

The Interpretation of the Eschatological Portions of the New Testament.

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It is one of the characteristic features of Christianity, as well as of Judaism before it, that it has a good deal to say about the future of the world as a whole and of man as an individual. The writers of the Old Testament sometimes glorified the past, for example, the innocence of man in Eden, the character of Abraham and the patriarchs, the heroism of David, and the splendor of Solomon. But they had even more glorious expectations as to what the future would bring when the Messiah should appear and establish his Kingdom on the earth. There would then be universal righteousness, universal peace, and universal prosperity to continue without interruption while the world should stand. The time for the inbringing of this glorious period was ever indefinite and uncertain, but was always possibly at hand and might be ushered in any day, though it was commonly supposed to be preceded by great disturbances both physical and national. The prominence given to such phenomena, however, was probably owing to the desire to furnish consolation to the Jewish people in other times of national distress and suffering. These were supposed to be but the birth pangs of the new period when all their hopes should be realized and their glorious destiny accomplished.

The Old Testament has little to say about the future of the individual, and that little is of the haziest and most impalpable character. It is morally certain that the Jews believed in a future life, but the future world bulked little in their thoughts and did little to give shape or tone to their piety. The rewards and punishments they were looking for were rewards and punishments to be received in this life rather than in the life to come. The doctrine of