special group of boys, who have never touched the ground where people are buried, to serve at the temple.⁷ An American Pentecostal preacher is helping the Israelis to breed a red heifer in their “holy land.”⁸

The Temple Mount is home to the Dome of the Rock, where Muslims believe Mohammed departed the earth with the angel Gabriel and left behind a footprint. The FBI has warned, “A simple act of desecration, or even a perceived desecration of any of the holy sites on the Temple Mount is likely to trigger a violent reaction.”⁹ In 1990, a rumor that Jewish extremists would lay a cornerstone for the new temple resulted in riots with 17 dead. In 1996, Israel’s opening a tunnel under the Temple Mount led to riots with 80 dead.¹⁰ The Dome of the Rock appears, crossed by swords, as part of the symbol of Hamas, the political party that calls for armed struggle with Israel and controls the Palestinian Parliament¹¹ (Figure 17). The end times myths involving the Temple Mount show a great possibility of becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy, but with human destruction instead of everlasting life as the final result.



Figure 17. Hamas symbol, including the Dome of the Rock.

One might think that Christians have no motivation to help the Jews in this enterprise, especially since according to the Jewish myth, only Jews are spared in the end times. But, after Jews, evangelical Christians are the strongest supporters of Israel in the U.S., and 63% of them feel that Israel’s establishment fulfills a biblical prophecy about Jesus’ second coming.¹² In the Christian myth, the end times evolve in the same area, but the result is different:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.¹³

Christians believe the Jewish messiah is the anti-christ, but that his arrival is a necessary step to bring about the Christian end times. In the Christian version, Christians get to live with Christ and non-Christians go to hell.¹⁴

It will probably not surprise you that the Muslim end times story agrees on some of the details but has a different outcome from that of the Jews and Christians. The Muslim end times story gets confusing with a mixture of information from the Koran, Hadiths, and modern propaganda. Jews did

not figure widely in the original story, but through a modern lens, they are a focus, as is the United States, which serves in some interpretations as the anti-christ (Dajjal).

In the Muslim end times story, the anti-christ, or Dajjal will arise from a road between Syria and Iraq and take on the characteristics of a god, but the legend says, he is a false god. Finally, after a period of forty days (in which time the first day will be a year), a battle will occur between the Dajjal and the Muslim forces near Syria, when Isa (Jesus or the messiah) will come down from heaven and kill the Dajjal and “destroy the cross, kill the swine and abolish the tax.” This statement is seen to mean that Christians and Jews will not be accepted. Now, if they pay a tax, they are tolerated by Islam. But in the end times, only converting to Islam will allow a person to survive.¹⁵ The Muslims will thereafter wipe out the Dajjal’s army which may consist of 70,000 Jews. According to one source, “The Jews will not be able to hide behind anything on that day. Every time they try to hide behind a stone, a wall, a tree (except a boxthorn tree), or animal, Allah will make these things speak and they will say, ‘O servant of Allah there is a Jew hiding behind me. Come kill him.’”¹⁶

An example of the modern spin on the Dajjal comes from the ilaam.net Website, whose author finds all Muslim prerequisites for the end times met by current events:

DAJJAL is not a person with one eye, “chained” at unknown islands (as claimed by many so-called Aalims, taken from Daeeef-Hadiths). In fact, DAJJAL is an evil concept or mission (Anti-Allah and its commandments) which will be carried out by a powerful group, not by one country but almost every country of the world. A powerful leader whose string will be controlled by the Jews will be the leader of this group.

DAJJAL with “one eye” means “new world order,” a concept initiated by former President of United States George Bush Senior during the war against Iraq. This concept works only in one direction. For example, whatever the United States says “is the law.” No question, no argument. Hence this is considered the “one eye order.”

If you compare the current situation of this world, it’s clearly understood who are DAJJAL and its followers. This is the first time in the history of this world where all so-called civilized but in fact criminal minded people joined hands together to fight against Allah and his commandments. All former enemies joined together (Russia, China, India, Japan, Germany, virtually all so-called “Muslim States” (surprisingly even Iran)) with DAJJAL, [leaving] aside their differences. They changed their constitution if it [was] an obstacle to join DAJJAL (Example: Germany, Japan—were not permitted by their constitution[s] to send their troops overseas.)

Support for DAJJAL is not only within the Governments, but you may notice the attitude of the newspapers (even media from so-called Muslim countries), television, radio and all other media are supporting DAJJAL by providing one-sided stories.

DAJJAL was predicted to rain-down fire to its enemy and throw food to its supporters. This is exactly that was happening in Afghanistan. DAJJAL planes are

throwing bombs (fire) and food side-by-side, one for the enemy and the other for “friends.”¹⁷

Lest you think that such crazy interpretations are the sole province of Muslims, Christians produce similar evaluations.¹⁸

The details of the end times myth of each religion vary from sect to sect and even from time to time. What is important is that true believers think there will be a day of reckoning when believers are rewarded and non-believers are punished. For Christians and Muslims that punishment is eternity in hell.¹⁹ In each religion, the end times are preceded by a time of turmoil and a great battle or Armageddon. For Christians and Muslims, the myth that non-believers spend eternity in hell magnifies the tribalism described in the previous chapter. If the non-believers are doomed to a life in hell anyway, adherents see little wrong in hurrying them to that end by killing them now.

The ultimate expression of religious tribalism is found in its end times stories. The monotheisms even warn that a single world government is a precursor to the end times. The Book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible and contains such gems as this, “[The anti-christ] forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.”²⁰ Christians use this story to condemn organizations like the United Nations and unified currencies like the Euro. It is amazing that anyone repeats these myths, especially the incredible ones like the red heifer and the mark of the beast. What is even more frightening is that a survey of Americans showed that 59% believe that the Book of Revelation will come true.²¹ A poll of Christians showed that 85% believe they are living in the end times.²² These beliefs are dangerous.

Think back to the Mormons. They believe the end times will occur in the United States, and that they will take over the U.S. government and eventually the world. Mormons hold important political, military and civil service posts throughout the government including Senate Majority Leader (Harry Reid) and presidential candidate Mitt Romney, both of Utah’s Senators (5% of the Senate is Mormon) and all three of Utah’s Representatives, Utah’s governor and Lieutenant Governor, and nine additional members of Congress.²³ The Mormons are preparing for their end times scenario—but the Mormon end times myths are not as widespread, frightening or imminent as the end times myths of the people of the book.

There are people at the highest levels of American government who say they believe the Christian end times myths. For example, born again Christian General William Boykin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intelligence, a key player in America’s military strategy, believed god made George W. Bush President. He said he prevailed in a conflict with a Somali warlord because, “My God was bigger than his . . . I knew that my God was a real God and that his was an idol.”²⁴ He said the “war on terror” is “a spiritual battle, it’s a battle for our soul. And the enemy is a guy called Satan--Satan wants to destroy this nation. He wants to destroy us as a nation and he wants to destroy us as a Christian army.”²⁵ A man who believed these religious myths helped plan American strategy in the

volatile Middle East. It actually makes you thankful for the hypocrites who say they believe but really do not. The true believers are the most frightening.

Religionists and the media seem afraid to discuss the role religion plays in the horrible strife in the Middle East. Perhaps they are afraid that discussing the religious motivation of the “infidels” will necessitate a similar examination of their own beliefs. Every time I hear a report about religiously influenced violence, I yell at the radio or TV, “talk about the role of religion!” But they never do.

The largest danger to the health and safety of the world comes not from the incidental acts of terrorism religionists have performed to date, but from the monumental acts they may commit in the future. The false beliefs that threaten the lives of virtually everyone on earth cannot continue unchallenged. The time has come to stop looking through the lens of ancient tribalism and seeing enemy tribes and instead start seeing a world composed of humans just like ourselves. Instead of seeing the world as “win-lose,” let us start searching for “win-win.” Regarding the Temple Mount, it would be nice if everyone would behave like atheists and think of it as a historical piece of real property. But if they cannot, then maybe for the advancement of world peace, it should be closed to everyone and left as a monument to madness.

End times myths are a bizarre element of religion. What is truly terrifying is picturing end times believers with their fingers on the buttons that activate nuclear weapons. The U.S., India, Pakistan and likely Israel possess nuclear weapons and Iran appears to be seeking them. Such weapons in the hands of people who truly believe in the end times could hasten their use and heretofore unknown levels of destruction. The most horrific aspect of ancient tribalism dragged into the modern world is that end times believers might use nuclear weapons to bring about what they hope is the rapture. To an outsider, end times myths sound like a joke as laughable as the flying spaghetti monster. Unfortunately to a number of religionists, including those in positions of power, the end times are a deadly serious reality. Atheists should challenge religious myths not only because they are lies, but because the lies could result in the destruction of the human race. Religious violence is not a joke. It affects our lives every day and with the wrong combination of belief, superlegal action and potent weapons, it could end life as we know it. The time for action is now.

Roadmap.

The second section of this book is dedicated to illustrating problems with religion, small and large. I started out with silly things, like the “miracle” of the image of Jesus on a tortilla. The following chapters looked at bigger problems, issues like religion’s unfairness to women and gays. Finally, I have shared my views on the dangers of superlegal actions, especially when combined with modern weapons and end times myths. From my perspective, these are the strongest arguments against religion and for atheist action.

I have a few more points to make about religion before returning my focus to atheism. The next chapter contains my thoughts about how deeply religionists believe, and finally I speculate why religion is still around after the rise of evolution science. That will complete my comments on religion and I will conclude the book with a few thoughts about the atheist movement.

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