

The Children of Abraham

The End of Days

Sunday, April 22, 2007
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.
Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

Primary References

- **Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam**, Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton, William Graham. Brill Academic Publishers, 2002
- **Christian Theology. An Introduction. Third Edition**. Alister E. McGrath, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001
- **Introduction to Theology. Third Edition**. Owen C. Thomas, Ellen K. Wondra. Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, 2002
- **The Faith of a Physicist**. John Polkinghorne. Fortress Press. Minneapolis. 1994.

O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered: Make us, we pray, deeply aware of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let your Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days; that, when we shall have served you in our generation, we may be gathered to our ancestors, having the testimony of a good conscience, in the communion of the Catholic Church, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a religious and holy hope, in favor with you, our God, and in perfect charity with the world. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The End of Days

Introduction

The End of Days

Introduction

- Judaism, Christianity, Islam concur:
 - history is linear, unidirectional, has a purpose and ultimate goal
 - each human being is responsible for their deeds in this life and answerable for them to the One God
 - each human being's deeds in this life effects their status in the world to come
- They differ on the details of:
 - the stories of the end times
 - the resurrection of the dead
 - the judgment
 - eternal life

Judaism

The End of Days

Judaism

The Messiah

- *Mashiah* (= **Messiah**): the “anointed one”
 - Enthronement of the king of ancient Judah involved anointing the head with oil
 - Calling the king of Judah *Mashiah* (**Messiah**) like calling the king of England the “crowned head”
 - The dynasty of David, son of Jesse, ended in the 6th century B.C. when the Persians dethroned King Zerubbabel
 - Under the foreign rule of the pagan empires of Persians, Greeks, and Rome, the hope grew among the Jews for a **Messiah** to return to throne of Israel

Judaism

The Messiah

- God is the Master of history, and eventually will lead the world to redemption
- A day would come – the day of the **Messiah** – when:
 - Pagan empires would be overthrown and the “Kingdom of God” established
 - Peace and perfect justice would reign through the world
 - The “shoot of Jesse” (Isaiah 11) would rule in righteous according to Torah
 - The faithful would be able to enjoy the promised land and respond to the commandments (*Mitzvot*) without obstacles
 - The lion and the lamb would dwell together

Judaism

The Messiah

- (Maimonides Mishneh Torah XI, XII): **The world will not change its accustomed order, but Israel will dwell secure, and humanity will find that true faith which will prevent them from making war and carrying destruction. Israel will not become exalted over humanity, or wield power, but will be undisturbed to follow Torah, study it, perform its *Mitzvot*. No longer will there be war in the world; all humanity will enjoy peace and prosperity; and all will search for that wisdom which God alone can give**

Judaism

The Messiah

- Book of Malachi: **Elijah** (who had never died, but transported bodily in heaven) would arrive as a messianic herald “before the awesome, fearful day of God” to prepare the way
 - Rabbinic folklore: **Elijah** will answer all the difficult questions of law, so the law will be complete for the Messiah
- Book of Daniel: Cataclysmic Events and persecutions, particularly for the Jews (“birthpangs of the Messiah”) would precede the Messiah’s arrival

Judaism

The Messiah

- Rabbinic folklore of the birthpangs of the Messiah:
 - The forces of evil will gather into a great army: army of Gog and Magog
 - The few forces of good would be led by **Messiah ben Joseph** (a Messiah descended from Joseph, son of Jacob)
 - The two armies will fight six indecisive battles. In the 7th battle – Armageddon – **Messiah ben Joseph** will be killed
 - God will then send **Messiah ben David** who will defeat the army of Gog and Magog and bring about the Messianic age

Judaism

The Messiah

- When will the Messiah come?
- The Pharisees and their successors (the Rabbis) advised patient waiting for a better world
- God would send the Messiah in God's good time
- We should do nothing to try to hasten the arrival of the Messiah. Our primary task is to live righteously according to Torah
 - **“If you are planting a tree and you hear that the Messiah has come, first finish planting the tree, then go to greet him.”** (Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai)

Judaism

The Messiah

- The Messiah will come when either:
 - The world is so hopelessly corrupt that only a Messiah sent from God can save it
 - When Israel has attained sanctification through complete acceptance of Torah
- Babylonian Talmud Taanit 1:1: **If Israel repents for one day, forthwith the son of David will come... If Israel would keep a single Sabbath in the proper way, forthwith the son of David will come**

Judaism

The Messiah

- Orthodox Jews believe the **Messiah** will be a real person
- Reform Jews believe a **Messianic Age** will come rather than a personal Messiah:
 - Hermann Cohen: “**The future, which the prophets have painted in the symbol of the Messiah, is the future of world history. It is the goal, it is the meaning of history. It is humanity itself which has to bring about this age of the Messiah. The realization of morality on earth, its tasks and its eternal goal, this, and nothing else is the meaning of the Messiah for us.**”
 - In other words: for Reformed Jews, **Messianism** is the human project for the improvement of the human society

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

- Daniel 12:2 (JPS Tanakh): “**Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence**”
- Second Maccabees (written in the first century BC) helped spread the doctrine of the **Resurrection of the Body**

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

- By the first century AD, it was accepted by most Jews (except the **Sadducees**)
- The **Pharisees** so firmly believed in the doctrine that they interpreted the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1) as referring to both the rescue from Egypt and the future Resurrection

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

- Rabbinic folklore and midrash:
 - after the **Messiah ben David** has come and defeated the forces of evil (army of Gog and Magog), all those who have ever lived will be resurrected in the **Valley of Jehosaphat** (east of the Temple Mount)
 - Last Judgment will follow, **Messiah ben David** presiding
 - Those judged good climb to the Temple Mount to build the Third Temple; those judged evil sent to *Gehinnom* (“the Valley of Hinnom”)
 - Feast of the Righteous follows, prepared by God from the primeval monster Leviathan
 - Righteous receive their reward in paradise, *Gan Eden* (Garden of Eden)

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

■ *Gehinnom*

- sometimes depicted as hell
 - usually a purgatory where sinners are punished for less than 12 months (with rest every Sabbath)
- **Mishnah Ediyot 2:10: The punishment of the wicked in *Gehinnom* lasts for twelve months, for it has been written: ‘it will be from month to [the same] month [of the following year] (Isaiah 66:23)**

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

- Justification for the Resurrection of the Dead:

Jacob Neusner, in *Three Faiths, One God*: **Within the framework of a theology of a just and merciful God, man must survive the grave, or justice cannot be done. This world on its own hardly serves, for the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. ... the righteous, who will stand in judgment and enter the world to come, must by definition encompass in their number not only those alive at the very final moment of humanity's life beyond Eden, but also all those who have ever lived.**

Judaism

Resurrection from the Dead

- Modern Judaism generally rejects idea of eternal damnation (despite Daniel 12:2), as inconsistent with a loving God
- Orthodox Jews continue to pray for the Resurrection
- Reform Jews have generally eliminated prayers for a Resurrection from their services, and in the past have rejected the doctrine of a Resurrection of the Body
 - they do believe in the immortality of the soul

Judaism

The World to Come

- Common theme in rabbinic literature: “this world” versus the “world to come” (*Olam Haba*) where:
 - righteous will be rewarded
 - Israel will shine in glory as God’s people
 - light of God’s presence will shine for all
- The relationship of the “world to come” to the time of the Messiah and the Resurrection is unclear
- The details of the “world to come” are unknown, for:
concerning *Olam Haba*: **‘No eye has seen it, O God, but Yours’ (Isaiah 64:3)** (B. Berkhhot 35b; B. Sanhedrin 99a)

Islam

The End of Days

Islam

A Life Directed to the Other Existence

- Birth, life, death in this “nearer” world (*al-dunya*) is directed to resurrection and eternal life in the “other” existence (*al-dar*), the last abode, or end, or hereafter (*al-akhirah*)

Islam

A Life Directed to the Other Existence

- Resurrection and judgment is the single, great, culminating event of creation. Called:
 - The Day of Resurrection: *yawn al-qiyamah* (Qur'an 2:85); *yawm al-ba'th* (Qur'an 30:56)
 - The Last Day: *al-yawm al-akhirah* (Qur'an 2:8)
 - The Day of Judgment: *yawm al-din* (Qur'an 1:4)
 - The Day of Reckoning: *yawm al Hisab* (Qur'an 40:27)
 - The Day of Decision: *yawm al-fasl* (Qur'an 37:21)
 - The Hour: *al-sa'ah* (Qur'an 22:7)
- On that day, every person will be judged on the basis of their actions in this “nearer” world

Islam

Between Death and Resurrection

- After death: angels call forth the soul to the grave, in a state called *barzakh* (“barrier”) that separates life from death, and death from the Day of Resurrection
- There is a preliminary judgment:
 - A person of faith: gets a comfortable experience in the grave
 - Unbeliever: gets pain and punishment
- **“We shall punish them twice, and then they will be brought back to a mighty punishment”** (al Bukhari 23:89 Hadith)

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- Cosmic cataclysms will mark the coming of the Hour
- Qur'an 82:1-5: **When the sky is torn apart, when the stars are scattered, when the seas burst forth, when graves turn inside out: each soul will know what it has done and what it has left undone**

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- The sky will become “**like molten metal**” (Qur’an 70:8)
 - mountains “**blown away**” (Qur’an 77:10) like “**tufts of wool**” (Qur’an 70:9, 101:5)
 - sun and moon will come together (Qur’an 75:8-9)
 - stars will be extinguished (Qur’an 77:8)
 - nursing mothers will abandon their suckling babes; pregnant women will miscarry (Qur’an 22:2)
 - children will turn gray as if aged (Qur’an 73:17)

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- Among Hadith (stories of the Prophet Muhammad's life) additions:
 - An “antichrist” *al-Dajjal*, will bring tyranny, suffering, injustice
 - Jesus will descend to re-establish peace before the Hour (in some accounts, he kills the *Dajjal*)

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- Resurrection of the bodies of the dead begins with the blowing of trumpet (Qur'an 74:8, 78:18)
- God brings back to life those who have died, recapitulating creation:
 - **Qur'an 10:4: It is to Him you shall all return ... It was He who created [you] in the first place, and He will do so again, so that He may justly reward those who believe and do good deeds. But the disbelievers will have a drink of scalding water, and agonizing torment, because they persistently disbelieved."**

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- All human beings gather on a vast plain under a brilliant sun; only the throne of judgment providing any shade
- Righteous Muslims will meet the Prophet and quench their thirst at great pool or basin of water
- Deeds of every person are recorded in a book of deeds or *kitab* (described both as a single ledger, or a separate personal record)

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- The pious get their personal record in their right hand; the condemned in their left hand:
 - Qur'an 69:19-23; 25-27: **Anyone who is given his Record (kitab) in his right hand will say, 'Here is my Record, read it. I knew I would meet my Reckoning,' and so he will have a pleasant life in a lofty Garden, with clustered fruit within his reach. But anyone who is given his Record in his left hand will say, 'If only I had never been given any Record and knew nothing of my Reckoning. How I wish death had been the end of me.'**

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- After the reckoning of deeds, the righteous will proceed to Paradise, by tradition crossing a bridge (*sirat*) over the Fire
- There may be a possibility of intercession by others at the Judgment:
 - Passages in the Qur'an are conflicting
 - The Hadith (stories of the Prophet Muhammad's life) offer some examples of intercession:
 - by the Prophet Muhammad on behalf of the faithful
 - by the faithful who are marked for Paradise

Islam

Day of Resurrection and Judgment

- Hadith: God will say at the last Judgment:
The angels have interceded, the prophets have interceded, and the faithful have interceded; there remains only the Most Merciful of the merciful (al-Bukhari 97:24:5, Muslim 1:302, Musnad 3:94-95)

Islam

Garden Paradise or Fire

- A “Garden Paradise” and “Fire” are images found in the Qur’an for eternal salvation and damnation:

Qur’an 13:35: Here is a picture of the Garden that those mindful of God have been promised: flowing streams and perpetual food and shade. This is the reward that awaits those who are mindful of God; the disbelievers’ reward is the Fire

Islam

Garden Paradise or Fire

- Bliss of paradise, agony of hell are emphasized in the Qur'an and throughout Islamic tradition
- They are often described in physical terms, but can be taken figuratively
- One's destination is a result of one's moral (or immoral life), and one's faith (or failure) in worshiping the One, True God. There will be **“ultimate retribution for evil deeds and unbelief, and ultimate recompense for good deeds and faith.”** (William Graham)

Christianity

The End of Days

Christianity

Kingdom of God

- The reign of God (“**The Kingdom of God**”) has already begun; and will be fully expressed at end of history. God's purposes for creation will be fulfilled
- Paul: coming of Christ inaugurated a new era or age, a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), which has yet to be fulfilled
- We say the Kingdom of God is “**Now and Not Yet**”
 - **Now:** Jesus has inaugurated the Kingdom (planted the mustard seed)
 - **Not Yet:** Kingdom not yet fulfilled (mustard seed has not grown fully)

Christianity

Death

- The fact of death and its unpredictability requires us to acknowledge our dependence on God at all times, in all projects and relationships. Failure to do so is to live inauthentically
- Tradition: at death, a person's immortal “soul” separates from their body
- A **Particular Judgment** occurs in which the soul understands its fate
- The soul then proceeds to hell or to a state of waiting (and perhaps the souls of some martyrs and saints get to go directly to “heaven”)

Christianity

Second Coming of Christ

- At the end of history Christ comes again in power and glory: **The Parousia** = The Second Coming of Christ
- God's purpose will be fulfilled, and this will consist in the reign of God as revealed to us in Jesus

Christianity

General Resurrection of the Body

- There will be a **General Resurrection of the Body**. Everyone who has ever lived will be resurrected as beings with a glorified “physicality” or body
 - Thus the Christian hope is not an escape from the "physical" aspects of existence

Christianity

General / Final Judgment

- Then there is a **General or Final Judgment**
- Eternal fate of all is proclaimed (presumably confirming the **Particular Judgment**)
 - By tradition, the saved then proceed to “heaven;” the damned to “hell”

Christianity

General / Final Judgment

- A **General Judgment** before all generations suggests:
 - An essential interrelatedness and communal destiny of all human persons at all times and places
 - Human history will be assessed and judged in the light of our communal responsibility for the destinies of each other
 - The ambiguities of good and evil in history will in the turn be overcome

Christianity

Heaven and New Creation

- Revelation 21:1-5 (NRSV): Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

Christianity

Heaven and New Creation

- New Testament parables give strongly communal descriptions of “heaven”
 - a banquet
 - wedding feast
 - a city (New Jerusalem)
- Doctrine of God as Trinity also argues for the communal nature of heaven
- McGrath: **“Eternal life is thus not a projection of an individual human existence, but is rather to be seen as sharing, with the redeemed community as a whole, in the community of a loving God.”**

Christianity

Heaven and New Creation

- The promise of a community of resurrected humanity with glorified bodies living within a new creation:
 - Thomas & Wondra: Suggests “**a fulfillment of creaturehood, individuality, ... physical embodiment, and temporality, and not to the denial or transcending of these aspects of human and cosmic history.**”
 - Invites speculation on the nature of the **New Creation**:
 - (1) is it a completely new creation? (*creatio ex nihilo*)
 - (2) or is it a transformation of the present creation? (*creatio ex vetere*)

Christianity

Heaven and New Creation

- John Polkinghorne argues the **New Creation** is a transformation of the present creation:
 - **The old creation has the character which is appropriate to an evolutionary universe, endowed with the ability through the shuffling explorations of its happenstance to ‘make itself’**
 - **The new creation represents the transformation of that [old] universe when it enters freely into a new and closer relationship with its Creator, so that it becomes a totally sacramental world, suffused with the divine presence.**

Christianity

Hell

- “Hell” is the assertion that human freedom can be used for a painful self-damnation and self-destruction, which may involve a final concluding reality beyond death

Christianity

Hell

- Interest in hell was particularly strong in the Middle Ages, where it was described as a static, eternal place
- This view continued to have influence in modern times:
Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," preached July 8, 1741: **It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God for one moment, but you must suffer it for all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery... You will know that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance**

Christianity

Hell

- Criticism of this idea of an “eternal hell:”
 - Its existence seems a contradiction to belief that in the end God will reign over all. Instead, it implies God will *never* fully triumph over evil
 - An *eternal* vindictive punishment of sinners for a *finite* number of offenses (even if against an *infinite* God) seems “un-Christian,” impossible to reconcile with a loving God

Christianity

Universalism

- **Universalism:** in the end, everyone will be saved
- The great church father **Origen of Alexandria** (185-254 AD) argued:
 - The idea that God and Satan would rule over respective kingdoms for all eternity is an unacceptable dualism
 - The final redeemed version of creation cannot include a hell or kingdom of Satan. In the end, all of creation must be restored to God

Christianity

Universalism

- John A. T. Robinson (English theologian 1960's):
 - “May we not imagine a love so strong that ultimately no one will be able to retrain himself from free and grateful surrender?”
 - “In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors.”

Christianity

Universalism

- Thomas and Wondra: “So this issue comes down to whether we are to give more weight to human freedom to turn away from God’s love, or to the power of God’s love to win all people freely to God. Any victory of God that violates human freedom is not a victory of love but of coercion. But it is possible to conceive of a love so powerful that ultimately no one will be able to resist free and grateful surrender.”

Primary References

- **Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam**, Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton, William Graham. Brill Academic Publishers, 2002
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