

Muslim Apocalyptic and Syria

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It has been shown that Muslim apocalyptic teaching and preaching has generated awareness in the Muslim world of Christian Zionists and their need to counter the potential of this group. Christians who support Israel need to be aware of that thinking and what it might entail.

To illustrate the power of the apocalyptic mindset, consider the findings of Mariam Karouny, writing for Reuters March 31, 2014. Based on prophecies, some of which go back to the 7th Century, of huge armies in Syria, a great battle near Damascus, and some intervention coming from the north and west of the country, fighters have flocked to the area to be a part of the end-times scenario. That means that the conflict, already three years old, is more deeply rooted than a simple power struggle between Assad and his foes and, as a result, will be far harder to resolve. To illustrate this point, one Sunni Muslim is quoted that the *mujahideen* have not gathered to fight Assad; they have come to fight what Muhammad promised would be the “Grand Battle,” the word used there also means “Slaughter.”

Shi’a from Lebanon, Iraq, Iran have been attracted to the war because they hold that it opens the door of the return of Imam Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, disappeared from view in the 10th Century and who is to rematerialize during a time of battle to establish world-wide Islamic rule before the “Day of Final Judgment.” In their thinking, the beginning of the end was the 1979 Iranian revolution and the setting up of the Islamic Republic of Iran from which fighters would be provided to be led by the Mahdi to wage war in Syria after overrunning the Middle East. Iranian cleric and parliamentarian, Ruhollah Hosseinian said last year that based on the

narratives from the prophet and imams, the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran “is a prelude to the appearance of the Mahdi.”

Islamic apocalyptic and historical texts have become a powerful recruitment tool to draw fighters to the conflict. From religious ceremonies in Karbala for the Shi’a to videos and tapes by Sunni preachers in the Gulf and beyond, the outreach is staggering. So powerful is the appeal that even those who are privately skeptical are reluctant to say so publicly for fear of being categorized as doubters.

The apocalyptic picture is grim, indeed. Hundreds of thousands will be killed, the whole region from the Arabian Peninsula to Mesopotamia to Iran and finally to Jerusalem will be caught up in the struggle. Saudi Arabia will collapse, every country will face upheaval. The prophecies are said to predict a Turkish involvement in the struggle in Sham (Syria).

A twenty-seven year-old Shi’a from Lebanon goes regularly to Syria to combat the rebels, states that he is not fighting for Assad, but for the Mahdi, saying “Even if I am martyred now, when he appears I will be reborn to fight among his army. I will be his soldier.” Another Shi’a fighter said he knew he was living in the time the Mahdi’s return when the U.S. and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003. He affirms that he was waiting for the day when the fight would take place in Syria thanks Allah for choosing him to be “one of the Imam’s soldiers.” An older Shi’a from the south of Lebanon said: “Things are moving fast. I never thought I would be living in the days of the Imam. Now, with every passing day I am more and more convinced that it is only a matter of few years before he appears.”