

In my previous post I began to explain how, in 1985, while teaching a class at Rutgers on the Problem of Suffering, I came to realize that I simply didn't accept any longer most of the views of the Bible on why there was suffering in the world. But one view did continue to appeal to me, the apocalyptic view that emerged toward the end of the New Testament period, and became the view of Jesus, John the Baptist before him, the apostle Paul after him, and, in fact, most of the early Christians.

This would be a good time to review where this view came from and what motivated it. For that I am going to return to a post that I made on the blog a couple of years ago. Here I set up what apocalypticists believed (especially about suffering) by contrasting it with the view out of which it arose and to which it was reacting, the view of the traditional Hebrew prophets.

The Prophetic Perspective

We have seen that the classical prophets of the Hebrew Bible differed from one another in a number of ways, in the historical contexts that they addressed, in their manner of addressing them, and in the specifics of their messages. But there are certain common features that tie all the prophets together, especially with respect to their understanding of God, his reaction to Israel's failure to do his will, and the coming disasters that will occur as a result. If you were to ask a prophet like Amos, Isaiah, or Jeremiah why it is the people of God suffer, they would have a clear and ready answer. They suffer because ...

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