

ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPRESSION IN THE HOLY TEXT (A Preliminary Hermeneutical Exploration on Selected Eschatological Narratives in the Qur'an and the Bible)

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Abstract: One of the key concept that lies in almost every religions, as asserted in each holy texts, is eschatological doctrine. The apocalyptic belief in the last day has been existed throughout the history of civilizations with the various expression. Eschatological narrative in the holy texts ought to deemed as a historical text that revealed within its space and time. Accordingly, it is a historizing thing, which contains plenty of stories besides it's sacred messages. This sense of historical awareness is pointed out – for example – by the eschatological narratives in the Qur'an which strongly influenced by socio-religious circumstances and topographical conditions in Arabian Peninsula at the time of revelation, as the Bible that has cased up its eschatological narratives based on a certain historical event: the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by Roman soldiers. The central purpose of this paper is to explore the connection and influence of the certain historical moments on the style and construction of both, the Qur'an and the Bible eschatological narratives, through a simple hermeneutical analysis.

Abstrak: Salah satu konsep kunci yang melandasi hampir seluruh agama, sebagaimana tertera dalam kitab-kitab sucinya adalah persoalan eskatologis. Kepercayaan apokaliptik akan adanya hari akhir terdapat hampir di setiap sejarah peradaban dalam beberapa ekspresi yang berbeda. Narasi eskatologis dalam beberapa teks suci hendaknya tidak hanya dilihat sebagai teks suci yang turun di ruang yang kosong. Dalam hal ini, ia menyejarah dan memberikan suatu kisah lain di samping pesan sakralnya. Hal ini terlihat jelas bagaimana narasi eskatologis dalam Al-Qur'an sangat dipengaruhi oleh kondisi sosio-religius dan keadaan topografis semenanjung Arab ketika itu. Begitu juga dengan Bibel yang mengemas narasi eskatologisnya berdasarkan suatu even sejarah tertentu, dalam hal ini penghancuran Yerusalem oleh bangsa Romawi pada tahun 70 M. Tulisan ini mencoba menakar keterpengaruhan narasi eskatologis dalam

kedua kitab suci tersebut oleh beberapa entitas historis yang melingkupinya dengan menggunakan suatu analisis hermeneutis yang sederhana.

Key Words: Eschatology, Phenomenology, Hermeneutic, Al-Qur'an, Bible.

1. Introduction

The history of civilization has shown the similar preference to the apocalyptic doctrines about the last day. It shared by most of religious believe systems with the various expression, mostly related to messiah context. In Christianity, the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus appeared to be the answer of people's hope in the last day. In Buddhism, *Kali Yuga* doctrine becomes the final thing to believe in, as in Islamic teaching, the last blow of Isra'fil trumpet makes a mark on the last day on earth. This apocalyptic matter seems to be more mathematic¹ in Mayan and Aztec calendar that claim 2012 as the end of the world calendar.

The further implication, of that grand apocalyptic doctrine is the eschatological believe, on which one of the major religious doctrine based. The eschatological discourse, at a certain level, has produced the branch issues like soteriology, the doctrine of salvation and damnation. This doctrine of salvation, eventually, related to "the hope" for a savior and salvation. Paul O. Callaghan said that the core of Christian faith was based on "hope".² It's not a surprise that the second encyclical letter promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI was entitled *spe salvi facti sumus* (in hope we are

¹In last decades, a number of people try to "predict" the last day by mathematical calculation. Jehovah mapped out a "schedule of last day" in following 9 times (1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, 1984). Recently, the apocalyptic termination mapped out by Mann in 1998 until 6300 AD. See Stephen Brown and friends, "Apocaholics Anonymous," in Stephen Brown (ed.), *Marketing Apocalypse, Eschatology, Escapology and The Illusion of the End*, (London: Routledge, 1996), page 1

²See Paul O. Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, (Washington DC.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), page. vii

saved).

In the other hand, the eschatological doctrines cannot separate itself from the surrounding contexts of place and time. The various narrative style of religious teaching written in the holy books – although they have a substantial similarity – has shown that the construction of religious doctrines was strongly influenced by its historical matters. In this case, the eschatological narratives which has been transmitted for long time through the holy books, was a pure historical text; it was banded in the web of history and contained the historical messages besides its sacred one. Quite apart from its sacred structure, there was a hidden story within the eschatological narratives in the holy texts. It has the untold story of a local expression about the apocalyptic doctrine; not only vertical interpretation to be applied, but also the horizontal relation to come up with.

The central purpose of this paper is to show the connection and influence of the certain historical moments on the style and construction of the holy text narratives. Here I examine some eschatological narratives of the Qur'an and the Bible through a simple hermeneutical exploration. In this extent, the hermeneutic and phenomenology would go hand in hand with the eschatology.

2. Penetrating the Eschatology: A Hermeneutic Turn

The word “eschatology” originated from Greek *eschatos* ‘the last’ and *logos* ‘knowledge’, the word *eschaton* used in Greek to alluding an end. Based on etymological meaning, eschatology is the knowledge about the end of something. It was used officially since the middle 19th century. In terminological perspective, eschatology is branch of the theology that concerns to the issues of the last day and related themes such as death, afterlife, salvation, damnation, and many others.³

Giacco Biffi said that eschatology is the human problem

³www.oxforddictionaries.com, dan www.meriam-webster.com, accessed on 02 Februari 2015

without human solution.⁴ Since the eschatology turned its concern to the metaphysic dimension in presenting the future, it was regarded as one of the most exclusive corpus in religion studies. The one and only major standpoint of this sacred discourse is “the hope”. One of most important extent in eschatological discourse is the doctrine of soteriology⁵ as mentioned before. Every religion has each soteriological doctrines, it's ranging from several basic questions; from what, how, and to what is a person saved? ⁶ The salvation, commonly contrasted with its exact opposite; damnation. The idea of heaven and hell, which lies in every religion with all their various expression, is the core of soteriological discourses. At this case, the eschatological doctrines appeared to be the answer for the afterlife questions.

Since the eschatology is chatting up with something which is not happen yet, many scholars of the holy books draw a distinction between the interpretation of eschatological narratives and the others. In the positivistic point of view, eschatology regarded as the imaginary knowledge of the presence of the future. For that kind of reason, many scholars avoid to use the historical tools to be integrated within the eschatology. The case, of course, will be different with the social sciences on which the historical analysis works properly. This kind of opinion seems to adopted – for example – by Fazlur Rahman, a prominent Pakistani muslim thinker who refused to use his well-known “double movement hermeneutic” to interprets the eschatological verses of the Qur'an. For Rahman, all treatments which all show the evolution through the Qur'an, the procedure used for synthesizing themes

⁴Paul O. Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, ... page 3

⁵Soteriology originated from Greek *soteria* ‘salvation’ and *logos* ‘knowledge’. This word was officially used since mid-19th century. www.oxforddictionaries.com, accessed on 02 Februari 2015

⁶Jan G. Van der Watt, “Salvation in The Gospel According to John”, in Jan G. Van der Watt (ed.), *Salvation in The New Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), page 101

is logical rather than chronological.⁷ This issue has also become debatable among biblical scholars. Yet, the historical expectations of eschatological significance set forth by the Old Testament still under on-going discussion.⁸ However, since 20th century, scholars like Karl Barth, Johannes Weiss, Karl Rahner and Jurgen Moltman have all made the eschatology central to Christianity.⁹

The case will be quite different in phenomenology. As eschatology's concern is all about the end of thing, phenomenology tried very hard to deal with that thing itself. The traditional eschatology has a strong relation to the role of time; today and yesterday's goodness is shaped by and depend on "tomorrow's event". Heaven and hell is the major motivation for the people of faith in doing their goodness. In phenomenological perspective, the notion of eschatology will come into the notion of temporality.¹⁰ Although the *eschaton* is not happen yet, but it has actually exist today and yesterday as one of the historical entity throughout human history. To increase the significance of the study, eschatological discourse, in some extent, has openly to deal with phenomenology and hermeneutic discussions. Husserl's notion about *zeitbewusstsein* (the internal-time consciousness of a subject) deserve to be a major core of eschatological discourse.

We should mention hermeneutic here as the best partner for eschatological discussion. One of the key to "read" the nature of reality is the awareness of hermeneutical situation. The need to hermeneutic is to avoid the alienation. As Gadamer pointed out in existentialist accent, that the advent of hermeneutic was based on two kind of alienation; alienation of the aesthetic consciousness

⁷Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of The Qur'an*, (Biblioteca Islamica, 1980), page v-vii

⁸Kenneth Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, (Texas: Tyler, 1992), page 144

⁹Neal Deroo and John Manaossakis (ed.), *Eschatology and Phenomenology*, (Ashgate, 2009), page 1-2

¹⁰Neal Deroo and John Manaossakis (ed.), *Eschatology and Phenomenology*, ... page 1-2

and the alienation of the historical consciousness.¹¹

The historically effected consciousness theory (*wirkungsgechichtliches bewwutsein*), one of Gadamer's key concepts can be applied as preliminary notion of hermeneutical exploration on the new territorial of eschatology. It started with a very basic assumption about how knowledge and effect belong together.¹² It is primarily the consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. The very idea of situation is means that one is not standing outside it.¹³ Something is always already affected by history.

As the holy text throw itself into a constellation of reality made out of certain situations, the eschatological narratives have ultimately affected by those situations. For instance, the very basic of this situation can be simplified into the question of place and time; where and when were those texts appeared for the first time? In following section, the effect of a hermeneutical situation on a certain text will be described briefly.

3. Socio-Religious Circumstances, Topographical Conditions and Eschatological Narratives in The Qur'an

Two major Islamic messages revealed to prophet Muhammad in earliest period of Makkah are the oneness of God (*tauhi>d*) and the belief in the last day (*yaum al-a>khir*). The doctrine about the final things to come at the last day has been profoundly the central teaching in early period of Islam. The majority of Makkiyah verses is dominated by such theological themes, in which the Qur'an gives the accentuation to the Quraish people who doubted the truth about the resurrection of the dead, whereas they've been a rotten dead bones (*Ya> Si>>n: 78*), as an

¹¹Hans George Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge, (University of California Press, 2008), page 4

¹²Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Contium, 1989), page 336.

13 Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method, ...*, page 336

impact of “simple realism” *weltanschauung*.¹⁴ The lucky person is those who believe in God and the last day (al-Baqarah: 64). In this case, the eschatological doctrine has an important role in Islamic believe system, as well as tauhid (one-ness of God). Accordingly, al-Ghazali said that the major core of Islamic faith is believe in God and the last day.¹⁵

The standpoint for eschatological discussion in the Islamic believe system can primary be drawn from two major divisions of life; the present life (al-dunya) and the hereafter (al-akhirat). There is a direct relationship between them, as al-dunya and al-akhirat are linked by ethical responsibility.¹⁶ The life to come is shaped by and depend on present life deeds. Nevertheless, there is a demarcation line that makes both of two lives distinguish each other. The present life is temporary and nothing but a persiflage (Ali ‘Imran: 185), whereas the life to come is eternal the real one (al-An’am: 32). Accordingly, one of the major accentuation in Prophet Muhammad *da’wah* was the belief of resurrection day of the dead after shattered into rotten bones, to account for their deeds

14 Before the advent of Islam, the notion of afterlife was a nonsense for Arabian people. The impact of their business in a cruel dessert life was a “simple realism” *weltanschauung*. The very idea of this “simple realism” is there is no life but presented life, the life outside the present life is nonsense. At a certain further level, this kind of world view eventually caused a hedonistic life style. See Taufik Adnan Kamal, *Rekontruksi Sejarah Al-Qur’an*, edisi digital, (Jakarta: Yayasan Abad Demokrasi, 2011), page 18. This “simple realism” also alluded by some verses in the Qur’an such as *al-Jasas*: 24: *They say, ‘there is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us’....*

¹⁵By this account, al-Ghazali offers his straight critics to naturalist philosophers (al-tabi’iyyun), those who don’t believe in the last day, as “*zandaqah*”, (a label for those who place intellectual and philosophical knowledge above religious doctrines). See Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, (Kairo: Maktabah al-Anjilu, 1964), page 32

¹⁶See Jane I. Smith, “Eschatology”, in Janne Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of The Qur’an*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 3, page 44

in the court of God.

A. The Influence of Socio-Religious Circumstances

The socio-religious circumstances, in which Islamic days are just getting young, has also affected the Islamic eschatological teaching very much. The polemical interaction between Islam and the previous religions has eventually influenced the certain narratives in Islamic teaching, imperatively the eschatological doctrines. Some of Qur'anic verses have directly dealt with the previous religions¹⁷ when it's come to the soteriological doctrine. This polemical discussion asserted – for example – in *al-Baqarah*: 111-113, in which the Qur'an shows the soteriological debates between Jewish and Christian:

They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.' This is their own wishful thinking. (Prophet), say, Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth.

In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.

The Jews say, the Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on, and the Christians say, the Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on, ' though they both read the scripture, and Those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the day of resurrection concerning their differences.

These verses show how Islam “records” and reports its predecessors concerning the still-functioning salvation claims at

¹⁷There are several religious community that randomly mentioned in the Quranic verses; Bani>Isra>i/ Children of Israel and Ahl al-Kita>b/ People of the Book, both are used to include Jews & Christian, and later also used to Sabean and Zoroastrians (al-Baqarah: 83, 211, al-Maidah: 70, Ali 'Imran: 110, 113, etc.), Jews/Yahu>d (al-Baqarah: 113, 120, al-Maidah: 18, etc.) Christian/ Nas}ara> (al-Taubah: 30, Ali 'Imran: 67, etc.), al-S}a>bi'in/ Sabean (al-Baqarah: 62, al-Maidah: 69), Majusy/Zoroastrians (al-Hajj: 17), al-Musyriku>n/ the Idolaters (al-Baqarah: 135, al-Taubah: 28, etc.)

that time. As al-Tabari pointed out in *Ja'mi' al-Baya'n*, when the Jews and the Christians said their "wishful thinking" (*ama'ny*) about claiming the key of Paradise, according to God's command, prophet Muhammad asked them to make a fair deal between Muslim, Jews and Christians concerning this claim, in which then he said: "*ha'tu burhanakum* (produce your evidence)."¹⁸ The Qur'an goes on to say that the salvation claim is not merely a monopoly between the Jews and Christians. In this case, Islam as the last participant emerged to join these eschatological discussions.

It should be noted here, that this kind of eschatological narratives obviously influenced by the contact between prophet Muhammad and other previous religions at that time. The Qur'anic evidences point to the presence of Jewish and Christianity in 7th century Arabia. Prophet Muhammad was domestically associated with certain Jews¹⁹ and Christian²⁰ tribes since the early period of Makkah until Madinah period. Bany Qainuqa', Bany Nadir, and Bany Quraizah for instance, were the prominent Jewish tribes in

¹⁸Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Ja'mi' al-Baya'n fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, page 509-510

¹⁹Since the first century AD, the oasis areas such as Tayma, Fadak, Khaibar and Wadi al-Qura which lies near Madinah and northern Hijaz was dominated by Jewish communities. The advent of Jews in the Arabian milieu can be tracked back to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, by Roman soldiers under Titus emperor which perhaps has forced them to left Jerusalem and then stayed in Arabian milieu. At the time of Prophet, the Jews was not only labeled as the unbeliever, but also idolatrous (*musyrik*), since they were accused of believing Ezra (*'uzair*) as the son of God, a trade-mark for Arabian Jews, which not to be found in another Jewish teaching all over the world. See Taufik Adnan Kamal, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an*, page 24, Uri Rubin, "Jews and Judaism", in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of The Qur'an*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 4, page 21, Phillip K. Hitti, *History of The Arabs*, terj. R Cecep Lukman Yasin, (Jakarta: Serambi, 2002), page 135

²⁰The Christian presence in Arabian peninsula was less localized and cohesive than the Jewish. The advent of Christian in Arabian Peninsula was tracked back to 4th to 6th century, in which they made a major inroad to Arabia. Prior to the time of Prophet, there are two Christian sects; Nestorian and Monophysites that existed in South Arabia. See Clare Wilde, "Religious Pluralism", in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of The Qur'an*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 4, page 21

Madinah at Prophet time, who has all caused a continuous conflict between Aus and Khazraj, two major rivalry tribes who took over the most of political-sphere at Madinah,²¹ the place of the second emigration.

While the Qur'an asserts some condemnations and frequent political conflict between Islam and the Jews in Madinah period,²² the Qur'an assertion of Christian community is less politic and cohesive. The famous Muslim-Christian encounter is the contact between the prophet and two polities of Abyssinia (Monophysite Christians) and Najran (Nestorian),²³ in which he had a political and theological exchange with both. As pointed out by Ibn Ishaq, – for example – there was a theological discussion concerning Jesus between Muhajirin and the delegation of Negus (Najasyi, the ruler of Abyssinia).²⁴ The other encounter was related to the Christians of Najran which well-marked in the Qur'an by muba>halah (see Ali 'Imra>n: 61).²⁵

The wider historical frame that shaped above-quranic

²¹See S{afiyur Rahman al-Mubar Kafu>r, al-Rah}i>q al-Makhtu>m, (Da>r Ih}ya> al-Tura>s, 1976), page 163, Muhammad Ibn Isha>q, al-Si>rah al-Nabawiyyah, (Beirut: Da<r al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2004), page. 73

²²See Ali 'Imran: 12 (about Bani Qainuqa', first Jewish tribe defeated by muslim), al-Hasyr, al-Maidah: 11 (about Bani Nad}i>r), al-Ahza>b: 26 (about Bani Quraiz}ah).

²³The ruler of Abyssinia was the Christian Monophysite King, while the theological orientation of Najran Christians remains unclear; although the center of Monophysite, some Nestorian missionaries settled in Persian Gulf and South Arabia. See Clare Wilde, "Religious Pluralism", vol. 4, page 411

²⁴This event is related to Maryam: 16-21, which has traditionally considered as the "Muhajirin" response to the Negus delegation, in which the Negus granted them a refuge after hearing the answer of the Muhajirin. See Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, al-Si>rah al-Nabawiyyah, ..., page 149

²⁵This passage is concerning the Najran delegation sent to prophet Muhammad after the Islamic conquest of South Arabia. The mission was both political and theological. Besides to understand the muslim about the nature of Jesus, it also concerns to the urgency of Christians life under the new Muslim ruler. Ali 'Imran: 61 believed as the response to the Christians challenges, in which the parties of the dispute would present their case, pray, and invoke the curse of God upon the liars. This was called muba>halah or mutual adjuration, from which the delegation of Najran withdrew the contest. See Clare Wilde, "Religious Pluralism", vol. 4, page 411

passages was traceable to a geopolitical perspective. Arabian Peninsula, at the time of prophet, was also lies between two giant world empire; Byzantine in East Rome and Sasanid in Persia. This geopolitical awareness has also alluded by the Qur'an in al-Rum (Byzantine): 1-2, special verses in Quran which opens with the reference to the subsequent victory of Byzantine in 624 CE after defeated in the hands of Persian.

Another Qur'anic passages which has directly dealt with the soteriological discussion between all of Muslim, Jewish, and Christians is al-Nisa: 123-125:

It will not be according to your hopes or those of the people of the book: anyone who does wrong will be requited for it and will find no one to protect or help him against God.

Anyone, male or female, who does good deeds and is a believer; will enter paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone.

Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took Abraham as a friend.

As pointed out by al-Tabari, these verses was revealed in a special occasion, in which a Muslim, Jews and Christian were all exchanging the words and claiming the truth of each religions. In this soteriological "clash", God urges each one of them for not to be trapped in the "wishful thinking" of religiosity:

It was narrated that a group of Jews and Christian met each other. The Jews said to the Muslims: 'we are better than you, our religion has been existed before yours, our holy book has been existed before yours, and our prophet has been existed before yours. We do hold fast to Abraham religion and occasionally no one will enter paradise but the Jews'. The Christians then said the

same. The Muslims then replied: ‘our holy book was revealed after yours, our prophet was sent after yours, and indeed, you have been ordered to follow our religion and leave your religion, therefore we are better than all of you, we do hold fast to Abraham, Ismail and Ishaq religion, and occasionally will not enter paradise but those who follow our religion. God then refuted their words and said: ‘*It will not be according to your hopes or those of the people of the book*’.²⁶

The above-narration originates from al-Suddy source. This event has mentioned with various expressions from multiple sources in Tabari’s *tafsir*, such as from Qatadah, al-Dahhak, Ibn ‘Abbas, al-Suddy and Abu Salih. Additionally, several sources such as the narration from Ibn ‘Abbas explain the God’s confirmation – at least a tendencious – to the muslims in the next verses; *Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God*).²⁷ These Qur’anic verses seem to be the most comprehensive soteriological sections that covered Islam and both of its predecessors, in which the final of the discussion end with the God “confirmation”. However, al-Tabari has eventually selected and chose the other interpretation held by Mujahid, which offers the absence of Muslims in that discussion. He claimed that these verses is addressed to the Arabian idolaters (*musyriku al-‘arab*),²⁸ not to the Muslims. Accordingly, the word *amaniyyikum* (your hopes) means “idolaters hope” not “muslims hope”. Apart from this controversial claim, it’s proper to say that the socio-religious condition has strongly influenced the Islamic salvation doctrine.

B. The Influence of Topographical Conditions

The next main issue that should be mentioned here, as it has a relevance within eschatological discourse, is geographical

²⁶Ibn Jari>r al-T}abary, Ja>mi’ al-Baya>n fi Ta’wi>l al-Qur’a>n, , vol. 9, page. 229

²⁷Ibn Jari>r al-T}abary, Ja>mi’ al-Baya>n fi Ta’wi>l al-Qur’a>n, , vol. 9, page. 229-230

²⁸Ibn Jari>r al-T}abary, Ja>mi’ al-Baya>n fi Ta’wi>l al-Qur’a>n, , vol. 9, page. 234-235

and topographical conditions in 7th century Arabia. Generally, the geographical study of Arabia ranges around the study of the geographical situation of the Arabian Peninsula (*Jazirat al-'Arab*), especially the area which presently known as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It has a desert climate and three climatic zones.²⁹ Topographically, it is mainly a great plateau of ancient crystalline rock, largely covered with limestone and sandstone. Until now, one of the main issues that remain relevant in Saudi Arabia is the depletion of ground water resources.³⁰

Topographical conditions of Hijaz (Mecca-Medina) is described as a mountain barrier along the western side of the Arabian peninsula. Makkah, which is a barren place surrounded by steep and rocky mountain ranges, is situated in the Hijaz about 72 kilometers inland from the read sea at 21°27' north latitude and 39°49' east longitude.³¹ Furthermore, Madinah lies at 24°28' north latitude and 39°36' east longitude. It developed from an oasis surrounded by *harra* lands.³² The rainfall of Hijaz is irregular and very scanty.

This topographical conditions of Hijaz, which is considered as the Qur'an's land of origin, has an affect on eschatological narratives. In many places, the Qur'an describes heaven as dream-place for those who lived in a place with such kind of topographical conditions. Heaven is described as a garden (*Jannah*) with the flowing streams:

Give those who believe and do good the news that they will have Gardens graced with flowing streams. Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they

²⁹(1) desert almost everywhere, (2) steppe along the western highlands, forming a strip less than 100 miles (160 km) wide in the north but becoming almost 300 miles (480 km) wide at the latitude of Mecca, and (3) a small area of humid and mild temperature conditions, with long summers, in the highlands just north of Yemen. Source: www.britanica.com

³⁰See "Geography of Saudi Arabia" in www.wikipedia.org

³¹Angelika Neurwith, "Geography", in Janne Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of The Qur'an*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 2, page. 295

³²Angelika Neurwith, "Geography",, vol.2, page 298

will say, 'We have been given this before,' because they were provided with something like it. They will have pure spouses and there they will stay. (Al-Baqarah: 25)

But those who were mindful of their Lord will have Gardens graced with flowing streams where they will stay as a reward from God. What God has is best for those who are truly good. (Ali 'Imran: 198)

These passages reflect how the eschatological narrative in the Qur'an was packed in a construction that was very accommodating to the Arabian custom. The picture of heaven as a garden in which there is a flowing river, obviously has a reference to the topographical conditions above. For those who born in the desert, a garden with oasis, rivers, and fruits is a place of dream. Thus, it is clear how the Qur'an describes paradise with a dream place, which is completely absent in Arabia at the time.³³

4. The Destruction of Jerusalem and The Eschatological Narration in the Bible

As well as the Qur'an, one of the major eschatological theme in the Bible is the salvation messages, which has been the basic of early Christian identity. Eschatology is vitally important to a proper understanding of the biblical revelation.³⁴ Christianity was not revealed in an emptiness. Thus, the salvation message was contextualized in various languages that can be understood, even by ordinary people. In order to provide an understanding, many metaphorical statements – for example – was operated in the Bible. In this case, the eschatological narratives was also influenced by some specific historical convergences.

One of the most important events in the history of Christianity is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the

³³The prophet, however, has a different explanation of heaven as 'something that no eyes can see, no ears can hear and not reflected in mind'. (Mu'jam al-Tabrani no 6003). See Sulaiman bin Ahmad al-Tabrani, Mu'jam al-Kabi'r, (Mosul: Maktabah al-'Ulu>m wa al-H}ikam, 1983), vol. 6. Page 201

³⁴Kenneth Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*,, page 1

Roman army under the command of Roman general and the future emperor, Titus in the first Roman-Jewish war (66-73 AD). This event is recorded well in the book of Flavius Josephus (37-100 AD), *The War of the Jews*, as a major reference that witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem.³⁵

Due to closeness of timing (as it occurred a few years before the transmission of the synoptic Gospels), this event is vitally important for the teaching of Christianity. The Mark is believed as the oldest synoptic Gospel which already been written a few years before the event. Furthermore, although still debatable, there is a collective consciousness among the scholars, that the Gospel of Matthew – for example – was written only a few years after that event. Most scholars believe it was written between 80 to 90 AD.³⁶ It is not an exaggeration to say that the event, to some extent, has also influenced the formulation of the eschatological narrative in the Synoptic Gospels.

This influence can be seen in the several passages of the Bible which specifically describes about the “apocalyptic predictions” as the starting materials in the synoptic eschatological discussions. These conversation is asserted in Mark: 13, Matthew: 24, and Luke: 21. Mark: 13 is the beginning of synoptic eschatological discussion which is then followed by Matthew: 24 and Luke: 21 with a similar narratives. The following fragment of Mark: 13, will be a starting point for the next discussion:

³⁵Led by the future emperor Titus and Tiberius in second command, the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD was a part of the first Jewish-Roman war (66-73 AD). It was ended with the sacking the city and destruction of the famous second temple. This apparent act of sacrilege became controversial almost at once. Josephus describes the burning of the temple as the unauthorized act of an ordinary roman soldier. He said that Titus has previously ordered that the temple should not be damaged, but the building could no longer be saved. See Robert Goldenberg, “The Destruction of Jerusalem Temple”, in Steven T. Katz, *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), vol. 4, page 194

³⁶Dennis C. Dulling, “The Gospel of Matthew” in David E. Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), page 298

(13:14) But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains:

(13:15) And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter [therein,] to take any thing out of his house:

(13:16) And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.

(13:17) But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

In a quite different word, Matthew: 24:15 mentions “standing where it ought to” as “stand in the holy place”. It interprets the Markan words³⁷ as someone standing in “the holy place”. Most scholars think that it allude to the Roman general Titus who not only ravaged Jerusalem, but destroyed the temple. Titus subsequently became emperor (79 – 81 CE) and it is very likely that an allegorical comment in Matthew 22:7, a “king” / ”emperor” destroyed “their (the Israelites’) city”, refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.³⁸ Furthermore, Luke: 21 expresses the event with a more straightforward narrative related to the siege of Jerusalem:

(21:20) And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

(21:21) Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into.

³⁷The fact that no concrete circumstances surrounding the seizure of Jerusalem appear in Mark 13 (in contrast to Luke 21:20) might suggest that the Gospel of Mark had already been written before the destruction of the city. The years 68/69 CE seem the most plausible time of origin. See Jens Schroter, “The Gospel of Mark” in David E. Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), page 278

³⁸Dennis C. Dulling, “The Gospel of Matthew”,, page 298-299

(21:22) For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

(21:23) But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

(21:24) And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

These narratives reflect the fall of Jerusalem by the Roman army as described earlier. The segmentation continues into the core of eschatological doctrines; it is related to the coming of “the end of the day”, “the savior”, and “metaphor of heaven and hell”. Matthew: 24 narrative related to the apocalyptic doctrine about the last day:

(24:29) Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

(24:30) And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

(24:31) And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The narrative of Luke: 21 has an accentuation to the position of Jesus as the savior of mankind in the last day: ‘*when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near.*’ (Luke: 21:28). Chronologically, above-eschatological narratives begin with the story that identifies the siege of Israel (especially in the narrative of Luke: 21) and then

followed by a story about the last day and the coming of the savior (the second coming of Jesus). The following narrative, (Matthew: 22) which related to metaphor of heaven, is strongly revealed the influence the burning of the second temple in Jerusalem on the eschatological narratives in the Bible:

(22:2) The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

(22:3) And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

(22:4) Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and [my] fatlings [are] killed, and all things [are] ready: come unto the marriage.

(22:5) But they made light of [it,] and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: (22:6) And the remnant took his servants, and entreated [them] spitefully, and slew [them.]{22:7} But when the king heard [thereof,] he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Among these narratives, there is a special sentence that reflects the key event of Jerusalem's siege; "*burned their city*". It shows how the concept of heaven is expressed metaphorically in a phrase that represents the prevailing context at the time. In this case, the eschatological narratives was transmitted in accordance with the background of the siege of Jerusalem as one of the most phenomenal event that should be mentioned and will not be forgotten in the history of Christianity.

5. Conclusion

All of these elementary examples have all prove enough in showing the connection between the narratives of a sacred text and the surrounding context. Together with the rest of its divine message, the sacred texts also brings the worldly messages. The

whole sacred text does have their own vision containing the revolutionary part of human life in various aspect. In other words, every sacred text does provide a new structure. However, before that one, it must be recognized, that it is also structurized themselves into a network of reality in which it was located and situated. In this case, it is a historizing thing that provide the other stories besides its sacred messages. It is obvious how the eschatological narrative in the Bible is strongly influenced by a particular historical event; the destruction of Jerusalem. Likewise the Qur'an which provide the eschatological narratives based on the socio-religious and topographical conditions of Arabian Peninsula.

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