

**Three Faiths,  
One God.  
6. The End of Days**

# Introduction

## The End of Days

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 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* like calling the king of England the “crowned head”
  - the dynasty of David, son of Jesse ended in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when the Persian dethroned King Zerubbabel
  - under the foreign rule of the pagan empires of Persians, Greeks, and Rome, hope grew for a Messiah to return to throne of Israel

# 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 (**Mitvah**) without obstacles
- the lion and the lamb would dwell together

# The Messiah

**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**

- Maimonides (Mishneh Torah XI, XII)

# The Messiah

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

Daniel:

Cataclysmic Events and persecutions, particularly for the Jews (“birthpangs of the Messiah”) would precede the Messiah’s arrival

# The Messiah

- *Rabbinic folklore:*

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

# 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

# The Messiah

When will the Messiah 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

**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**

- Yerushalm Taanit 1:1 (Babylonian Talmud)

# 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:

**“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. Men and cultures must learn to think and hope for the ideal of human life, the ideal of individuals and nations, the future of the Messiah as something in the future of the human race. The realization of morality on earth, its tasks and its eternal goal, this, and nothing else is the meaning of the Messiah for us.”**

- Hermann Cohen

# The Messiah

In other words: for Reformed Jews  
**Messianism** is a project for the  
improvement of the human society

# Resurrection from the Dead

Daniel 12:2:

**“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 (first century BC) helped spread the doctrine of the **Resurrection of the Body**

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

# Resurrection from the Dead

Rabbinic folklore and midrash:

- after the **Messiah ben David** has come and defeated the forces of evil (army of God 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)

# Resurrection from the Dead

## **Gehinnom**

- sometimes depicted as hell
- usually a purgatory where sinners punished for less than 12 months (with rest every Sabbath)

**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)**

- Mishnah Ediyot 2:10

# Resurrection from the Dead

Justification:

**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.**

- Jacob Neusner, in **Three Faiths, One God**

# 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

# 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

Relationship of the “world to come” with time of the Messiah and the Resurrection unclear

The details of the “world to come”

unknown, for: **concerning Olam Haba:**

**‘No eye has seen it, O God, but**

**Yours’ (Isaiah 64:3) - B. Berkhot 35b;**

B. Sanhedrin 99a

**Christianity**

# Tradition to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

## The Traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant Orthodox Teaching:

- at death, a person's **immortal soul** separates from their **body**
- a **Particular Judgment** occurs in which the soul understands its fate
  - the soul proceeds to **hell** or to a **state of waiting** (and perhaps the souls of some martyrs and saints get to go directly to **heaven**)
- at the end of history Christ comes again in power and glory (the **Second Coming** or **Parousia**)

# Tradition to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

- there is then a **General Resurrection** of all bodies, which are reunited with their souls
- there is then a **Final Judgment**
  - eternal fate of all proclaimed (presumably confirming the **Particular Judgment**)
  - the saved proceed to **heaven**; the damned to **hell**
- fate of the universe was unclear
  - some Lutheran theologians suggested God would annihilate it

# Modern Consensus\*

## History

Human history has a beginning, an end, and a purpose. It is not cyclic.

## Death

Each human being's life on this earth has a beginning and an end. Death is certain; its time is unpredictable.

The fact of death and its unpredictability requires us to acknowledge our dependence and contingency at all times, in all projects and relationships. Failure to do so is to live inauthentically

\* mainstream theologians

# Modern Consensus

## The Kingdom of God

God is the source, the end and goal of all.

The reign of God has already begun; and will be fully expressed at end of history.

God's purposes for creation *will* be fulfilled

## 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

# Modern Consensus

## The General Resurrection of the Body

- the *whole person* dies, the *whole person* participates in the fulfillment of God's purpose
- the Christian hope is *not* an escape from the "physical" aspects of existence
- the body cannot be separated from the *natural world*; suggesting that the *cosmos* will also be fulfilled
- the body is *the basis of interpersonal communications* and the resurrection is *general*, both suggesting a fulfilled continuation of community and social life

# Modern Consensus

## The General 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 be overcome

# Modern Consensus

## Heaven

"Heaven" is the assertion that **"the destiny intended by the creator for every human person is to find ultimate happiness and the final resolution for the quest of life in intimate and essentially indescribably personal communion with God, and in God with all creation."** (Monika K. Hellwig)

# Modern Consensus

## 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

# The Kingdom of God. Now and Not Yet

New Testament: *something new and significant happened in history through the life and death of Jesus: the coming of the Kingdom of God*

- **Kingdom of God** a dominant theme in Jesus' teaching (70 times in the Synoptic Gospels)
  - "Kingdom" = kingship or rule
- Paul: coming of Christ *inaugurates* a new era or age, a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), which has yet to be fulfilled

# The Kingdom of God. Now and Not Yet

There is a tension between the "**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)

# Hell

Interest in hell particularly strong in the Middle Ages, where hell was described as a static, eternal place

This view continues to have influence in modern times:

**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**

- Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," preached July 8, 1741

# Hell

Criticism of this idea of hell:

- Its existence seems a contradiction to belief in 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

# Hell

## Universalism

**Origen** (185-254):

- The idea that God and Satan would rule over respective kingdoms for all eternity  
a flawed *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

# Hell

## Universalism

John A. T. Robinson (radical 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.”

# Hell

**"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."**

- Thomas and Wondra

# Purgatory

An intermediate stage where those who die in a state of grace purge themselves of the guilt of their sins before entering heaven

Scriptural basis: 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 (part of the Apocrypha, canonical in Roman Catholicism, noncanonical among Protestants)

# Purgatory

*Rationale:* If all die imperfect, and fulfillment involves perfection of all persons ("sanctification"), then the alternatives are:

- sudden transformation at death
- process of moral growth after death involving purgation from sin

Today, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans pray for the dead (thus implying belief in an intermediate stage where prayers can help)

# Heaven

## Heaven:

- the realization of the presence and power of God
- the final elimination of sin
- the consummation of salvation

# Heaven

## Communal Nature of Heaven

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

**"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."**

- McGrath

# Heaven

## The Resurrected Body and The New Creation

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." (Thomas & Wondra)

Invites speculation on the renewal or re-creation of the cosmos:

- a new creation? (*creatio ex nihilo*)
- a transformation of the present creation? (*creatio ex vetere*)

# Heaven

## **The Resurrected Body and The New 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 [the 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.**

- John Polkinghorne

**Islam**

# A Life Directed to Al-Dar

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 / end / hereafter (*al-akhirah*)

Resurrection and judgment is the single, great, culminating event of creation.

Called:

- The Day of Resurrection: *yawn al-qiyamah* (S. 2:85); *yawm al-ba'th* (S. 30:56)
- The Last Day: *al-yawm al-akhirah* (S. 2:8)
- The Day of Judgment: *yawm al-din* (S. 1:4)

- The Day of Reckoning: *yawm al Hisab* (S. 40:27)
- The Day of Decision: *yawm al-fasl* (S. 37:21)
- The Hour: *al-sa'ah* (S. 22:7)

On that day, every person will be judged on the basis of their actions in this “nearer” world

# 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 Day of Resurrection

There is a preliminary judgment:

- A person of faith: comfortable experience in the grave
- Unbeliever: pain, punishment

**“We shall punish them twice, and then they will be brought back to a mighty punishment”**

- al Bukhari 23:89 (Hadith)

# **The Coming of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment**

Cosmic cataclysms which mark the coming of **the Hour:**

**When the sky is split open, when the planets are scattered, when the seas boil forth, when the graves are torn up, a soul will realize what [deeds] it put forward and what it held back**

- Qur'an Surah 82:1-5

# The Coming of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment

Cosmic cataclysms will mark the coming of **the Hour**:

The sky will become “like molten metal” (S. 70:8)

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

# The Coming of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment

Among Hadiths 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*)

# Day of Resurrection and Judgment

Resurrection of the bodies of the dead begins with the blowing of trumpet (S. 74:8, 78:18)

God brings back to life those who have died, recapitulating creation:

**Surely He produces creation and then repeats it in order to reward those who are faithful and do good works justly, while as for those who reject faith, theirs is a boiling drink and agonizing punishment because they denied [God]**

- Qur'an Surah 10:4

# 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)

# Day of Resurrection and Judgment

The pious get their personal record in their right hand; the condemned in their left hand

**As for the one given his record (*kitab*) in his right hand, he will say, 'take and read my book. I knew I would be held account.' And he will be in a blissful state... While as for him who is given his book in his left, he will say, 'Would only that I had not been given my book and did not know my accounting.'**

- Qur'an Surah 69:19-21; 25-26

# 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

Possibility of Intercession by others at the Judgment:

- there are conflicting passages in Qur'an
- Hadith offers examples of intercession:
  - by Prophet on behalf of the faithful
  - by the faithful marked for Paradise

# 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

# Paradise and Fire

Garden Paradise and Fire are similitudes for eternal salvation and damnation:

**The similitude of the Garden that is promised to the godfearing [is a place] underneath which flow rivers; its food and its shade are everlasting. That is the reward of those who are godfearing, while the reward of the ungrateful deniers [of God] is the Fire**

- Qur'an Surah 13:35

# Paradise and Fire

- Bliss of Paradise, Agony of hell emphasized in the **Qur'an** and throughout Islamic tradition
  - often described in physical terms, but can be taken figuratively
- one's destination is a results 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)