

I have been arguing that during his lifetime Jesus had come to think that he was the messiah of God, the one who would be king when God intervened in history to overthrow the forces of evil and establish a good kingdom here on earth. A number of readers have asked how or why he would come to that view about himself. I'm afraid the answer is that I don't know, and either does anyone else.

There are, of course, lots of theories, some of which are no doubt held by different people on this blog, for example, Christians often say that it was because he really is the coming messiah and that God had told him this. Others might say that he had some kind of visionary experience that led him to think this (at his baptism? During his 40 days in the wilderness? Some other time?). Others might think that this is a rather exalted view to have of oneself as a lower class peasant in the remote backwaters of Galilee - that you would be the king of Israel, or even of the entire earth - and might suggest, then, that he had a megalomaniacal streak. I myself really don't know.

What I am pretty sure about is that Jesus had a highly exalted view about what was going to happen in the imminent future - within his own generation - and that both he and his disciples were going to play a significant role in it. When they soon-to-arrive kingdom appeared with the advent of the Son of Man, they would be made the rulers of this kingdom. He himself would be appointed to be king. This would happen very soon. His disciples bought into this vision of the future. The thirteen of them would be exalted in the very near future.

When thinking about the early Jesus movement, nothing can be more important than realizing just how radically and thoroughly these fervent expectations and hopes were shattered by the events that happened at the end of Jesus' life. The followers of Jesus were...

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