

Comparative Review Of Angels Within Abrahamic Faiths

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Introduction

The terminology “Abrahamic Religions” relates to the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The claim they all share is their belief in Prophet Abraham being their mutual forefather. These three religions form about half of the world’s population presently. The claim is further explained through the association of Jews’ consideration of Prophet Abraham as their ancestor, Muslims’ belief in Prophet Abraham’s son, Ishmael, being their ancestor, and the firm Christian belief of Prophet Abraham as the “Father of Faith.” This claim promotes the mutually understandable fact that all of these three religions originated from a single source.

“Abrahamic Religion” as a term links back to the repeated mentions and references made in the Qur’an. However, there are several mentions of Abrahamic Religion in the Bible and Torah as well. From the Jewish perspective, Abraham is prioritized as the most respected ancestor of theirs or otherwise referred to as Patriarch, translating to “Our Father Abraham.” Christians present their belief in Abraham with the association of Abraham as a spiritual forebear instead of referring to the term “direct ancestor.” It is exemplified by the example of Christian iconography depicting him as the early witness to the Trinity, in the form of three angels that visited him. The viewpoint of Christianity holds Abraham as a valued and revered model of faith. This is solely on the basis of Abraham’s selfless act of offering Isaac. The act itself is a holy representation of Abraham’s pure intentions of faith and being in obedience to God. Muslims on the other hand, present Ibrahim (Abraham) to be part of the lineage that starts from Adam (mentioned as the “Prophet” in Genesis 20:7), along with the title of addressing him as the “First Muslim.” The Muslim states further that it is Ishmael instead of Isaac (Christian claim) who is sacrificed. However, despite these differences, all of the three sister monotheisms share a common belief that aligns them perfectly together.

Description

Considering all points of mutual belief between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the concept of “Prophetic” tradition is found to be precisely the same, with the same enumerations in each religion. However, from the Semitic origins detailed explanation, it is found that Islam and Judaism belong to the Semitic, more commonly referred to as Jews and Arabs, whereas Christians stem from Judaism. The upright orientation elaborates on the similarity between the three monotheistic religions and talks about an individual owning a choice between good and evil, relating to obedience and disobedience

directed toward God. The perspective of praying, however, adds a difference between these monotheistic religions. Islam and Judaism pray to a divine deity, a supreme being who is worshipped and revered to be monotheistic as one being, whereas Christian believes in the conceptual idea of the Trinity, which Judaism and Islam disapprove of (Afdillah, 2016, p.97). The word of God has always been spoken and conveyed to humans via his messengers, referred to as angels. They have diligently served and are known to be in perfect obedience to the order of God. The mention of angels in these monotheistic religions has slight variations but various enumerations directed toward a common belief in their existence (DIX, 1927, pp.233-250). The Prophets, being the bearers of God's word and conveying it to their people, were found to be in contact with these angels and received revelations from them. These revelations became the main source of teaching for each of these respective religions.

Judaism

The followers of Judaism are referred to as Jews and are known to occupy a major portion of Israel. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine over land ownership highlights that Judaism spread far and wide in ancient times. Judaism is the most ancient religion and the first scripture owned in the Abrahamic faith. Torah is the foundational text of their practices. This terminology is used for the description of Jewish people's culture, practices, and religious philosophy. The fundamental belief of Jews leads them to believe that they are the children of God and superior to all the other religions. Even in their practices, some of their belief states that God is established with the Children of Israel (Afdillah, 2016, p.97). Judaism encompasses religion that has been found in the form of textbooks, theological positioning, and the different forms of organized practices linking to the Torah which is also known as Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. Later on, with time, the scriptures have been extended in the form of the Talmud. Judaism is the tenth largest religion in the world with a population ranging between 15 to 17 million worldwide.

When looking at the history of the people with Judaist faith, the first settlers were found to be residing in Sydney in 1844. Around the 1930s, Jewish people living in Australia increased in abundance due to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Aside from the Australian Jewish, there were traces of Jewish populations residing in Palestine as well. However, over the years, the conflicts with Palestine led the Jewish population to settle in Israel. Currently, most of the young Jewish generation resides in America due to the opportunities offered by the United States of America.

Coming to the concept of Angels in Judaism, it can be seen that Jews believe the Angels to be the messengers of God. In Rabbinic literature of Jews, Angels have been classified into different groups according to the different hierarchies. Scripture of Midrash has defined the four angels which are chief of the other angels and surrounding the throne of God. These four angels exhibit particular attributes which set them apart from the other angels. In Talmud, four angels have been mentioned, and they have been referred to as 'archangels'. According to the rabbinic literature, it has been stated in the Talmud that the archangels surround the throne of God as has been stated in the following lines,

“As the Holy One blessed be He created four winds (directions) and four banners (for Israel’s army), so also did He make four angels surround His Throne – Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael.” (Midrash Rabbah, Numbers 2:7-10)

There is also a reference to Angel’s way of living as three angels have been identified who visited Abraham and consumed food that was prepared for them by Abraham, which shows that despite not having a physical form, they could still eat food. The scriptures explain different aspects regarding the appearances of the Angels, like in Midrash, it has been included that Michael is made up of snow and Gabriel is on Fire. There are multiple sources in the Midrash concept that guide that Michael is a defender of Israel with all odd happenings and considers him as an angel favoring the creation of humans. The Talmud talks about the two angels, the one who is bad and the other who is good, with the concept of Evil and Good. Both angels are given the duty of writing down every activity carried out by the humans.

The origin of the angel is still questioned from the scripture as it is believed they are from the time when God existed, and they are serving God from the start of the world (DIX, 1927 pp.233-250). In the Tanakh, there is a narration that introduces the Angel of God in Genesis and Exodus. Those events are briefly explained, such as the event that states that there was a whole army that had been formed with a single blow. However, many Jewish speakers are of the view that Angels are Manifest of God and they exist from the time God existed. There is a different hierarchy of the angels that have been defined by Maimonides who is a 12th-century scholar of Jews. Maimonides rewrote the version of the Torah in which Torah teachings and the nature of angels have been highlighted.

Yesodei Hatorah 2:8

“All these types of angels are alive. They recognize G-d very intensely, each in a manner commensurate with its level. Even the highest level, however, is incapable of grasping God’s true nature, as its intellect – like ours – is limited. Each category of an angel does understand God’s nature more fully than those on lower levels. Even the lowest level, the Ishim, knows God in a fashion superior to anything of which man is capable, but none of these levels can know God the way He knows Himself” (“Yesodei HaTorah – Chapter Two,”).

There are ten levels of Angels according to the difference in their hierarchal status. The hierarchal status has been defined according to Angel’s attributes that set them apart from others. Maimonides mentioned in Mishneh Torah, that the ranks of Angels from the top to the lowest following the Jewish Angelic hierarchy. Furthermore, Jews believe that Angels are known to God, they know God better than humans, and they have strong connectivity with God.

While Angels do not have free will and they, do not have any differentiation with regards to good and bad deeds, they are innocent. The concept of the fallen angel in Judaism can be found in the study of the second temple era, while both traditionalist Jews and rationalist Jews do not believe in the fallen angel, and that belief considers Satan as the fallen angel.

Christianity

Christianity is the most expanded universal religion around the world. Based on the brief life, teachings, and theology, they believe in Jesus and consider him as a son of God, known as Christ, too, which is the focal point of their faith. Over 2.4 billion people in the world right now practice it with complete devotion. The religion of Christianity has played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization (Lamoureux, 2010, pp.433-437).

Christianity is considered to have originated in Jerusalem, a society that was not entirely occupied by Jewish society. The early Christian doctrine is believed to have been influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. Both Christianity and Judaism were recorded as having certain similarities that led to confusion in ancient times. Without the Church and Rabbis, it would have been difficult to tell a Christian apart from a Jew or a Christian text from a Jewish text. By the end of the 4th century, there was a state-developed church during the regime of the Roman Empire. Later on, it spread around the world during the time of colonization and was embraced by many people in different colonization sectors.

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The theology of Christianity is briefed and summarised in the Creed, which defines the profession of the faith from a person to be carried out for being a Christian which states that Jesus died and he will be back to grant eternal life to his true followers who are referred to as Gospels. Christians are shown to have a strong belief in the existence of Angels, as there are many passages in the Bible that are dedicated to the Angels.

“Angels were created by God, but it doesn’t say when they were created. They are depicted as praising God at the time of creation, which suggests that they existed before that moment” (cf. Job 38:4-7)(“Bible Gateway passage,”).

“The role they have as God’s servants” (cf. Heb. 1:14)(“Bible Gateway passage,”)

The Angels have been regarded as important beings according to the scriptures of the Christian faith. Apart from having a strong faith in their existence, Christians believe that the first Angel that appeared was Daniel who played a crucial role as he was the main messenger of God and also is considered to have been very close to God. Daniel is also conceived as God’s instrument.

“The angel is something different from God himself but is conceived as God’s instrument” (Daniel 10:13)(“Bible Gateway passage”).

There is the hierarchal order followed in Christianity in which Angels are put into three different levels because of their status and closeness to the status in front of God. The first level or first order is based on the Angels who are closest to God, and they are considered the strongest spirit in the world, they sing the praise of God and manage or regulate heaven, they purify the world with their purified

spirit in this Seraphim are the highest in the angel. Also, they support the throne of God manifested with his judgments. The second order held out to the priest-princes of heaven who help the universe to stabilize and keep it ongoing as it should be going; it is believed that they could appear in the world in human shape and meet humans in physical form. They are called Chesed. Gevurah is also under this category, which considers miracles applicable on the earth, and they are considered the most shining angels decorated with the instrument of passion. They work hand in hand and reward people physically regarding tools.

There is important recognition from the second order as they must control the fallen angel from taking over the world, keep the balance of the universe, and provide powers to intellectuals for their mental growth. The third order is based on the ministering angels, which include principalities having all duties to protect religions and guard the holy cities and religious rulers, and there is a possibility to see in human form (Lindsay, 2017 pp.1-18). Archangels are the chief of overall angels, of which four included Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. The last other includes the Angels, who are closely connected to the humans between God and mortals. These all assist humans in every way from birth to the end of life and the afterlife; they will be in service of humans in heaven (Davidson, 1994).

In Christianity, we have seen that Angels do not have the will while they are innocent, and they do not conduct anything without the will of God, and they are serving him fully. The concept of the fallen angel is from Christianity, in which they believe Satan had power and led the angels, but for his attitude, he was cut out from heaven, due to which he is considered as the fallen angel.

Islam

Islam is considered a fairly recent religion to be added to the Abrahamic faiths. Started right after the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, with all of the scriptures in the Arabic language, and followed a uniform practice. The fundamental teaching of Islam teaches that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is a messenger of Allah. Islam is regarded as the world's second-largest religion. Presently a study revealed Islam to be growing steadily with over 1.8 billion of the population, covering 24% of the world population. The belief in Islam is that all powers reside in the hands of God (Allah), and as a Muslim individual, people have to spend their lives according to the principles of Islam and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. This practice is known as Sunnah, which is composed in the form of narratives called Hadith (Otters, 2012, pp.59-70). The scripture, according to their belief, provides basic knowledge of life, and Qu'ran presents a clear description of the way of life. Qu'ran is the actual Holy Scripture, and Hadith (collection of the Narrations of Prophet Muhammad) forms the fundamental basis for various practices and Laws. Muslims consider Islam to be the compilation of various teachings offered by the prophet. Further classification of Islam reveals two dominant sects: Sunni, which is about 90%, and the remaining 10% based Shiites. While they both have similar fundamentals that they believe in, the belief in the angels is the same too (Geisler and Saleeb, 2002).

They addressed angels as Malaikah, following the belief that their creation was sourced from the luminous of God. It is essential to believe in the existence of angels because, without them, one cannot be called a Muslim. It is an important part of Islamic belief, and as Muslims, every individual has to testify to the following statement known as Imaan e Mufasssal, a complete declaration of faith.

"I have faith in Allah and His Angels, His Books and His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment and that all good and evil and fate is from Almighty Allah, and it is sure that there will be resurrection after death."

The first mention of angels in the scripture can be found in the 2nd chapter of the Quran Al Baqarah, verse number 30

"And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know("Surah Al-Baqarah [2,")"

Islam does not properly define any hierarchal structure in their teachings, while there are 4 Archangels inclusive of Jibrail, Mikael, Izrael, and Israfil. Also, there are other prominent ones, such as Kiraman Katibein. In Chapter 30 topic of Al Infitar verses, Numbers 11 and 12 tell about them.

"Noble and recording; they know whatever you do. ("Surah Al-Infitar [82,")"

Muslims believe that they are always with them, and one is sitting on the right, and one is sitting on the left shoulder, noting down each of our deeds.

Islam has no belief in the fallen angel out of heaven. Both schools of thought agree upon it while disapproving of Satan as an angel and categorizing him as Jinn. Jinn are beings made of fire, and Satan, being one of them, has been thrown for his arrogance. The act of pride he displayed was the sole reason for his banishment from heaven and removal from the leadership of the Angels (Lindsay, 2017, pp.1-18).

Conclusion

Angels, being with the purest of intentions and servants to God, are devoid of all sin and tasked with the deliverance of God's word to the prophet and the people. Throughout the three monotheistic religions, angels have been presented as beings that obediently follow through with God's order; they are not to be perceived as objects of worship, and worshipping them is strictly prohibited, as well as condemned. There are various enumerations of "Archangels" in the traditions and writings of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Smith, 2012, pp.580-580). In the post-Exilic Judaism, mention of two out of the seven archangels is available. The names of Gabriel and Michael can be seen in the scriptures, which later on were accepted by all Christians as canonical. Raphael's name is enumerated

several times in The Book of Tobit, whereas the names of the other four archangels, Raguel, Uriel, Jarahmeel, and Sariel, are found in chapter twenty-one of The Book of Enoch. Slight variations based on the angels can be seen in these three monotheistic religions, but their roles remain the same, as it was mentioned in Abrahamic Faiths.

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