

The Eschatology of Jesus; Or, The Kingdom Come and Coming  
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The four lectures contained in this book largely deal with the issue raised in recent times by the hyper-eschatological interpretation of our Lord's kingdom-preaching, of His Messianic consciousness, in fact of His whole mind and message. This interpretation tends to shift the center of gravity in our Lord's gospel from the ethical to the eschatological, in the sense that the latter might almost seem to have possessed for Jesus' mind a supreme interest for its own sake apart from its religious and ethical implications. So far as the writer disputes the correctness of this position, we find ourselves in hearty agreement with the central thesis of his book, and believe it will render most timely service. He very skillfully points out the main fallacy of this modern view. It lies in the tacit assumption that ethical and eschatological form a logical antithesis. But in reality there is nothing to prove that in what Jesus taught concerning the eschatological coming of the kingdom and the acts or events associated with it, He was inspired by any other than the purest and deepest religious and ethical motives. The kingdom of the end is still the kingdom in which communion with God and righteousness are central and supreme. Undoubtedly the eschatological crisis contains much that cannot be resolved into purely religious and ethical processes, it contains physical and cosmical elements, and in so far it may be said to go beyond the sphere of the present kingdom which our Lord declares to have been realized in the spiritual sphere even at the time of his earthly ministry. But what there is more in the conception of the eschatological kingdom, materially considered, does not for this reason become extra-ethical or extra-religious, formally considered. It is further plain, and this we wish the author might have emphasized more than he does, that by reason of its ethical and religious significance the eschatological aspect of the kingdom possesses for Jesus supreme, absolute interest and is not a mere fringe, as it were, of His consciousness, nor a mere accidental form for expressing the truth that the religious and ethical forces must revolutionize the world. Jesus believed that nothing short of a cosmical regeneration could bring about the normal religious and ethical state in which the center of the kingdom consists. If the Weiss-Bousset-Wernle hyper-eschatological view endangers the supremacy of the ethical factor in Jesus' teaching, it must not be forgotten that the opposite extreme, that of undue depreciation of the eschatological element, may easily lead to a similar result. We do not believe that Jesus could have dropped his eschatological expectations without thereby essentially modifying the center of his ethical and religious consciousness. The absolutism of the latter stands or falls with His eschatology. This the author has not sufficiently taken into account. Another criticism we feel bound to offer concerns the author's inclination to resolve the eschatological utterances of our Lord as much as possible into mere figurative language. It is true his position where he formally puts the question, what Jesus meant by his apocalyptic language leaves the point at issue undecided: "It is obvious that some of the secondary ideas of apocalyptic are represented in the language of our Lord, and it is tempting to ask how far these secondary ideas, viewed apart from the situations that called for their use and gave them their power of appeal to receptive hearers, represented to our Lord an independent system of reality. Did He really believe in a personal Power of evil that had sway in this world, and wrought ill in the bodies and souls of men apart from their own will? Did He conceive heaven as a place above the earth . . .? Had He distinct ideas of an intermediate state of bliss and woe for disembodied spirits, and did He conceive the final state as accompanied by a bodily resurrection of all dead and a summons of all, yet alive in the flesh, to judgment executed by the Messianic Son of man coming with the clouds? Did He know of a fiery abyss, to which, in

the end, Satan and his angels, and all whose names were not written in the Book of Life, should be consigned?" The answer given to these questions is the agnostic one: "We have no means of knowing what Jesus thought about this or that element of what He always presented, and probably in His own mind always conceived, as a whole—the kingdom of God" (pp. 63, 64). It seems to us that, on this point, the author has yielded too much to the influence of Haupt, to whom all the eschatological statements of Jesus become mere imagery. In point of fact, he occasionally reveals an inclination to pass over from the agnostic position above defined to this latter view, e.g., on page 139, where, speaking of our Lord's prophecy of the fall of the Jewish nation and of the end of the world, he remarks: "Only here (i.e., with reference to the cosmical catastrophe), it seems to me, we have the right to say that to His own consciousness the words had no relation to literal fact, or, at any rate, no such relation to it as the imagery in which He depicted the destruction of Jerusalem." To us it seems extremely hazardous to posit even the possibility that Jesus may have consciously used as mere figurative language what by all others was understood literally and realistically. Of course, no one denies that there are figurative elements in His eschatological sayings as well as in other parts of His teaching. But we see no reason why they should not be recognized here by the same criteria that are usually applied to distinguish figurative from literal language. To put on a line, as possibly equally figurative, the words about entering through the straight gate and the prediction of His own coming with the clouds of heaven, as is done on p. 52, seems to us altogether unwarranted

We have the highest respect for the motive which probably underlies this shrinking on the author's part from a positive committal to the literalness of our Lord's eschatological speech. This motive appears to be, in part at least the desire to vindicate the infallibility of our Lord's teaching, which a too strenuous insistence upon the realistic interpretation might seem to put in danger with the modern mind. The author reveals a commendable and most refreshing reverence here, and even outside of the eschatological sphere, in regard to such matters as history and criticism, openly confesses that he is not ready to affirm in the easy-going manner of the day that Jesus must have thought, on such questions lying within the scientific sphere, as his contemporaries did, and where they were wrong have erred with them. But, while respecting the motive, we are afraid that the hesitation to accept our Lord's eschatological teaching at its full literal value is not as innocent a matter as it might superficially appear. After all, is not the shrinking on this point a symptom of the general modern recoil from the supernatural as such? The eschatological element in our Lord's teaching is but another name for the supernatural, and to spiritualize the former may easily become equivalent to the elimination of the latter. We do not mean to say that the author contemplates this in any sense, but that the position he occupies may be abused for such a purpose admits, in our opinion, of no doubt. Besides this, while upholding the infallibility of the Lord, the writer is able to do so at the expense only of that of the Evangelists. It is true, here also, he proceeds with considerable moderation. "There are probably no ancient reports in the world so manifestly objective and veracious as the Synoptic Gospels." "Perhaps they (the Evangelists) never really misreported a sentence taken by itself." But "it is to me, as certain as any fact in history, that the Evangelists sometimes and inevitably misunderstood Jesus." And "I would stake the entire worth of this investigation upon the assertion that they did not understand fully, and therefore partially misunderstood the mind of Jesus, in reference to the kingdom of God. They misunderstood in particular His way of thinking and speaking about its consummation" (pp. 35, 36). Here again the influence of Haupt's treatise is very perceptible. How the principle works out may be best observed in the author's discussion of the great eschatological discourse, which seems to join together the fall of the Jewish state and the end of the world. Instead

of explaining this from Jesus' participation in the well-known peculiar prophetic perspective, which overleaps intervals and marks only the outstanding crises, he attributes it to the misunderstanding of the Evangelists, who felt at the time of writing that the world was coming to an end. Still, even here we are told that there was a certain basis for the juxtaposition of the two events in the mind of Jesus Himself. During the last days of His life His conflict with the Jewish authorities developed to a point of intensity which made Him feel that on the issue depended the course of the history of the world. And this He naturally and inevitably expressed in eschatological language. Only, as stated above, the eschatological language remained to Him conscious imagery, whereas to the later writers it assumed the character of literal prediction.

The center of gravity of the book lies in the third and fourth chapters. The former deals with the consummation of the kingdom and contains much that is valuable in correction or refutation of the extreme eschatologism of Johannes Weiss and others. The fourth chapter gives an admirably lucid and succinct survey of the Son-of-man problem in its most recent linguistic phase, and argues with great cogency in favor of the historic character of this self-designation in the mouth of Jesus. As to the sense, the author assumes that Jesus on purpose chose it, because, while to Himself it had Messianic associations from the beginning, it needed not suggest such to His hearers. The peculiarity of the usage, that our Lord always speaks of the Son of man in the third person, is explained, in partial dependence on Johannes Weiss, from the fact that the Messiahship was to Jesus objective, the gift of revelation, something that He hardly dared to identify with his own subjective personality. In Weiss this hypothesis has the form that Jesus conceived of the Messiahship as something future; in other words, that the distinction between Himself and the Son of man was a distinction in the category of time.