

From Thoughts About God

... To The Afterlife

(part 1 of 8)

... In ... Judaism ...
Christianity ... Islam



Schedule

From Thoughts About God ... To The Afterlife

23 Sept ... Introduction/ God

30 Sept, 7 Oct ... God

14, 21, 28 Oct, 4 Nov ... The Afterlife

11 Nov ... Summary

Introduction

From God ... To The Afterlife

Concepts of God ... attributes and characteristics ... are important in the development of thoughts on the afterlife in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The understanding of Divine justice and mercy ... compassion and punishment ... and how God balances and prioritizes these are instrumental in afterlife beliefs.

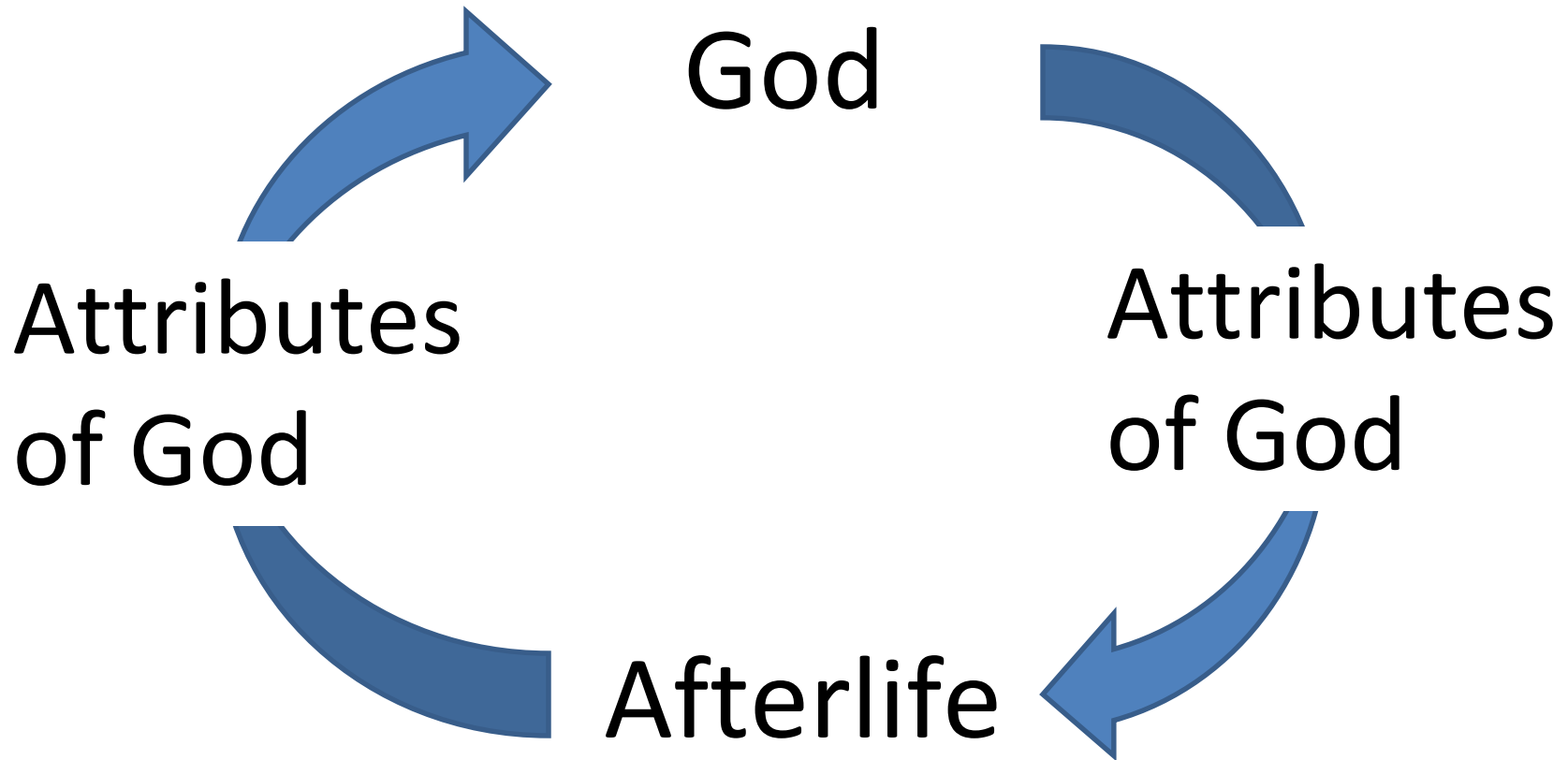
From God ... To The Afterlife

We will explore the **development** of concepts of God in Judaism ... Christianity ... Islam ... to better understand life-after-death reward and punishment in each of these belief systems.

Issues:

- Are our beliefs about the afterlife compatible with our understanding of God?
- In Judaism ... Christianity ... Islam ... developed beliefs established vastly different criteria for “eternal” reward or punishment. Can the God who “revealed” these criteria (in scripture) possibly be the “same God”?

From God ... To The Afterlife ...



Background

Development of Thought

There is a distinct [chronology to the development](#) of thought in Judaism ... Christianity ... and Islam.

Judaism emerges from the “Sinai event” in the second millennium BCE and progresses through numerous stages before Christianity becomes a distinct belief structure ... and organizational structure ... late 1st century CE ... 2nd century CE. Islam formally emerges on the Arabian peninsula with the Prophet Muhammad (570 - 632 CE).

- There are 1300+ years between the Sinai event and the emergence of Christianity.
- There are ~600 years from the emergence of Christianity to the emergence of Islam.

Development of Thought

The point of considering chronology and **development** is that ...

- Judaism came first ... and had centuries of development before Christianity. Christianity *emerged* from Judaism ... Late Second Temple Judaism ... and openly claimed the “God of Abraham ... Isaac ... and Jacob ... the God of Israel” ... and the Hebrew scriptures. Christianity began as a sect *within* Judaism.

- Islam emerged on the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century where there was both a Jewish and Christian influence. The Quran reveals a knowledge of both Hebrew scripture ... and Christian beliefs. Muhammad lived among Jews ... and probably had Christians in his extended family.

Development of Thought

Christianity accepts the Hebrew scriptures ... but expands upon it ... physically and conceptually ... and reinterprets Jewish understanding.

Islam ... in the Quran ... presents views of Judaism and Christianity ... and again expands thought ... based on new prophecy.

- There is an anti-Jewish polemic in some Christian writings to include the “New Testament.”
- There is an anti-Jewish ... and anti-Christian polemic ... in portions of the Quran.

A competition of thought ...

Development of Thought - Example

- In Judaism ... The Torah provides no formal teaching concerning an afterlife ... life after death matters are not dealt with in the Hebrew scriptures (TaNaKh).
- In Christianity ... there is the promise of “eternal life” ... allusions to an “immortal soul” ... and belief in a resurrection of the body.
- In Islam ... there is significant detail on a final judgment ... and Divine rewards and punishments.

This development can be traced clearly in Judaism where the finalization of the Babylonian Talmud (late 6th century CE) includes teachings on life after death ... with ... as an example ... the name given to the place of punishment after death in the Rabbinic literature ... *Gehinnom*.

In Christianity ... a word often mistranslated as “hell” is ... *Gehenna*.

In Islam ... *Jahannam*

Gehenna

Gehenna ... is the Greek term for the Hebrew ... *Gai-Ben-Hinnom* ... meaning **Valley of the Son of Himmon** ... an actual place outside the gates of Jerusalem.

After the Babylonian exile (6th cent BCE) ... A garbage dump in a deep narrow valley outside the wall of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning to consume the refuse. It is also the location where bodies of executed criminals, or individuals denied a proper burial, and animals would be dumped. Sulfur (brimstone) was added to keep the fires burning.

- In the Greek Hebrew Scriptures (Septuagint) the word is not used except to describe the actual place outside of Jerusalem.

- A place ... *Tophet* (fire stove) where children were sacrificed to Baal and Molech.

- 2 Chronicles 28:3 & 33:6 ... kings Ahaz and Manasseh participate in child sacrifice.

A place of abomination

Development of Thought

- There have been many post-Sinai “Judaisms.”
 - Pre-Temple Judaism ... First Temple Judaism ... Inter-Temple Judaism ... Second Temple Judaism ... Pharisaic Judaism ... Rabbinic Judaism.
 - Today ... think Orthodox ... Conservative ... Reform ... Reconstructionist ...
- In Christianity there are more denominations and sects than anyone can agree upon.
 - (example ... The Handbook of Denominations numbers 27 varieties of Baptists in the United States alone ... and 90+ worldwide according to the UN)
- Islam also has branches ...
 - Sunni ... Shia ... Sufi ... and numerous smaller sects ...
 - Differences ... perceived or real ... cause atrocities to be committed on a daily basis.

Supersessionism & Syncretism

Supersessionism ... fulfillment theology ... and replacement theology.

- An understanding that one belief structure replaces another by fulfillment or completion.

Syncretism ...

- The combination of different forms of belief or practice ... the fusion of two or more originally different forms.

Supersessionism & Syncretism

Because Judaism is chronologically the earliest of the three faiths reviewed ... it cannot logically claim to supersede either Christianity ... or Islam.

Some Christians interpret their own scriptures as claiming that Christianity does supersede ... by fulfillment ... Judaism (of course this means the Judaism that existed at the time of the emergence of Christianity).

Because of this ... Christianity is syncretic (combining and melding various thought) ... borrowing heavily from 1st century Jewish beliefs ... and reinterpreting ... or redefining ... beliefs and practices. Christianity is also highly syncretic with Greek philosophy.

Islam ... interestingly ... although the latest of the three faiths reviewed ... through the Quran ... claims to be the *earliest* ... of the three ... the original faith. This does not fit the definition of supersessionism ... but a return to a pristine ... early faith. In reality, however there is syncretism ... with Judaism ... Christianity ... and pre-Islamic Arab polytheism.

Competition in Thought

In [post-scriptural](#) thought and writings ... all three faiths comment on ... and in a sense either critique the thought of the other faiths ... or adopt some of their views.

Examples:

- In early Hebrew thought and scripture ... there is no concept of reward and punishment in an afterlife. There is only the “abode of the dead” ... *sheol*. By the time of the completion of the Babylonian Talmud (late 6th century CE) there is extensive material on the afterlife ... oftentimes using terminology and concepts similar to that used in Christianity.
- Certain developments in Christianity have a clear supersessionist focus ... some using Hebrew scripture as proof text.
- The Quran directly critiques both Judaism and Christianity ... and argues for the originality and superiority of Islam.