

## Concepts of God:

When we talk about 'Concepts of God' what we are talking about is - what do other people, religions and societies mean when they talk about God.

A concept of God is common to all religions and from the very beginning of time - people had an idea of God or Gods and how the world was created. These Gods were worshipped in different ways.

As human beings developed and changed, so too did their understanding of God.

People's knowledge, history, culture all influenced how they understood their concept of God.

## The Gods of the Ancients:

Ancient cultures believed in many different Gods. The Gods and Goddesses of the ancient world took many different forms, were worshipped in different ways and were often very fascinating.

They had many different types of Gods called ARCHETYPES. For example they believed in a creator God, a destroyer God, a helper God, etc.

Pantheon is the word that is officially used to describe the Gods of a particular culture. e.g. the gods that the greek people believed in was called the Greek Pantheon, the Gods that the romans believed in was called the Roman pantheon, etc.

The pantheon of a particular culture gave us a great insight in to the beliefs of the people at that time. Examples of Greek Gods would be - Zeus (the leader of the family of Gods), Ares (the God of war), Apollo (the God of Music)

The Gods of the ancients were feared rather than loved by the people. People were afraid of the Gods and were constantly trying to please them.

You need to know one myth about the ancient Gods. The Myth that we have studied was the story of Thor and his hammer. You have this on a handout.

**Transcendent** - means that you believe in a higher power, something sacred, something other - this higher power is generally referred to as God.

**Polytheism** - This is a belief in many Gods. Polytheism is the norm for religions of the world today - the 3 great exceptions are Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

2 Examples of Polytheism (3 points for Each)

Hindusim:

Shinto:

## Monothelism - means that you believe in only One God.

As time went by, people slowly began to move away from believing in many Gods to believing in just one ultimate supreme God. This process did not happen over night.

The man responsible for this shift in thought is Abraham (founding father of Judaism). He lived between 2000 and 1500 (BCE) and he lived in what we call today - the Holy land.

It was a land where many nomadic people came to settle and make a life for themselves.

Abraham, who was leader of his family, was chosen by God to carry out a special task. God told Abraham to lead his family to a special land. He said that if Abraham followed his instructions he would bless him and all his offspring. God promised to give Abraham a Holy promised land.

These events can be found in the book of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy in the Bible.

Abraham followed God's instructions and so began a special relationship between Abraham and God.

God made a covenant (a promise) with his people through Moses on Mt. Sinai. The fact that God had to make a covenant is proof that polytheism still existed and threatened people's belief and loyalty to this one true God.

It was during a time period called The Axial Age that monotheism really began to become established. This was a time of great prosperity. It led to great intellectual and cultural developments.

The God that the Israelites believed in at this time was a strict military God who demanded complete allegiance. Belief in other Gods was a deadly sin. This view of a strict severe God would change again over time.

## God in Judaism:

Belief that God is connected to the Jewish people in a distinct and special way.  
Jews see themselves as Gods chosen people.

Yahweh made a promise (Covenant) with them and this is the basis of their faith.

At the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob their God was a military God. They believed their God to be powerful and were afraid of him, they would not look upon his face (draw, paint his face) and they would not speak his name

Yahweh was distant but he loved his people.

The Jewish people knew that in times of War they could rely on Yahweh for military success. At this time the Jewish people almost looked on their God as a God of War.

Over time however, the Jewish understanding of God changed and developed. After the Axial age where Yahweh was seen as a removed, distant, military leader the Jewish people began to see him as a more compassionate God who loved his people but who asked for loyalty in return.

This understanding had consequences for the Jewish people as it meant that it would impact on their daily lives. They were now required to live in a certain way. Their God was now seen as compassionate and just so they would have to behave in a similar way.

During the Exile of Babylon in 578 BCE that the concept of Yahweh being the one true God became really solidified for the Jewish people. The Jews now came to see God as extremely powerful, yet loving. It was around this time that the Genesis creation stories were written.

The Concept of God for the Jewish people is one that has evolved over time from the belief in a strict military type god to a more compassionate and loving one.

## God in Christianity:

The Christian understanding of God came from the Jewish old testament.

Christians believe in an all powerful creator God - like the Jews

Christians believe in the creation stories of Genesis - like the Jews (not literally though!)

Christians believe in a personal loving God who loves his people and who asks for their love in return.

The God of Christianity is loving, merciful and forgiving. The image of God as Father (Abba) is central to the Christian understanding of God. The word Abba was used by Jesus to describe his relationship with God.

Christians feel that they have a loving paternal relationship with God. Christians believe that God revealed himself in a very unique way through his Son Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection God saved his people from Sin. Christians believe that when Jesus was taken bodily into heaven that God then communicated his message to humanity through the Holy Spirit.

Christian understanding of God is expressed through the Trinity. The father, son and holy spirit. Christians believe that there is one God expressed through three persons - all equally divine.

## God in Islam:

The God of Islam is known as Allah and is the same God as worshipped by Jews and Christians. The Qur'an is the sacred text of Islam and is believed to be the actual word of God as revealed to his prophet Muhammad in the 7th Century.

The Qur'an is very important to Muslims as it is the self revelation of Allah to his people. They believe that it is through the Qur'an that they will come to know what Allah wants of them.

Muslims believe that God is so great and other worldly that human beings will never fully know him. They believe Allah to be:

All powerful and Created all things He is more impersonal than the God of Judaism and Christianity.

Allah is incomprehensible (Muslims feel they will never fully understand him)

He is all merciful, He is Generous. They believe Nature to be Allah's greatest gift to humanity. They believe that on the last day Allah will judge them and the life that they have lived. Islam demands total submission and surrender to the will of God.