

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines eschatology as "a branch of theology concerned with death, judgment, heaven, and hell."¹ It is a branch of theology that discusses topics such as death, the end times, heaven, and hell. It further defines eschatology as "a term of Greek derivation meaning literally 'discourse' about last things," typically referring to the Judeo-Christian doctrine of the coming of the kingdom of God and the transformation or transcendence of history.² Eschatology, originating from the Greek language, broadly encompasses the end of something (whether an object or life), particularly related to the Christian doctrine about the arrival of God's Kingdom and the transformation of existence (the afterlife).

¹ AS Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1980), 290.

² Lawrence T. Lorimer, *Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge*, vol. 7 (Danbury: Grolier incorporated, 1993), 100.

Eschatology is one of the central theological concepts in Islam, encompassing themes of the end times, resurrection, the Day of Judgment, paradise, and hell, all of which have a significant impact on the worldview and ethics of Muslims. In the Qur'an, eschatology is depicted through warnings about the Day of Resurrection, the revival after death, divine judgment, and the rewards or punishments of the hereafter, which form the ethical and faith-based foundation for Muslims.

This theme addresses not only the consequences of human deeds in the worldly life but also emphasizes divine justice as the spiritual and moral basis of existence after death. Traditional Muslim scholars have long interpreted these verses literally and normatively, holding that eschatology in the Qur'an is a divine revelation, unchanged and independent of cultural influences.

The Qur'an contains extensive information on the certainty of the Day of Judgment and the associated monumental events. The term "*Al-Yaum Al-Ākhir*" (the Last Day) appears 24 times in the Qur'an, in addition to other terms expressing similar meanings. Meanwhile, the term "*Ākhirah*" (the Hereafter) is repeated 115 times, along with other

synonymous terms. Among these many verses, the Qur'an emphasizes the inevitability of the Last Day and corrects misunderstandings of those who deny it.³

In the fields of Comparative Religion and the Study of Major World Religions, there exist foundational teachings about the afterlife as the conclusion of this transient worldly life. However, these teachings vary between religions, differing in concept, process, and the means by which one may reach the ultimate destination.⁴

Early scholars of tafsir, such as Ibn Katsir, interpreted eschatological verses literally, considering them as authentic and unaltered divine revelation. According to Ibn Katsir, the teachings on the afterlife in the Qur'an form a foundation that not only defines the Islamic creed but also clarifies the purpose of human life, which is to attain Allah's pleasure through righteous deeds and piety.⁵

In orientalist studies, some Western scholars interpret the concept of eschatology in the Qur'an through a historical-critical approach,

³ Norhidayat, *Eskatologi Dalam Perspektif Islam* (Banjarmasin: Artikel UIN Antasari, n.d.), 4.

⁴ Syahid Muammar Pulungan, "Eskatologi Dalam Al-Qur'an," n.d., 115.

⁵ Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Azim, Juz I* (Berlin: Dar al-Fikr, 2002), 100.

attempting to situate it within the socio-historical context of the Prophet Muhammad's time. One notable figure known for this approach is Richard Bell. In his book *The Qur'an: Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs*, Bell argues that the eschatological verses in the Qur'an reflect historical development alongside Muhammad's prophetic journey and may have been influenced by Jewish and Christian traditions present in the Arab society of that era.⁶

According to Bell, the verses regarding the Day of Judgment, resurrection, and final judgment were not arranged in a chronological or literal order but rather developed as a narrative shaped by the social and political needs of the time. Bell further suggests that some parts of the eschatological verses may have undergone rearrangement or revision to align with the evolving Muslim community.⁷

Bell's perspective stands in stark contrast to that of other Muslim scholars, who believe in the authenticity and integrity of the Qur'anic text as pure divine revelation. Ibn Katsir, in his influential commentary,

⁶ Richard Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 250.

⁷ Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 115.

strongly rejects the view that associates Qur'anic eschatology with external influences, affirming that the concept of the hereafter in the Qur'an is entirely independent and divine in nature (Ilahi).⁸ For him, questioning the arrangement of verses or viewing them as products of external influence diminishes the value of revelation and obscures the moral and spiritual purpose of the Qur'anic message.

The urgency of this research lies in its contribution to enriching the literature on the study of eschatology in Islam, particularly in exploring comparisons between Orientalist views and traditional Muslim interpretations. This study can thus serve as a reference for academics and students seeking a deeper understanding of end-time concepts in the Qur'an and how these are examined from various perspectives.

This research also offers a novel contribution in the form of criticism against the orientalist approach to understanding Islamic eschatology. By critically analyzing Bell's views and examining them from Ibn Katsir's perspective, this research enriches the literature on critiques of

⁸ Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Azim, Juz II* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2002), 150.

Orientalism, especially concerning the Orientalist approach to theological themes such as the afterlife in Islam.

The reason for selecting this title is due to the author's interest in studying Richard Bell's perspective on the concept of eschatology in Islam more deeply, as well as understanding how traditional Muslim scholars interpret and understand this eschatology.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the background previously described, it is necessary to delineate the scope of the issues for the research to be more focused and systematic in its discussion. The research questions formulated are as follows:

1. What methodological approach did Richard Bell use in interpreting eschatological verses?
2. What are Richard Bell's views on the concept of eschatology in the Qur'an?
3. How do Muslim scholars and scholars respond to the thinking of richard bell?

C. Objectives of Research

To clarify and specify the scope of this study, it is important to outline the research objectives. The objectives of this research are:

1. To understand the methodological approach Bell used in interpreting eschatological verses.
2. To analyze Richard Bell's views on eschatology in the Qur'an.
3. knowing the responses of Muslim scholars and scholars to the thinking of Richard Bell

D. Benefits of Research

The benefits or significance of this research are as follows:

1. Theoretical Benefits

- a. This research enriches academic studies on eschatology in Islam, especially through a comparative approach between classical tafsir and orientalist criticism.
- b. This research makes an important contribution to Qur'anic studies literature, particularly in understanding end-time concepts, thus

serving as a reference for other researchers interested in similar studies.

2. Practical Benefits

- a. This research can serve as a guide for Muslims who seek a deeper understanding of eschatological concepts from both the perspective of classical tafsir and modern critical approaches, allowing them to maintain a more comprehensive and balanced understanding in facing contemporary intellectual challenges.
- b. This research is also beneficial for educators and students in the field of Islamic studies, enabling them to recognize and analyze different approaches in Qur'anic studies, and appreciate the importance of criticism and traditional interpretation in preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings.

E. Literature Review

Several previous works explore the theme of eschatology from various research perspectives. The author will focus on comparing the theme of eschatology in the Qur'an with other works discussing the same theme, as follows:

1. A thesis written by Raga Maulana Primadi in the Master's program in Qur'anic Studies and Interpretation at the Graduate School of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung in 2023, an titled "The Concept of Eschatology in the Qur'an (A Comparative Study of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman's Interpretations)." In this work, Primadi examines Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Fazlur Rahman's interpretations of the concept of eschatology in the Qur'an. This study also discusses eschatology in the Qur'an; however, the difference between this study and the author's work is that the author focuses on eschatology in the Qur'an using the analytical perspectives of Richard Bell and Ibn Katsir.⁹
2. A thesis written by Tia Nurfitriani in the Faculty of Ushuluddin at the State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung in 2021, an titled "The Interpretation of Eschatological Verses According to Tafsir Al-Bayan Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim by Aisyah Abdurrahman Bint Syathi: A Thematic Exegesis Study on Juz 30." In this thesis, Nurfitriani discusses Bint Syathi's interpretation of eschatological verses.

⁹ Raga Maulana Primadi, *Konsep Eskatologi Dalam Al-Qur'an (Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali Dan Fazlur Rahman)* (Tulungagung: uin sayyid ali rahmatullah, 2023), 13.

Although this study also addresses eschatology in the Qur'an, it differs from the author's work, as the author examines eschatology in the Qur'an according to Ibn Katsir.¹⁰

3. A journal article written by Ridotul Inayah from UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, published in Jurnal Al-Fath in 2022, an titled "Islamic Eschatology in the Qur'an: A Study of I'jāz Balāgī in Eschatological Verses." Inayah's article explains the i'jāz al-balāgī (rhetorical inimitability) of eschatological verses according to various exegetes. While this study also explores eschatology in the Qur'an, the difference lies in the author's focus on eschatology in the Qur'an from the perspective of the Western orientalist Richard Bell.¹¹
4. A thesis written by Mohamad Irfan from the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Qur'anic Studies, and Interpretation at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung in 2023, an titled "Islamic Eschatology in the Perspective of Tafsir Al-Mishbah." This thesis examines the concept of Islamic

¹⁰ Tia Nurfitriani, *Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Eskatologi Menurut Tafsir Al-Bayan Li Al-Quran Al-Karim Karya Aisyah Abdurrahman Bint Syathi: Kajian Tafsir Maudhu'i Juz 30* (Bandung: universitas islam negeri sunan gunung djati, 2021), 8.

¹¹ Ridotul Inayah, *Eskatologi Islam Dalam Al-Qur'an Studi I'jāz Balāgī Atas Ayat-Ayat Eskatologi* (Banten: UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, 2022), 2.

eschatology in the Qur'an according to Quraish Shihab as presented in Tafsir Al-Mishbah. This study similarly discusses eschatology in the Qur'an, yet it differs from the author's research in that the author examines eschatology in the Qur'an from the perspective of Ibn Katsir.¹²

5. A thesis by Hidhayatul Hilmiah in the Islamic Education Program, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang in 2021, an titled "The Doctrine of Eschatology in the Qur'an: Surah Yasin, Al-Waqi'ah, and Al-Mulk from the Perspectives of Tafsir Al-Mishbah and Tafsir Al-Azhar." In her thesis, Hilmiah explores eschatology in the Qur'an according to Quraish Shihab in Tafsir Al-Mishbah, specifically regarding Surahs Yasin, Al-Waqi'ah, and Al-Mulk. Although this study also discusses eschatology in the Qur'an, it differs from the author's research as the author's study is not

¹² Mohamad Irfan, *Eskatologi Islam Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (Tulungagung: uin sayyid ali rahmatullah, 2023), 13.

limited to these three surahs and also includes the perspective of the Western scholar Richard Bell.¹³

F. Theoretical Framework

It is known that the purpose of this research is to understand and explain the methodological approach Richard Bell used in interpreting eschatological verses, as well as to analyze Bell's views on eschatology in the Qur'an. Before a researcher conducts a more in-depth study, it is essential to understand the theoretical framework and key concepts that will serve as the foundation of the research.

The theoretical framework provides the researcher with a foundational structure, ensuring the study is conducted systematically and accurately. One of the primary aspects in research is that the researcher must understand the meanings of the dominant terms in the study, both in terms of language and terminology.¹⁴

¹³ Hidayatul Hilmiah, *Doktrin Eskatologi Dalam Al-Qur'an Surah Yasin, Al-Waqiah, Al-Mulk Perspektif Tafsir Almisbah Dan Al-Azhar* (Malang: universitas islam negeri maulana malik ibrahim, n.d.), 19.

¹⁴ Khalid bin Usman Al-Sabt, *Qawaidu Tafsir Jam'an Wa Dirosatan* (Madinah: Daar Ibn Affan, 1996), 6.

In this research, the author refers to Richard Bell's views and interpretations and thus will conduct a critical analysis based on Richard Bell's theory of chronology. Bell divided the text of the Qur'an, fragmenting it in a way that each surah does not remain a single, cohesive unit. A single surah, according to Bell, may contain a portion that is Madaniyyah, a part that is Makkiyyah, and other sections that he believed were edited or revised by the Prophet himself.¹⁵

Bell argued that the social-political conditions of the early Muslim community influenced the structure and emphasis of certain themes within the Qur'an. He believed that as the Muslim community developed, there was a growing need to establish laws and build a society based on Islamic values. Therefore, Bell assessed that some surahs underwent content adaptation to meet the evolving needs of the Muslim community at that time.¹⁶

In addition, the author will employ the Tahlili method, a relevant process for discussion that explains the knowledge within. The Tahlili

¹⁵ Al Makin, *Antara Barat Dan Timur: Batasan, Dominasi, Relasi, Dan Globalisasi* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2015), 71.

¹⁶ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington: DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 54–57.

analytical method involves interpreting Qur'anic verses by elaborating on all aspects contained within these verses and explaining their meanings according to the expertise and tendencies of the exegete interpreting them.¹⁷

G. Research Methods

1. Type of Research

This research will be conducted using the Library Research method,¹⁸ which involves collecting data, manuscripts, books, journals, readings, agendas, minutes, and relevant software related to the topic addressed by the researcher.¹⁹ Through this method, the researcher will gather data based on topics or main discussions concerning Richard Bell.

2. Data Sources

As this research will be conducted as library research, or through literature sources, the data utilized in this study are as follows:

¹⁷ Nasrudin Baidan, *Metodologi Khusus Penelitian Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016), 32.

¹⁸ Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian, Suatu Pendekatan Praktek* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1991), 11.

¹⁹ Baidan, *Metodologi Khusus Penelitian Tafsir*, 28.

a. Primary Sources

The primary sources used in this research are:

1. Introduction to the Qur'an, by Richard Bell.
2. The Qur'an: Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs, by Richard Bell.
3. The Origin of Islam in it's Christian Environment.

b. Secondary Sources

The secondary data in this study serve as supporting information to reinforce the main data. Since this is a library research project, secondary data will be sourced from books or journals related to this research, particularly those discussing Richard Bell's views on eschatology in the Qur'an.

c. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is conducted not only after data collection but also begins during the data-gathering phase. The researcher uses a qualitative analysis strategy, which starts from the data and leads

to general conclusions.²⁰ Based on this data analysis strategy, inductive reasoning is used to draw general conclusions.

In this study, the researcher will use the critical analysis method developed by Richard Bell to examine Surah At-Takwir (1-14) and Al-Infithar (1-8). This method focuses on structural, linguistic analysis, as well as the possibility of interpolation or rearrangement in the Qur'anic text. With this approach, the research will explore the stylistic aspects, chronology of revelation, and historical context of the two suras.

The researcher will examine how Bell identifies patterns in revelation and examine whether there are indications of changes or insertions in the verses. The main focus of this research is to understand how the eschatological message in Surah At-Takwir and Al-Infithar is conveyed and how Bell's approach can provide a new perspective in the study of Qur'anic interpretation.

The researcher will analyze whether Bell considers the images of the apocalypse in these suras as part of the influence of

²⁰ Moh. Nazir, *Metode Penelitian* (Bogor: Ghalia Indonesia, 2014), 81.

pre-Islamic Arab culture and beliefs, or as a form of revelation that underwent editorial changes. In addition, the research will compare Bell's understanding with classical Islamic exegesis, in order to see the different approaches in understanding the concepts of the destruction of the world and the afterlife in these two suras. Thus, this study will explore the extent to which Bell's method can provide new insights in the study of Qur'anic eschatology and test the validity of his assumptions in academic studies.

H. Systematic of writing

To facilitate discussion, data analysis, conclusion drawing, and achieving the desired results, the researcher has organized a systematic structure consisting of several chapters and subchapters across four chapters:

Chapter 1: The first chapter includes the research background, which serves as a foundation for the topic being discussed. This chapter explains the issues related to the theme, presents the problem formulation, the research objectives, and the significance or benefits of the research.

Additionally, it includes previous studies, identifying similar research conducted by others, and highlighting the differences or innovations of this research compared to earlier studies. This chapter also covers the theoretical framework, research methodology, data sources, and data analysis.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides a brief biography of Richard Bell, including his life journey and works. It discusses his methodological approach, which includes historical criticism and his theory on the chronology of the Qur'an. This chapter also covers the definition of eschatology and how the concept of eschatology is presented in the Qur'an.

Chapter 3: This chapter contains an analysis of Richard Bell's and muslim scholar on eschatology in the Qur'an. Subtopics include Richard Bell's views on eschatology and muslim scholar interpretation of eschatological verses in the Qur'an. differences in eschatology in the mecca and medina periods according to bell The final subchapter provides a critical analysis of Richard Bell's perspective on the concept of eschatology in the Qur'an.

Chapter 4: This chapter, which is closing, contains a brief description of the conclusions of the research and the closing of the report which contains suggestions and recommendations. It ends with a bibliography that includes all the references used in the study.

