

Book Review: The Last Trumpet

Reviewed by Abe Wiebe

The Last Trumpet: A Comparative Study in Christian-Islamic Eschatology, Samuel Shadid, PhD, Xulon Press, 2005, 305 pages, ISBN 1-597810-32-0.

Samuel Shadid, a Middle Easterner, is director of Islamic Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and executive director of Good News for the Crescent World. He has written over 45 books in English and Arabic.

As indicated by the subtitle of this book, *A Comparative Study in Christian-Islamic Eschatology*, Shadid focuses on end-time events — from both the Christian and the Islamic standpoint. Shadid's treatment of the subject is masterful. Most of us have a general knowledge of Qur'anic teaching as related to the grave, heaven, hell and the surrounding stages of future events, but this author takes the whole matter much further. Right from the start, he plunges into the eschatological perspectives emanating from differing world views and shows how these are related to their primary sources, the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Bible. Shadid's knowledge of the various Hadith collections is extensive. Thus, drawing on this wide array of material, topics like, 'The Hour', 'The Anti-Christ', 'The Mahdi', 'The Resurrection and the Day of Judgement' are examined carefully and in depth. What is helpful is his presentation of both the Sunni and Shia side of each question while then bringing in the biblical

position for comparison. The whole is done in an easy and readable style.

One is immediately struck by the wide dependence of both the Qur'an and the Hadith on Zoroastrian, Christian apocryphal and Jewish sources. Muhammad may have been illiterate but there is abundant proof that many of his comments and 'revelations' were influenced by what he heard from others such as Salman al-Farisi. In fact, his favourite wife, Aisha, complained about Muhammad's long evenings with Salman. Perhaps the question needs to be asked, 'Did the Prophet really say all these things or are they in fact inclusions and additions by subsequent Muslim authorities during Islam's early development?' For example, according to a hadith of Muhammad, the Mahdi, who is the expected deliverer and saviour of the Shi-ites, who will return from his occultation (concealment) at the end of time, received this name because he will be guided to a mountain in Syria from which he will recover the original Torah. He will then restore the Ark of the Covenant from Antioch (p. 117). When he comes, he will fill the earth with goodness, justice and equity. This personage of the Mahdi definitely has a messianic aura about him. Was this included to off-set the Christian hope of Christ's return to establish righteousness?

In the section about the resurrection (p. 170), we learn that according to Islamic teaching, two angels, Munkar and Nakir, interrogate the deceased

while still in the grave. Apparently no one is exempt from this trial of the grave, even the Prophet. Since the first question in the grave relates to whether or not the person believed in Muhammad as Allah's messenger, what kind of question could the angel ask him? Moreover, why, as he attested, was he afraid of this interrogation? The answer must be that no one is sure of God's decision regarding his eternal fate since God's actions are unpredictable.

With respect to heaven and hell and future rewards, Shadid shows again and again that much of Islamic teaching has links with Zoroastrian and Christian doctrine. So is Islam really a pure revelation uniquely taken from the 'Heavenly Tablet' or is it in fact a reflection of societal opinions commonly accessible in the Hejaz and Mesopotamia during the seventh and eighth centuries? Shadid's study clearly points in the latter direction.

In his conclusion, the author points out that Islam is a reward-based eschatology, where man's eternal destiny is determined by human effort. The individual never knows whether he has made the grade since saving grace is absent from Islam. This makes the

trial of the final judgement of momentous importance. Great hope is laid on good deeds and the hoped-for intercession of the Prophet despite numerous declarations that believers can be sure of Paradise. Actually, only martyrs for the cause are guaranteed a place in the 'Gardens of Delight'. Fear fills the Muslim's heart in anticipation of the ultimate trial. Just reading of the seven levels of hell can show us why; they defy imagination. If Muslims truly believe that such a destiny might befall them, why then do they not make every effort to avoid it? We might ask ourselves the same question: if we truly see hellfire as a possibility, as stated in Scripture, would it not follow that we would seriously take measures to avoid it — not merely by doing good deeds but by holding to our faith in Christ's finished work, not merely by doing good works?

Unfortunately, though well written, the book contains several small errors in spelling which could easily be corrected with careful editing. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it remains the most complete presentation of Islamic eschatology in current literature.