

Islamic Eschatology

REL 375 (Fall 2013)
T & TH 3:05 – 4:20 (Chambers 3155)

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Office Hours: M, T & Th 9:45- 11:00. Schedule appointments via www.signupgenius.com

NOTE: If you are unable to meet during these times, schedule appointment through email.

Course Description

This course surveys death, afterlife, apocalypse, and messianic themes within the Islamic theology, history and culture, in other words, Islamic personal and cosmic eschatology. Personal eschatology will explore human death and the afterlife, the journey from the grave till the judgment, depictions of heaven and hell and purpose and meaning of life and death. Cosmic eschatology will detail Islamic beliefs regarding the apocalypse and end of times, messianic figure and collective judgment of humanity, and influence of these ideas in the realms of Muslim political, social and artistic spheres of life. Our examination will begin with the scriptural sources of Islamic eschatology, i.e., the Qur'an and the hadith. We will then turn to how Muslim scholarship has elaborated and expanded on these scriptural themes, thus various theological and exegetical works on the themes of death, apocalypse and the afterlife. Then we will explore the impact of these eschatological ideas on intellectual, cultural (including the artistic) and political currents in Islamic history, and in contemporary times. Finally, we will examine Islamic mystical reflections on the themes of death, apocalypse, and messianism, and briefly, how Islamic eschatology compares with the eschatological views of other religious traditions. Readings will include a combination of primary source material (in translation) and scholarly secondary writings.

Objectives of the Course

Since it is impossible for this course to be more than an *overview of Islamic eschatology*, it is expected that by the end of the class, the students will have the necessary language, categories and familiarity with Islamic eschatology to pursue and critically engage further the texts and practitioners of Islamic faith on this subject. For the instructor, the success or failure of the course depends on how far the class

as a group accomplishes these goals. Furthermore, implicit but the most significant goal of this class is to make learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved in the class. Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you (or/and the instructor) could contribute in achieving these goals, personally and as a class.

Format of the Class:

Format of the class and selection of readings are all carefully thought-out to meet the various goals listed above. The extent and length of lectures, in-class discussion, debates and group work have been framed in view of these goals, and therefore could alter as per the instructor's assessment of the emerging needs of the class. That is why the class format will be flexible (in no way arbitrary though!) and could vary from week to week. When in doubt, do ask the instructor regarding the format of the class in the upcoming week.

Preparing for the class is absolutely crucial to your success in this class, both for comprehending the subject and in earning a good grade. Preparing entails 1) reading *carefully* [not just skimming], 2) taking notes on the important points, 3) relating the readings to what has been studied in the class until that point, and 4) formulating your questions. *Lectures* themselves will mostly be geared towards better understanding of the assigned material by way of 1) providing a framework for the readings, 2) clarifying them, and 3) highlighting the key points. You are absolutely expected to have read and formulated your thoughts on the readings before the first class of the week (i.e., Tuesday).

Occasionally, you may be asked to 1) summarize or present formally selective portion of the readings, 2) make critical comments, 3) work in groups, 4) turn in questions from the readings, and 5) bring examples from the media (audio/video, blogs, magazines, and social media) for further discussion and clarification. All these activities and active participation in the in-class discussion will count towards your participation grade.

Your participation grade, therefore, will reflect the overall *quality* (and not simply quantity) of your in-class participation throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the class, asking engaging questions and active and thoughtful engagement in discussion. Do ask the instructor if you have any questions regarding how to make your participation more effective.

Course Requirements:

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to change/alter the syllabus as he deems fit.

First Review	25%
Second Review (Cumulative)	25%
Reflection Paper I (500-750 words, Nov 19 th) & RP II (750-900 words Nov 26 th)	20%
Final Reflection Paper (<i>Reign of Quantity</i> , 1000-1200 words, Dec 10 th)	15%
Attendance, Presentations & Participation [includes mandatory Nov 14 Public Lecture by <i>Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr</i>]	15%

ASSIGNMENTS (*General Guidelines on Audience and Citation*):

The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 375 class. Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides), and proper format of citations and bibliography are expected at all times. Only cite fully if it is a source other than the assigned material. You may use Chicago or MLA format.

Reflection Papers

1. *The audience for all your reflection papers is your REL 375 class.*
2. Your reflection paper will be used to enhance discussion during the seminar. You must also be prepared to read it aloud in the class.
3. The purpose of the response paper is to help you reflect and critically engage the materials you have learned in the class. *Remember you are writing for your fellow classmates* who have also read the same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing readings will be absolutely redundant.
4. Yes, you need to demonstrate that you have a good grasp of the material and have critically engaged the readings. Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
5. IMPORTANT: Akin to II (ii), a good response paper will speak from both *within* and *without* the text.
6. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?

- ii. Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With limited words, you must write after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
 - iii. Will it be found interesting and illuminating by the class as a whole? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say? Does the reflection offer something different/new or merely summarizes?
 - iv. Does it *show* (not merely state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
 - v. Does your paper successfully convince/persuade your classmates?
7. A response paper is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Response paper, like all writing, is meant to persuade the reader of your analysis. You do not need to exclude yourself. Yes, you can use first person pronoun I! Just do not pretend as if you have some objective view-from-the-top stance. In full awareness of the assumptions you bring to your analysis and try to persuade your reader of your analysis.
8. Unnecessary quotes from the readings are as unacceptable as a rambling current of thoughts unrelated to the subject at hand. Do mention the WORD COUNT.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is compulsory in this course (I will take regular attendance!) and more than **2 absences** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. It is student's responsibility to obtain notes and 'catch-up' in the case of absence. Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.

Late Paper(s) Policy

Each 24-hour delay in submission of the paper will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

Instructions for the Exam

1. GREEN BOOK: You will absolutely need Green Books for your exam. Loose paper without proper staple will result in loss of points.
2. HANDWRITING: Clear and legible. If I cannot read your handwriting, it will mean I won't understand what you are saying. I will have no option but to assume that you don't know the material.
3. READ AND ANSWER THE QUESTION CAREFULLY: It is here usually that well-prepared students lose points. Either they end up answering the wrong question (I.e., misreading the question) or not answering it FULLY. So answer the question asked, and answer all parts of it.
4. TIME MANAGEMENT: It is common sense and I have suggested a way to divide time for your answers. Do not write essays for short IDs. You will have to make choices. For IDs and short answers you will have to prioritize between more and less important, and more and less relevant things you choose to mention.
5. READ THE QUESTION AGAIN AND AGAIN WHILE ANSWERING IT: Related to 3, this works well for keeping one on track.

Required Readings (available at the Bookstore)

1. David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam), Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002
2. Jane Idelman Smith & Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, New York: Oxford University Press: 2002
3. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book XL of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, tr. T. J. Winter. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1989.
4. Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
5. Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, tr. M. B. DeBevoise Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
6. Jerry L. Walls (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

7. Guenon, Rene, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001.

Recommended Background Readings

- Gibb, Hamilton. *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* (? : Kessinger Publishing, 2010)
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. (New York: SUNY, 1992)
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003)

Writing and Speaking Centers

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

Disabilities

A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

COURSE OUTLINE

PART I: A BASIC SURVEY OF ISLAMIC ESCAHTOLOGY

WEEK 1 (Aug 27-29): Introduction to the Course

Note: Read an introductory book on Islam, especially if you lack background in Islam

Guest Lecture (Aug 29th): “Christian Eschatology” by Dr. John Bugbee

Introduction, syllabus review
Study of Islamic Eschatology: Resources and Challenges
Overview of Christian Eschatology (Guest Lecture)

Readings will be provided for Thursday

WEEK 2 (Sep 3-Sep 5): Islamic Eschatology: Historical Context, Origins & Development

Contextualizing Eschatology within the Islamic Tradition
Pre-Islamic Arabian Cultural Roots of Islamic Eschatology
Impact of Early Islamic History on the Development of Islamic Eschatology

The Garden and the Fire, pp.1-20
The Islamic Understanding of Death & Resurrection, pp.147-155
Apocalypse in Islam, pp. 3-29

WEEK 3 (Sep 10-12): Islamic Eschatology: Scriptural, Theological and Mythical Sources

Mythical Roots of Islamic Eschatology: God, Time & Human Life
Scriptural Roots of Islamic Eschatology & Key Scriptural Passages
Terminology of Islamic Eschatology

The Qur'an, Chapters 69-75 & 77-95 (ask me for translation) and *Hadith TBA*
The Islamic Understanding of Death & Resurrection, pp.1-30
Apocalypse in Islam, pp. 30-48

WEEK 4 (Sep 17-19): Personal Eschatology

Human Life, its Beginnings and the End
Meaning and Goal of Human Life
Death, Resurrection, Judgment, and the Afterlife

The Islamic Understanding of Death & Resurrection, pp.31-61
Al-Ghazali on the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife, pp.121-147 & pp.173-216

WEEK 5 (Sep 24-26):

FIRST REVIEW on SEPTEMBER 26th
There will be no class on September 24th

Watch the Documentary: *Inside Mecca* [on reserve in the library]

WEEK 6 (Oct 1-3): Visions of the Afterworld

The Afterlife
Heaven & Hell
Artistic Representations of the vision of the Afterworld

The Garden and the Fire, 21-39, 63-97 and 111-122
Al-Ghazali on the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife, pp. 217-251

WEEK 7 (Oct 8-10): Collective Eschatology & the Apocalypse

Eschaton & Final Judgment
Apocalypse & its Signs
Battle between Good and Evil

The Islamic Understanding of Death & Resurrection, pp. 63-97
Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, pp. 92-136

WEEK 8 (Thurs, Oct 17): Islamic Messianism

Mahdi and his helpers
Differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Messianism
Particularities of Shi'ite Eschatology

Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, pp.137-229

WEEK 9 (Oct 22-24): Messianic and Apocalyptic Ideas and Movements in History

Apocalypse in Islamic History
Major Muslim Messianic movements
Mahdists in history

Apocalypse in Islam, pp.49-103

SECOND REVIEW ON OCT 24th

PART II: INTEGRATION & SYNTHESIS

WEEK 10 (Oct 29-Oct 31): Political, Moral & Cultural Implications of Eschatology

Eschatological Ideas and Shaping of Ethical Attitudes
Eschatological Themes in Islamic Art – Gardens & Landscapes

The Garden and the Fire, 40-62

“The Islamic Garden: History, Symbolism and the Qur’an” *Voices of Islam* vol. 4 (Lib. ebook)
Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, pp.230-268

WEEK 11 (Nov 5-7): Intersections of Eschatology and Politics in Contemporary Islam

Political Influence and Implications of Islamic Eschatology
Jihad and Apocalypse in Contemporary Islamic Movements
Islamic Eschatology and the World Order

Apocalypse in Islam, pp.104-193

WEEK 12 (Nov 12-14): Contemporary Muslim Contestations of Islamic Eschatology

Typology of Interpretive Positions
Key Themes in Contestations
Historical Precedents of Contemporary Positions

The Islamic Understanding of Death & Resurrection, pp.99-146 & 183-192

Nov 14th: “Islam and the Modern World” (Public Lecture by *Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr*)

Nov 19: 1st Response Paper is Due Today

Which of the three contemporary Muslim eschatological viewpoints makes the most sense or is most appealing to you and why? Which one seems most absurd and why? Make sure that you demonstrate a thorough comprehension of the mystical traditions you discuss in your response paper. Reflect on your reactions vis-à-vis these traditions and underlying reasons for those.

FILM VIEWING

You will watch *Knowing* (2009) [on Reserve in the Library] this weekend (Nov 17 OR 18)

PART III: INTERPRETATION & SIGNIFICANCE

WEEK 13 (Nov 19-21): Beyond Islamic Eschatology (i.e., Comparative Eschatology)

GROUP PRESENTATIONS on *The Oxford Handbook*; Instructions will be provided

Islamic Eschatology compared to Other Religious Traditions (Eastern and Western)
Theological & Philosophical Issues in Eschatology
Eschatology & Politics
Eschatology & Culture
Eschatology & Ethics

WEEK 14 (Nov 26): Group Presentations Continued

2nd RESPONSE PAPER DUE ON NOV 26th

(Your Reflections on your Group Presentation- Response Papers will be shared)

Watch: *The Road to Armageddon: A Spiritual Documentary* (To be discussed during Week 15)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTq0xjJaWkw>

THANKSGIVING BREAK: Tue, Nov 26 (4:30 p.m.)-Mon, Dec. 2 (8:30 a.m.)

WEEK 15 (Dec 3-5): Spiritual & Esoteric Meaning, and Applications for Human Life

Spiritual Interpretation of Islamic Eschatology
The *Imaginal* World
Shared Spiritual Perspectives of Religious Traditions

GROUP PRESENTATIONS: Readings for this Week; Instructions will be provided

Al-Ghazali on the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife, pp.7-120; 252-261
William Chittick, *Imaginal World* [Death and Afterlife section], pp. 97-119 (Library e-book)
Ibn 'Arabi "The Mahdi and His Helpers" from *The Meccan Revelations* vol. 1 (Provided)
"Aghaz and Anjam" in *Shi'i Interpretations of Islam* (Library e-book)

WEEK 16 (Dec 10- OPTIONAL DAY): Bringing it All Home to Our World

Religious Eschatologies and the Contemporary World
Concluding the Conversation

The Reign of Quantity, "Introduction", 50-128, 172-176, 191-275

REFLECTION PAPER ON *THE REIGN OF QUANTITY* DUE ON DEC 10TH