

As really representative of such opinion, we can only take into account the Talmudic and the recognised Midrashic literature, or the "great Midrashim." But even in these authoritative works we have first to separate all that is stray and peculiar of the nature just indicated, and to eliminate a great deal of polemical matter only uttered under provocation in the heat of controversy, and to subject the whole of it to the test of the religious consciousness of Israel.

This literature covers, as stated elsewhere, many centuries, and was produced in widely differing climes amid varying surroundings and ever-changing conditions, and was interrupted several times by great national catastrophes and by the rise of all sorts of sects and schisms.

This last circumstance — besides being productive of bitter polemics, as just hinted at — could not fail to create new "theological values," as the modern phrase is, leading, for instance, to the emphasis upon the significance of the Law and even the Oral Law and other doctrinal points, which, though questioned by none, were never before stated with such distinctness and in such a challenging manner.

The influence of the historic events may perhaps be best illustrated by the literature bearing upon the belief in the advent of the Messiah. Whatever doubt there may be as to the high antiquity of this doctrine or as to the varying phases it passed through in the early stages of its history, no such uncertainty prevails as to the opinion held by the Rabbis with