From Lictors to Apostles: Jesus, Early Christianity, and the Roman Empire

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Most scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity claim that it was a major part of Jesus' message to oppose the Roman rule that plagued him and his Jewish community during the reign of Tiberius, by teaching of and organizing a spiritual kingdom among his followers, which concerned Roman officials and subsequently led to his public execution. Just prior to the ministry of Jesus, a handful of Roman authors articulate the history of the building of the Roman Empire, which in some cases closely paralleled the New Testament accounts of the structuring and building of the Christian kingdom of God. In this thesis, I will seek to answer the following question: If it was Jesus' message to oppose Roman rule by setting up this spiritual "Kingdom of God," why does there exist this ideological and structural parallel between the Christian message and Roman systems? I will argue in this thesis that it may be the case that Jesus is interested in some kind of social structure that is not just simply applicable to a heavenly kingdom. Whether or not Jesus and early Christians intended this to appeal to the Roman sensibility for the spread of Christianity, I will show how this parallel message may have functioned in this way.