

Retribution Beyond the Grave

In all the more developed systems of religion, and even among savage tribes, we find an expectation of retribution beyond the grave for all actions done in the present life. A good example of this widespread and deep conviction is found in a story of judgment in bk. x. of Plato's *Republic*.

The same conviction underlies the Hindu doctrine of transmigration, which asserts that in future incarnations each one will receive due recompense for all deeds of former lives. This expectation of judgment to come is evoked in man probably by the manifest inequality of retribution in the present life, looked upon in the light of the supreme majesty of the Moral Sense, which forbids us to doubt that its commands will be vindicated by due reward and punishment.

This doctrine of retribution, and of retribution beyond the grave, is taught with increasing clearness in the Old and New Testaments. In the Pentateuch we have frequent mention of rewards and punishments following obedience and sin; but these consist of material benefits to the nation as a whole. In the later books, a retribution beyond the grave comes into view.

The mysterious Book of Ecclesiastes closes with a solemn warning, "God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." This suggests irresistibly an exact retribution such as is possible only beyond the grave. Still more definitely we read in Dan. xii. 1, 2 of a time to come when "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to eternal life and some to shame and eternal abhorrence.

(The Last Things, 3rd revised ed., by Joseph Agar Beet, New York: Eaton and Mains, 1898, e-book, 2-3, Paragraph Structure Modified)