

I now can mount a second argument for why Jesus almost certainly called himself the messiah during his lifetime. Remember: by that I do not mean that Jesus wanted to lead a military rebellion against the Romans to establish himself as king. On the contrary, I think Jesus was not a supporter of a “military solution.” Jesus was an apocalypticist who believed that God himself would take action and do what was needed - overthrow the evil ruling authorities in a cataclysmic show of power and destroy all that was opposed to himself, and so bring in a good, utopian kingdom on earth. And Jesus would be made the king.

I don't need here to give the extensive reasons for thinking that Jesus held to this kind of apocalyptic view in general - I've talked about it at length both in a number of my books and on the blog. The question here is the more narrow one: did Jesus think he would be the king of the coming kingdom? I have given one strong reason for thinking so: he taught his disciples that they would themselves be seated on thrones as rulers in the future kingdom.

Someone on the blog has asked why that means Jesus himself would be king over them. It's a good question. The answer is that we have to think in terms of what a first century person in the Roman empire thought a kingdom was. Kingdoms have kings. They don't have twelve kings. That would be twelve kingdoms. Every kingdom and empire in antiquity had one ruler (until the Tetrarchy; but that's a completely other story). Often they had rulers under them: client kings, administrators, governors, and so on. But ultimately there was one king.

That's what Jesus appears to be imagining the kingdom of God like. There would be a king. And under him twelve other rulers for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. So who would be the solitary king? The only reason the twelve would rule is because they followed and obeyed their lord and master Jesus. He ruled them now. He would rule them then. He would be the king.

And now for another reason for thinking so. It is beyond any real doubt that...

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