

The Shi'a Expectation of the End Times



Both the Iraqi and the Iranian national flags have the phrase "Allah Akbar" (God is Great)

Shi'a (Shi'ite) Muslims make up only about 10-15% of all Muslims worldwide. They separated themselves soon after Mohammed's death in 632 AD over the issue of succession. The majority, which came to be called "Sunni" Muslims, wanted the successor to be the most capable military leader from Mohammed's own tribe. The minority, later called the "Shi'a" Muslims, wanted it to be a close relative. However, at Mohammed's death there was no son who could be appointed as successor (his sons had died previously and his grandsons, Hassan and Hussein, were only children at that time).

The first three caliphs (successors) of Mohammed were Sunni caliphs; the fourth one was Ali, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law. Ali's reign was cut short by murder in 661 AD. The Shi'a hold that the rightful rulers of all Muslims were Ali and his eleven descendants through Mohammed's grandson, Hussein, who

died a martyr in Iraq in 680 AD. Many Shi'as believe that Hussein's line of succession continued until his descendant Mohammed al-Mahdi (the twelfth "rightly guided Imam") mysteriously disappeared in 874 AD at the age of five. After that the Shi'a hope for ruling the Umma (Muslim community) became eschatological, the hope that a Hidden Imam or Mahdi (one who guides) will eventually return.

This sinless leader, the Mahdi, will establish a just Islamic empire at the end of time, with the assistance of Jesus, who is also expected to return, according to most Muslims (including Sunnis). Both the Mahdi and Jesus will be opposed by the Masih ad-Dajjal, an evil, one eyed, anti-Christ figure, who will eventually be slain and the whole world will join in Islam. After the victory of the Mahdi there will be a general resurrection of the dead followed by the last judgment.

Muslims in general, but Shi'as concretely, have a strong expectation about the end times and afterlife. Contrary to tradition, many Iranian Shi'as believe that the Mahdi is presently living, though hidden, and has

even guided the Ayatollah Khomeini to get involved in the political struggle and to establish this just empire already by fighting against the enemies of Islam instead of passively waiting for the Mahdi's return. The current Iranian President seems to embrace that idea.

Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ *There are possibly 200,000 Shi'a mullahs (religious leaders) in Iran alone and many thousands more in Iraq. They have a significant role in their communities and in society as a whole. They are teaching their people to place their confidence in the future Mahdi and to practice Islam with zeal. Pray for these leaders to come to know the living Messiah, Jesus (Acts 6:7)*
- ▶ *The Messiah is the ultimate hope for a world of peace and justice. Indeed the Bible promises us that one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the water covers the sea (Isaiah 11:9 and Habakkuk 2:4) There will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Pray that the millions of Shi'a Iranians and Iraqis discover the living and reigning Messiah who is the true hope of the world.*

