



Jesus of Nazareth

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Introduction

While it is difficult to establish the precise words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth (died c. 30 CE), apocalyptic, millenarian, and eschatological ideas about an imminent coming Kingdom of God or Heaven are likely among the earliest ideas attributed to him. Jesus shared views of some of his contemporaries about the Kingdom, including the idea that God already ruled the universe but would bring about a golden age on earth. This coming Kingdom would involve a messianic figure, supernatural intervention, the end of the Roman Empire, judgement on sinners, and the placing of Israel above all nations. Jesus and his movement believed he would take on a messianic or kingly role and understood themselves to hold prominent positions of authority in the inbreaking and coming Kingdom, including judging the restored twelve tribes of Israel. His brand of popular apocalypticism and eschatology was partly a product of land displacement in Galilee, reflected in an emphasis on the coming economic reversal and calls for those deemed rich to repent of their wealth and behaviours. As expected of popular prophetic leaders, the threat of execution loomed large. It is possible that Jesus understood himself as a martyr whose redemptive death would assuage the wrath of God but that he would be present and resurrected with others when the Kingdom came.

The Historical Jesus

Since the late eighteenth century, there have been sustained attempts to reconstruct the life and teaching of the historical Jesus (for discussion of historical Jesus scholarship, see, e.g., Paget 2024). The term 'historical Jesus' is a convenient scholarly shorthand for the endeavour to reconstruct details of Jesus's life from behind later Christian embellishments and developments, including those found in the Gospels, and to understand his ideas in their cultural context. While there are non-Christian sources which may (or may not) refer to Jesus in passing (Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96–97; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius *Lives of the Twelve Caesars: Caligula* 25; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 18.63–64), they are of limited use for reconstructing the historical Jesus. At best, they reflect perceptions about Jesus and early Christian beliefs that were already established. Instead, scholars typically rely on the canonical Gospels to get back to Jesus.

While some see value in using the Gospel of John for historical reconstruction (e.g., Anderson 2026), scholarly reconstructions of the historical Jesus are generally dependent on the first-century gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Reasons for scholars being less inclined to use John are that the gospel may have been dependent on the other gospels, extensively reflects theological issues from decades after the death of Jesus, and dramatically downplays earlier expectations of imminent eschatology (on issues surrounding John, see, e.g., Foster 2012; Crossley 2015, 48–62; Reinhartz 2018; Goodacre 2025). Mark is widely accepted as the earliest gospel and was used by Matthew and Luke. Scholars have long argued that there were other, now-lost sources underlying the gospels. A longstanding, widespread view is that Matthew and Luke had a shared source (labelled ‘Q’ in scholarship), while historical Jesus scholars who reject this hypothesis will still usually posit pre-gospel sources. The letters of Paul from the mid-first century have little information concerning the historical Jesus, though they sometimes offer possible early, potentially independent sources (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:10–12; 11:23–26). Some noncanonical sources are sometimes used in scholarship, notably the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas is typically considered of limited use and dependent on earlier gospels (Goodacre 2012; Gathercole 2014).

Reconstructing the historical Jesus from these sources is a complex task, and even the very criteria established in scholarship are full of shortcomings (Keith and Le Donne 2012). Results of this complexity include many competing reconstructions of Jesus among historians and much uncertainty about whether we can reconstruct his words and deeds. Nevertheless, some general points can be made about the likelihood of the themes that were closest to the life and time of Jesus. What follows is a basic summary of many scholarly views, with the caveat that these conclusions, while based on extensive research and argument, are estimates and contested (for a fuller summary, with bibliography, see Crossley, forthcoming). For the *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, these conclusions are, in a sense, academic, as this outline of Jesus’s life and his apocalyptic and millenarian thinking remains a familiar portrait in the history of the interpretation of Jesus as a historical figure contextualised in Galilee and Judea.

Growing Up in Galilee

The earliest birth and infancy narratives are found in Matthew and Luke and are notoriously difficult for reconstructing the early years of Jesus; indeed, it is often thought that the historical Jesus was born and raised in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem, on the grounds that the story is absent in Mark and John (both of which seem to assume Nazareth as Jesus’s homeplace—Mark 6:1–6; John 1:46–47) and that Bethlehem was creatively employed to fulfil prophecy about the line of King David (Matthew 1:1–18; 2:1–6; Luke 1:26–33; 2:4; 3:23–38; for a recent critical defence of Bethlehem as the place of Jesus’s birth, see Taylor 2025). Whatever is concluded about the infancy stories in Matthew and Luke in terms of historical accuracy, they contain potentially useful general chronological markers suggesting that Jesus was born towards the end of the first century BCE and was a known public figure by around 30 CE (Matthew 2:1, 16, 19; Luke 1:5; 3:1, 23).

And whatever is concluded about Jesus’s birth, he grew up in and was associated with Nazareth, a rural village in Galilee. Here he would have received a conventional upbringing for a Jew of his time and place, including observing dietary laws, resting on the Sabbath, hearing stories of Israel’s history, and worshipping their god daily (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). He was a craftsman or rural worker (Mark 6:3); the Greek τέκτων/*tektōn* has been translated too precisely as “carpenter” in English, and the term was used more generally to denote physical occupations (e.g., Sirach 38:24–34). Evidently, Jesus’s social status, and

perceptions others might have that he lacked the proper literacy skills, were a problem for those who expected a more conventionally educated scribe to be an authoritative teacher (see, e.g., the changes to Mark 6:1–6 in Luke 4:16–30; Matthew 13:55; cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 6:34 and the discussion in Keith 2020). For others disillusioned with established scribal authorities in Galilee, Jesus's social status was presumably received more positively (cf. Mark 1:22). For Jesus and his supporters, it seems his authority also came through visionary experiences and direct access to the divine (cf. Mark 1:23–27; 2:6–10; 3:22–30; Matthew 12:28//Luke 11:20).

As Jesus was growing up, two major building projects had some impact on Galilee. Nearby Sepphoris was rebuilt after being razed by the Romans, and a new urban centre, Tiberias, was completed around 19 CE. There would have been mixed views about these projects among Galileans, partly depending on who benefitted and who did not (or at least thought they did or did not). The first-century Jewish historian Josephus describes the building process in Tiberias, mentioning both gifts of land and the displacement of people from their land (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 18.36–38). For good or ill, building projects meant more work for Galileans, but once they were completed, they would have posed new problems about what they were to do next (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.219–222). In other words, Galileans at the time of Jesus had experienced some sharp socioeconomic changes. In this setting, we can note the ideas (including apocalyptic and eschatological ones) associated with Jesus about the fragmentation of traditional family life and the importance of loyalty to the new movement. Jesus's movement took on the role of an alternative family, with God taking on the role of the father figure (on fragmentation and alternative family, see e.g., Mark 3:20–22, 31–35; 10:29–30; Matthew 8:22//Luke 9:60; Matthew 10:34–36//Luke 12:51–53//Thomas 16:1–4; Matthew 10:37//Luke 14:26; see further, e.g., Moxnes 2003; Crossley and Myles 2023).

Prophetic Leader

The upheavals in Galilee help us understand why Jesus's movement emerged when and where it did. While there have been dissenting arguments (e.g., Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar 1993), historians typically argue that the historical Jesus was a prophetic leader of a Jewish apocalyptic and millenarian movement. It seems Jesus was, at some point, a follower of the end-times prophet John the Baptist (see the CDAMM entry on [John the Baptist](#)). As a leader of his own movement, Jesus became known as a healer and exorcist whose favoured form of teaching was through fables (what have typically been referred to as 'parables'; see now Strong 2021). The content of his teaching focused on, for instance, the establishment of God's rule on earth (referred to as the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven), ethics, and interpretations of Jewish law.

Jesus had a core group called 'the Twelve' with changing membership and prominent roles given to followers such as Simon Peter (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5–6; Acts 1:12–26). Some members of the Twelve came from the fishing community, an important network for the spread of the Jesus movement's ideas (Kloppenborg 2008; Myles 2019). Such networks included tax collectors, a group apparently of interest to the historical Jesus, and represented among the Twelve (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27; Matthew 9:9). Alongside their eschatological significance (see below), the Twelve were remembered for their involvement in removing malign spirits (Mark 6:7, 13; Luke 10:17; cf. Mark 3:14–15). There was a wider group of followers and supporters beyond the Twelve, including followers associated with exorcisms (cf. Luke 10:1–17; 1 Corinthians 15:6) and women such as Mary Magdalene who herself had an elevated role within the movement (Taylor 2014). Some of the female supporters were of a higher social status than fishermen and

workers and/or had the means to provide material support (Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:1–3; cf. Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50).

Jesus's authority and interpretations of Jewish law brought him into debate and conflict with other individuals and groups, such as Pharisees (see, e.g., Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6; 7:1–23; 10:2–12; Luke 11:39–41//Matthew 23:25–26; Luke 11:42//Matthew 23:23; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6). Jesus's claims to divine authority in casting out spirits were likewise controversial and accompanied by claims that Jesus's authority was of demonic origin (see, e.g., Mark 2:1–12; 3:20–30; Matthew 12:22–32//Luke 11:14–23; 12:10; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6). Some of Jesus's opponents in Galilee may have wanted him dead (cf. Mark 3:6), but he was not executed over these specific Galilean disagreements. While details are disputed, scholars typically argue he was most likely executed as a potentially popular agitator and thinker who overturned the tables of dove-sellers and seats of money changers in the Jerusalem Temple during the festival of Passover (Mark 11:15–18). Jerusalem was overcrowded during this festival, and tensions with the authorities ran high with the possibility for a riot ever present. Indeed, Passover itself was a celebration of liberation from slavery under Pharaoh in the distant past and was tied up with expected Jewish liberation from the Roman Empire. The authorities may have cautiously and covertly had Jesus arrested (perhaps through a betrayal, as the gospels suggest; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23) to avoid a potential riot (Mark 14:1–2), allowing Jesus to teach a while longer and share a final meal, most probably a Passover meal.

The trials of Jesus as presented in the gospels pose many difficulties for reconstructing the historical Jesus's end. The first trial scene in Mark (14:53–65), for instance, takes place at night, which was unacceptable according to Jewish law (Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.1; cf. Luke 22:66–71). Mark probably constructed a legally absurd context to show that the entire trial is an unjust farce (Bond 2012, 156). Furthermore, Mark has Jesus convicted of “blasphemy” and uses this charge to bring together the writer's preferred Christological titles (Messiah, Son [of God], Son of Man). Whatever the historical realities behind the gospel trial scenes, the most likely explanation for why Jesus ultimately ended up on a Roman cross was that he was deemed a threat to the social order. Jesus's provocative act in the Temple and beliefs about the imminent end of the Roman Empire would have been enough to convince all parties that Jesus needed to be killed as a bandit or insurrectionist (Mark 15:16, 27). It would not have taken much for the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate to allow an execution (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 302), and he and the High Priest Joseph Caiaphas worked together for many years. Rome, its client rulers, and local allies had little concern for distinguishing between popular movements advocating supernatural violence and those advocating human violence in the here and now (see, e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116–118; 20.97–98).

Wherever Jesus may have been buried, many of his followers believed he had in some way risen from the dead and appeared to them (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). These experiences played their part in the theological speculations about Jesus's significance and the spread of what became Christianity.

For a selection of the varied modern reconstructions of Jesus, see, e.g., Sanders 1985; Meier 1991; Crossan 1991; Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993; Sanders 1993; Meier 1994; Wright 1996; Theissen and Merz 1998; Meier 2001; Dunn 2003; Horsley 2003; Fiensy 2007; Hengel and Schwemer 2007; Craffert 2008; Meier 2009; Schröter 2009; Allison 2010; Casey 2010; Bond 2012; Meier 2016; Keith 2020; Meggitt 2023; Crossley and Myles 2023; Crossley and Keith 2024. For an extensive bibliography of works on the historical Jesus this century, see Massey 2023.

Apocalyptic and Millenarian Eschatology

Jesus may well have been seen as an apocalyptic thinker in the sense of experiencing or revealing knowledge of the divine and about the world (e.g., Mark 1:10–11). Nevertheless, his most famous teachings on the Kingdom of God/Heaven, while connected to ideas of revealing knowledge, are closely associated with apocalypticism and millenarianism as understood in terms of dramatic change in the world order and the establishment of a golden age (see the CDAMM entries on [Apocalypticism](#) and [Millenarianism](#)). Sayings of Jesus as presented in Mark, for instance, give us some flavour of this:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near [or: is at hand]; repent, and believe in the good news [or: gospel] (Mark 1:15)

Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with [or: in] power. (Mark 9:1)

Expectations of imminent transformation likely belong to the early Gospel material (e.g., additionally, Mark 13:30, 33–37; Matthew 10:23; 25:1–13; Matthew 6:10//Luke 11:2; Matthew 23:34–35//Luke 11:49–51; Matthew 24:42–44//Luke 12:39–40; Matthew 24:45–51//Luke 12:42–46; Luke 12:35–38; 21:34–36; cf. Mark 15:43; Luke 2:25; Thomas 21, 111). We also know that eschatological enthusiasm was a central feature of the movement in the years after Jesus's death, and that there were anxieties about eschatological predictions by the mid-first century (1 Thessalonians 4–5).

By the end of the first century and into the second, there were attempts to explain seemingly failed predictions. John, for instance, suggests end times will occur sometime in an undisclosed future. Whereas Mark, Matthew, and (to a lesser extent, perhaps) Luke regularly have Jesus mention the Kingdom of God or Heaven in reference to its expected arrival, John removes most references, leaving only two. Moreover, these two references do not refer to end times but to being “born again/from above” as a believer (John 3:3, 5; cf. John 18:36). Elsewhere, John downplays the imminent second coming as found in other gospels (e.g., Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 21) and concludes the gospel (John 21) with an explanation about why Jesus has not yet returned. Similarly, 2 Peter 3 explains that opponents mock that eschatological predictions have not come to fruition, and offers an alternative explanation for the delay:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. (2 Peter 3:8–10)

The standard explanation in scholarship is that the earlier material was full of eschatological enthusiasm

prompted by the historical Jesus, which left a problem of unfulfilled expectations, which was later addressed in texts like John and 2 Peter. It is not clear whether the historical Jesus predicted a precise date, as some scholars claim (e.g., Galbraith 2019), or whether he thought the time would be soon but undisclosed. Even so, a standard argument in historical Jesus studies is that he believed end times would take place within the lifetime of his audience.

For discussion of Jesus's eschatology, apocalypticism, and millenarianism, see, e.g., Sanders 1993, 169–88; Meier 1994, 237–506; Ehrman 1999; Fredriksen 2000, 78–89; Frey 2000, 14–22, 260–82; Allison 2010, 33–55; Casey 2010, 212–26; Wassen and Hägerland 2021. On Jesus and cross-cultural comparison of millenarianism and apocalypticism, see, e.g., Allison 1998, 78–94; Crossley 2024.

The Coming Kingdom and Messianism

Jewish millenarian thinking about the coming Kingdom at the time of Jesus involved transformation of the sociopolitical order, expectations of judgement, Israel's dominance over the nations, a Davidic king or messianic figure, and supernatural intervention (cf. Daniel 12:11–12; 1QpHab 8, 1–14 [Dead Sea Scrolls]; 4 Ezra 4:26; 2 Baruch 82:20, 85:10; see also the CDAMM entry on [Millenarianism in Ancient Judaism](#)). These ideas were built on biblical language of a coming and everlasting kingdom or empire that would replace the existing world powers and bring great blessings (Obadiah 19–21; Zechariah 14:9; Psalm 47:2–3; Daniel 7:27). Around the time of Jesus, this meant that the Roman Empire and its client rulers would fall and be replaced (see, e.g., Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 10.209–210, 268, 272–277). Such understandings of the coming kingdom typically assumed that God 1) ruled the universe but 2) would intervene in history and place Israel above all other nations (see, e.g., Daniel 2:44; 4:34). Unsurprisingly, ideas about a present and future Kingdom coexist in the teaching attributed to Jesus (see, e.g., Mark 4:26–32; Luke 16:13//Matthew 6:24; cf. Luke 13:20–21//Matthew 13:33; Matthew 13:44; 16:19; Luke 17:20–21; 22:29–30; Thomas 113).

The Twelve were expected to assume an important role in the end times. 'The Twelve' was most likely a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel and the eschatological expectations of their restoration at the time, as seen for instance in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 1QM 2:2–3, 7–8; 3:13; 5:1). A parallel saying in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:29–30 likely retained earlier sentiments, namely that the Twelve would sit on thrones judging the tribes:

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28)

I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:29–30)

Matthew and Luke clearly used and edited the saying for their own interests. But one reason why scholars

believe this saying reflects pre-gospel ideas close to Jesus is that there is no reference to or interest in the fate of gentiles or non-Jews, a major concern of the movement in the decades after Jesus's death. The fate of gentiles was otherwise an important concern for Matthew and Luke, so when passages like this have no interest in gentiles, scholars are often inclined to think that the intra-Jewish sentiments underpinning Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:29–30 are close to the historical Jesus. By contrast, when Paul addresses a comparable understanding of the future, he is more general and more reflective of his concerns about the inclusion and justification of gentiles in the movement. He refers to “the saints” who would “judge the world” (1 Corinthians 6:2).

How Jesus and those around him understood his role in the end times is much discussed in scholarship. While scholars continue to dispute the details, it is commonly argued that Jesus and his close circle believed they had God-given positions of authority as part of their message about the inbreaking and coming kingdom (cf., e.g., Mark 2:1–12; 3:22–30; Matthew 12:28//Luke 11:20;). Jesus is well known today in Christian thought as the Messiah, or Christ (from the Greek equivalent of ‘Messiah’). It is not clear whether Jesus used the formal title ‘the Messiah’ of himself as God’s anointed redeemer-king of Israel, or indeed if there was even the option for him to use the absolute title ‘*the* Messiah’ in early Jewish thinking (see further the CDAMM entries on [Messiah](#) and [Early Jewish Messiahs](#)). The title is not on Jesus’s lips in Mark, and those who use the Q hypothesis have long noted its absence from such material. Furthermore, related messianic or kingly claims, such as Jesus being the Son of David, are ambiguous in Mark (Mark 12:35–37) or can be read as a label or concept for Jews around Jerusalem to describe fellow Jews like Jesus (Mark 10:46–52; 11:9–10). Nevertheless, titles like ‘Messiah’/‘Christ’ and ‘Son of David’ were used soon after Jesus’s death (e.g., Romans 1:1–6) and by the gospel writers. Jesus was understood as incorporating kingly, priestly, and prophetic concepts associated with the language of Messiah, including at the expense of potential contenders.

There has been much debate over how to explain the limited use of the title ‘the Messiah’ in Mark and (for those who accept the hypothesis) Q, on the one hand, and its early acceptance among followers shortly after Jesus’s death, on the other. Rather than fixating on the title, we are on safer ground if we use terms like ‘messianic’ as a broad category for understanding the historical Jesus as taking on redeemer and kingly qualities (see the CDAMM entry on [Messiah](#)). Jesus would, for instance, have an elevated position with the enthroned Twelve judging the tribes of Israel, reflecting other known claims of kingly leadership associated with Jesus (e.g., Mark 15:26). Such kingly concepts were part of the culturally recognisable language of popular messianism in Jesus’s day, comparable to elevated claims made by prophetic leaders and bandits (Josephus *Jewish War* 2.57–62; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.273–278; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9). The language of popular messianism gives us another indication of why the authorities in Jerusalem could put Jesus to death as a violent subversive (cf., e.g., Mark 15:16–19).

Martyrdom

There is the likelihood that Jesus expected to be executed and that he understood his impending death as that of a martyr for his cause. Execution was an established risk facing popular prophetic and related figures, a fate suffered by Jesus’s old associate John the Baptist (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116–118). If he caused a commotion in the Temple at Passover, he must have been aware of the likely consequences. The problem of establishing how Jesus envisaged his death is difficult because the gospel writers and

others like Paul had an intense interest in the ramifications of Jesus's death, including its salvific function.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make some suggestions about how Jesus may have understood his death (see now Barber 2024). Mark 10:35–45, for instance, is a story about how two brothers from the Twelve—James and John—wanted an elevated place alongside Jesus through martyrdom, echoing Jewish martyrdom traditions about redemptive deaths assuaging the divine wrath (e.g., 2 Maccabees 7:10–13, 23, 32–38; 4 Maccabees 17:20–22; cf. Daniel 11:35; 12:2–3). Mark 10:35–45 cannot easily be seen as a creative retrospective story of martyrdom (as is sometimes argued) because only James was believed to have been executed according to the book of Acts (Acts 12:2). John, however, was recognised as one of the major figures in the movement after Jesus's death (Galatians 2:9). As the author of the book of Acts and therefore aware of James's death, the author of the Gospel of Luke tellingly does not include the names of those who wanted to become martyrs in his version of Mark 10:35–45 (Luke 22:24–27). The most likely reason is that people knew John had not been executed. In the second century, John was remembered as having lived a long life before dying in old age (Acts of John 115). It is unlikely that such a tradition would have developed if John had died the martyr's death expected in Mark 10:35–45.

Jesus's Return

In the presentation of Jesus's final Passover in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus interpreted the meal in light of his impending martyrdom:

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:22–25)

Here, we might note that the additional claim is that Jesus would be present with the coming of the Kingdom. Whether Jesus said such words is, as ever, difficult to establish. Nevertheless, this is an early understanding of Jesus that circulated independently as a story, as we see in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in the mid-first century (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). In Paul's hands, the Passover context is removed, the meal is the "Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20), and Jesus's words are used to impose discipline on believers in Corinth. Mark's version is presented as internal Jewish theology with no obvious interest in gentiles. Mark uses conventional Jewish Passover language when referring to the wine as the "blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:24; cf. Exodus 24:8), whereas Paul again looks towards the developing Christ movement and away from intra-Jewish concerns: "This cup is the *new* covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25; cf. Luke 22:19–20). One standard argument is that this story about the meal began as a Passover account concerning Jesus's martyrdom, which Paul soon reapplied to address a new situation removed from the immediate concerns of the historical Jesus.

Strikingly, Jesus predicts being present again when the kingdom comes in Mark's version; Paul's version refers to Jesus's second coming: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This difference is sometimes cited as an example of

Paul representing an understanding of eschatology that is thought to have developed after the death of Jesus, namely that Jesus would return dramatically at end times as part of the great supernatural intervention. This is usually referred to as the 'second coming' or 'parousia'. Scholarship is split on whether Jesus predicted his second coming or whether he thought he would be (for instance) resurrected with others when the Kingdom came. There are certainly gospel texts which suggest Jesus was some kind of messianic figure of the Son of Man based on the interpretation of Daniel 7:13 ("I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven"). This allusion seems clear enough in the extended eschatological discourse in Mark 13 about the fall of the Temple and predictions of various tribulations and heavenly portents; Jesus is expected to return as the "Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26; cf. 14:62). Elsewhere, the Son of Man seems to denote Jesus as a figure of great authority and an eschatological judge (Mark 8:38; cf. 14:62). But there are many notorious problems trying to establish what does and does not reflect the historical Jesus in a lengthy passage like Mark 13, including whether it was written up as a prophecy in light of later events in the first century (see the CDAMM entry on [Mark 13/Little Apocalypse](#)).

A more notorious problem still is what the phrase 'son of man' would have meant for the historical Jesus, with views ranging widely, not just over whether he used such a phrase. For instance, some argue that only those usages reflecting a non-titular Aramaic idiom with reference to the individual and a broader group (e.g., 'a man in my position'; cf., e.g., Mark 2:27–28, and compare the editing in Matthew 12:8 and Luke 6:5) go back to the historical Jesus. Others, however, stress that the 'Son of Man' was a title Jesus used for himself as a messianic figure. For a range of views on the son of man problem, see Reynolds 2024.

Economic Reversal

The upheavals in Galilee as Jesus was growing up may have marked his thinking about eschatological transformation. There is a strong, concentrated interest across the gospels for the wealthy to give up their wealth and transform their behaviour before the coming kingdom and judgement. These ideas are coupled with a concern for those at the bottom of the social order who will eventually be given bountiful blessings (see, e.g., Mark 10:17–31; Matthew 6:24//Luke 16:13; Matthew 6:25–34//Luke 12:22–31; Matthew 11:8//Luke 7:25; Matthew 22:1–14//Luke 14:12–24; Luke 4:18; 6:24–25; 12:13–21; 16:19–31; cf. Thomas 64). This thinking belongs to a strand of early Jewish reward theology which challenged the competing idea that material wealth in the here and now was a sign of divine blessing. Instead, the abundant blessing would be shown in the end times and in the afterlife, with wealth in the here and now a sign of wickedness and likely damnation (e.g., 1 Enoch 96:4; 103:5–8; Psalms of Solomon 5:16; CD 4:15–19 [Dead Sea Scrolls]). Jesus's call for the repentance of "sinners" is part of this understanding (e.g., Mark 2:15–17; 14:41; Matthew 11:19//Luke 7:34; Luke 7:37; 18:13; 19:1–9). The term 'sinner' was typically used to describe those deemed lawbreakers and those who act as if there were no God. If the socioeconomic status of sinners is mentioned, it refers to wealthy and corrupt oppressors; hence, sinners are associated with the often-despised tax collectors in the gospel tradition. By calling for the repentance of sinners (based on Ezekiel 33), Jesus was in a minority tradition, as the dominant view (at least as far as can be established) was that persuading such people to change their ways was both dangerous and pointless. This may explain why Jesus's association with sinners caused some controversy (see further Crossley 2015, 96–133; Crossley and Myles 2023, 116–21).

Jesus's actions in the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 11:15–18) may also be part of this understanding of economic reversal. Tellingly, Jesus is described as driving out those buying and selling, and overturning the tables of moneychangers and the seats of dove-sellers. These sentiments echo Jewish claims that the Temple and its priesthood had descended into corruption, exploitation, and greed, including critiques of the excessive cost of sacrificial doves for poorer members of society (in the Dead Sea Scrolls: 1QpHab 8:8–12; 9:4–5; 10:1; 12:10; 4QpNah 1:11; CD 6:16, 21; in Josephus's works: *Life* 63; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.181, 206–207; in the later rabbinic literature: Mishnah *Keritot* 1:7; Tosefta *Menahot* 13:21–22). As is commonly argued in scholarship, Jesus's actions in the Temple likely functioned either as a conditional threat or an expectation that the Temple would inevitably be destroyed. While the evidence is unclear, it is possible that Jesus expected the Temple to be rebuilt with the coming Kingdom (cf. Mark 14:55–59; John 2:18–22).

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