The Future and its Impact on the Present in Christian Apocalypses

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Abstract

It is well known that the Christian apocalypses attempt to influence the behavior of their audiences in the present by including promises of reward for approved behavior and threats of punishment for prohibited activities. But these works differ in the ways they elaborate these themes. This paper begins with a brief discussion of how the book of Revelation defines approved and prohibited behavior and what particular rewards and punishments are described. It then goes on to discuss the Ascension of Isaiah as a work portraying the future as a time of reward. It turns next to the depiction of the future as a time of punishment in the Apocalypse of Peter and the Apocalypse of Paul. It concludes with a brief discussion of the reception of these texts, referring to those who believe them literally and those who take them seriously but not literally.