

Interesting Differences, between Christianity and Judaism

Introduction

As many people know, the Bible is actually a miniature "library", of 66 separate books. Christians refer to the first 39 books of the Bible - Genesis through Malachi - as the "Old Testament"; and the remaining 27 books - Matthew through Revelation - as the "New Testament".

In addition, most people are aware that the Old Testament is sacred to both Christianity and Judaism. In other words, Christians and Jews both believe that God *inspired* the writings in the Old Testament.

One item that is *not* so well known is the fact that almost all of the information in the New Testament is **based upon** information in the Old Testament. It is estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of the concepts in the New Testament are directly linked to passages in the Old Testament.

The reason why this is important is because many people believe that the New Testament contains *completely different information* from the Old Testament. Basically, many people believe that everything listed in the New Testament was "brand new" information – i.e., information that *no one* had **ever** heard before. However, that is *not* the case. On the contrary – for the most part, the New Testament **reiterates** concepts that had *already* been stated in the Old Testament.

An article that discusses some of the important "links" between the Old and New Testaments can be found at the following link:

[Eight "Links" between the Old and New Testaments](#)

So, Christianity and Judaism both believe that the Old Testament is from God. Also, the New Testament is *based upon* the Old Testament. As a result, one would expect that there would be quite a few **similarities** between the two religions – and indeed there are. However, there are also a number of **differences** between the two religions – and some of those difference are quite interesting.

The two most *specific* differences between Christianity and Judaism are as follows:

- Christianity believes that Jesus is the promised Messiah from the Old Testament; while Judaism does not.

- Judaism believes that the commands in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) should be followed; while Christianity believes that those commands have been abolished.

Of course, the two “doctrinal” differences listed above are very well known. However, there are a number of *other* differences between Christianity and Judaism that are not so obvious. Those other differences do not deal with doctrines, per se; rather, they are differences in "outlook" – or "philosophical" differences if you will.

The sections below describe some of those differences in outlook, between Christianity and Judaism. Each section contains a comparison of two overall ideas, and the section then discusses **which** of those two ideas are *emphasized* in each religion.

Beliefs vs. Actions

First, consider the overall subject of "beliefs vs. actions". Certainly, *both* of those areas are important in Christianity and Judaism; but there is a definite difference in "emphasis" between the two religions.

For the most part, Christianity focuses on beliefs - i.e., on the **theological doctrines** to which people subscribe. So, the *primary* emphasis in Christianity is believing the correct ideas - rather than on ethical behavior.

Needless to say, one of the beliefs that is stressed in Christianity is the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. However, "mainstream" Christianity promulgates many **other** beliefs as well - notably, the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, going to heaven when you die, eternal conscious torment in hellfire, etc.

The Trinity, in particular, is often used as a "litmus test" of whether a person is a Christian or not. Basically, many churches assert that if a person does not believe in the Trinity, then that person is not a Christian at all! In addition, differences in theological beliefs can easily cause a person to get "thrown out" - i.e., "excommunicated" - from a Christian church.

The emphasis on beliefs over actions is *especially* strong in Protestant churches. This is because most mainstream Protestant churches espouse the doctrine of "eternal security" - also known as "once saved, always saved". According to that doctrine, if a person has ever **believed** in Jesus, then that person will automatically be saved. This is true *even if* the person "changes his mind" afterwards, and no longer believes in Jesus. It is also true no matter how a person **behaves** - i.e., even if the person becomes a devout *Satan worshipper*, he will still be saved.

So, with the "eternal security" doctrine, a person's *actions* are **completely irrelevant** to salvation - and as a result, churches which believe that doctrine generally place little emphasis on how people act.

Judaism, in contrast, focuses on **actions** - i.e., on people's behavior. Basically, the primary emphasis in Judaism is on promoting *ethical behavior* - as opposed to promoting specific *theological doctrines*.

Of course, theological beliefs are still very important in Judaism. However, for the most part, Judaism does not try to "push" *specific* doctrines - and disagreeing about doctrines usually will **not** get you "thrown out" of a synagogue. In essence, Judaism encourages **debates** about theological beliefs - rather than trying to force everyone to accept the "official beliefs" of a given denomination.

So, the *overriding* emphasis in Judaism is on righteous **actions**. One of the key concepts in Judaism is the principle of "tikkun olam"; which basically means "fixing the world". That principle involves encouraging people to exhibit righteous behavior, in order to make the world a better place. The idea is that each person - through virtuous actions - can bring the world "closer to God", so to speak.

This emphasis on behavior in Judaism is not very surprising – because in *Scripture*, true faith is **always** reflected in a person's actions. In other words, if a person has true faith in God, then he will believe God's promises – **and** his behavior will reflect that belief. This is true in both the Old and New Testaments. There are many examples in the Bible, of individuals whose actions demonstrated true faith – such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the apostles, etc.

In addition, Judaism states that a person's actions determine if that person will live in the **next age** or not. Interestingly, Judaism asserts that **every person** who practices righteous behavior will have a part in the next age – *even if* a person does **not** have Jewish theological beliefs!

Basically, according to Judaism, if a person's **behavior** is righteous, then that person will live in the next age – *even if* he does not share all of the **theological beliefs** of Judaism. This is in stark contrast to mainstream Christianity – which asserts that a person must share *all* of Christianity's theological beliefs, or else that person will be condemned to *conscious torment* in hellfire, for *all eternity*.

Current Age vs. Next Age

Scripture tells us that there are two basic “ages” – or “periods of time” – in which people will live. Those ages are usually referred to as the “current age”, and the “next age”. The primary *difference* between the two ages is that during this current age, corrupt human rulers have authority over the earth; while in the next age, the Messiah will rule over the earth.

Of course, both of those ages are important, to both Christianity and Judaism. However, there is a major difference in “emphasis” between Christianity and Judaism, regarding the two ages.

For the most part, Christianity focuses on the next age. In other words, Christianity emphasizes looking forward – to “the hereafter” – rather than emphasizing living our lives now.

One of the reasons for this focus on the next age is that mainstream Christianity's **idea** about the next age is *radically different* than what is found in Scripture. Basically, Scripture tells us that in the next age, the Messiah will bring people **back to life**, so that people will live again – on the earth. So, in the next age, people will still live on the earth – but the earth will be restored to its original “paradise” conditions, with the Messiah ruling over us as our righteous king.

Mainstream Christianity, in contrast, asserts that people will never live on the earth again, after we die. Instead, Christianity claims that people have “immortal souls”; and that when a Christian dies, his immortal soul leaves his body, and goes to heaven. The Christian's “disembodied soul” will then spend the rest of *eternity* in heaven, with God and Jesus. Of course, the idea of living in heaven, as a disembodied soul, is completely different than living on the earth, in a physical body – so that is one reason why Christianity focuses on the “hereafter”.

There is *another* reason why Christianity focuses on the next age as well. Basically, some Christian denominations assert that our physical bodies are **completely corrupt** – so that there is no good in us *whatsoever*, while we have our fleshly bodies. This doctrine is usually called “total depravity”. As a

result, denominations which espouse that doctrine naturally focus on people becoming “disembodied souls” – so that we can “escape” the corruption of our physical bodies. That, in turn, leads those churches to emphasize the *next* life over this current life.

Judaism, in contrast, focuses on this current age - the world in which we live right now. This goes along with the concept of “tikkun olam” mentioned above – the principle that people should do what they can, to make this world a better place.

Orthodox Judaism does believe that people will live on the earth in the next age as well – under the rule of the Messiah (i.e., the Christ). Also, Orthodox Judaism **does** “look forward” to the next age; in fact, there are specific Jewish prayers which express the hope that the Messiah will return “quickly” – so that the next age can begin.

However, even in Orthodox Judaism, the primary emphasis is on this **current** age – how we live our lives right now. This is not surprising, as **Scripture** itself emphasizes *doing* what we can, right now – rather than on merely *imagining* what things will be like in the future. In other words, Judaism emphasizes living righteously, in our *current daily lives*.

In addition, some of the *other* branches of Judaism have quite *different* beliefs about the next age. For example, the official belief of Reform Judaism is that people will **never** come back to life after they die! That is, there is no resurrection of people **at all**, in Reform Judaism. As a result, our lives in this current age are the **only** lives that we will *ever* have. So, with that belief, the entire focus is completely on the *current* age – since this age is the *only* time that we will ever live.

Individual vs. Community

The final area to consider deals with the difference between “individual” and “community” focus. Both Christianity and Judaism assert that each and every individual person is unique – and that God cares about each individual. Also, both religions also hold that it is important for believers to be part of a community; i.e., on gathering together with other believers.

However, there are significant differences in *emphasis* between the two religions in this area. Especially in Western countries, Christianity places its primary focus on *individuals*. In other words, the main thrust in Christianity is on each individual getting saved – as opposed to working together in a community.

One of the reasons for this focus on individuals is the doctrine of “eternal security”, mentioned above. That doctrine states that if any *individual* makes a one-time statement of faith in Jesus, then that *individual* will automatically be saved. So, that doctrine helps to “skew” the focus towards individuals, rather than to communities.

Another reason for the emphasis on individuals is that *some* churches espouse a doctrine known as the “prosperity gospel”. In essence, that doctrine states that if an individual has faith in God, then God is guaranteed to bless that individual with good health – and with great wealth. That doctrine definitely

leads to a much greater focus on individuals – in fact, it can lead people to focus *solely* on themselves and their own prosperity.

Judaism, in contrast, has a greater focus on *communities* - i.e., on fellowshiping with other believers. Certainly, each and every individual is valued in Judaism; and all individuals are exhorted to live righteously. However, the primary emphasis in Judaism is working within the larger community.

One reason for this focus on communities is that all of the holidays in the Old Testament – Passover, Yom Kippur, Shavuot (Pentecost), etc. – all involve dealing with **other people**. That is, all of the holidays require working within a *community*. In some cases, the “community” in question is relatively small – such as, one’s own family; while in other cases the community is quite large – such as the *entire* nation of Israel. In any case, the group-oriented nature of the holidays leads to a community focus.

Another item to note is that as mentioned above, Judaism generally does not “push” specific theological doctrines. Instead, Judaism encourages debates about theological concepts; to try to arrive at the truth about any given topic. Of course, in order to have such debates, it is necessary to work with other people. So, this “debate-oriented” style also lends itself to more emphasis on the community.

Finally, throughout virtually *all* of its history, the Jewish people have suffered severe persecution. As a result, the Jewish people have needed to rely on each other– i.e., they have had to work within their *communities*, for their very survival. That has had a lasting impact on Judaism as a whole – such that there is a *much* greater emphasis on community in Judaism, than one finds in many other religions.

Comparison of the Jewish Denominations

Most people are aware that there are (literally) *thousands* of different Christian denominations – and that each denomination has its own, specific theological beliefs.

An item that is *not* so well known is that there are a number of different denominations (or “movements”) within **Judaism**. It turns out that the various Jewish movements also have many differences in their theological beliefs. Some of those differences are extremely “fundamental” – such as their beliefs about whether *God exists* or not!

The document at the URL below contains a brief comparison, of the theological beliefs of the seven largest Jewish movements. Note: as much as possible, the beliefs listed there represent the “official” beliefs of each movement. However, there are many differences in belief among *individual* Jews, of course.

[Comparison of the Jewish Movements](#)

Conclusion

As shown above, there are some very significant “philosophical” differences, between Christianity and Judaism. Those differences can be somewhat surprising; because both religions believe that the Old Testament is sacred – and because the New Testament is based upon the Old Testament.

In addition, the various Jewish movements have many “theological” difference between each other – and some of those differences are quite “fundamental”. I hope this article was useful to you!