I have explained how the idea of resurrection arose within early Judaism, and now I want to talk about the idea of afterlife in the teachings of Jesus. To begin with, I need to stress that when Jesus talked about the coming kingdom of God – the core of his apocalyptic message – he was *not* referring to what happens to a person’s soul after she or he dies.

Here is how I explain Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom in my first-ever trade book for a popular audience, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*

The very first thing that Jesus is recorded to have said in our very earliest surviving source involves an apocalyptic pronouncement of the coming Kingdom of God. In Mark’s Gospel, after being baptized by John and tempted by Satan in the wilderness, in neither of which is he recorded as having said anything, Jesus comes into Galilee with an urgent message:

> The time is filled up and the Kingdom of God is almost here; repent and believe in the good news! (Mark 1:15)

I take this to be an adequate summary of what Jesus himself actually preached. The saying about “time being filled up” is an apocalyptic image. Recall that for apocalypticists there were two ages of history – the present evil age that was running along its predetermined course and the glorious age to come in which God would establish his sovereignty once and for all. For Jesus, the time of this age was all but complete; the bottom of the sand clock was nearly filled. This age was near its end and the new Kingdom was almost here. People needed to prepare by turning to God and accepting this good news.

Later Christians, of course, took this very term “good news” and ...

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