

The Message of Jesus in the Light of Early Judaism

Jesus repeatedly emphasized that he came to reveal to the people the truth about the existence of the Creator's world and what it wants from the people. He said that man is connected to this other, non-material world through his soul – the only immortal part that was given to him by God. Jesus considered his primary goal to be the salvation of peoples' souls. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served" – stated Jesus – "but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Clarifying the goal of his mission, he said: "For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47). But saving the peoples' souls and atoning them could be done only through their repentance, for which many were not ready. The ability to deeply and sincerely repent, and have strong faith in God was the very criterion that divided the people into the potential righteous and sinners – the righteous whose souls would deserve the higher world (kingdom of God) and, on the other hand, the sinners whose souls could end up in more terrible worlds (Gehenna). Telling of the necessity of separating the true believers from the hypocrites, Jesus warned: "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division... For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 12:51; 19:10; Matthew 10:35).

But who did Christ come to save? To this question, Jesus gave an unequivocal and very complete answer: "I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners" (Mark 2:17). Did he mean all the sinners of our world? Jesus again answers clearly: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Furthermore, Christ compared his brethren, the Judeans, to children, and pagans to dogs. Such a harsh statement about the non-Judeans was explained by the fact that in those times the Jewish people were the only ones in the world who professed monotheism and were the light of true faith among the ubiquitous paganism and idolatry. At the same time, Jesus admitted that salvation awaits even the non-Jews, should they possess a deep and sincere faith in God. Later, already in the second century, when the Gentiles began to make up the absolute majority in Christian communities, the copyists added the following phrase in the Gospel of John: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

The entire mission of Jesus was accompanied with miracles that carried an exclusively positive character. Jesus cured the terminally ill, brought the dead to life, saved the dying, and fed the hungry. He did not punish or ruin anyone, even those who persecuted him and attempted to kill him, despite the fact that the strength he possessed could easily destroy any of his enemies and opponents. It is no coincidence that the Gospels mention the fig tree that dried up after Jesus cursed it. This is the only instance of Christ's supernatural abilities that carries destructive character. And it is given with a purpose. The evangelists wanted to emphasize that Jesus had power not only over everyone and everything, but also could employ it however he wanted.

Yet he never used it for destructive purposes, even when it was needed for saving his own life. Why? Because the moral that he preached excluded any violence. It was because of this that Jesus did not correspond to the traditional portrayals of the Messiah, who was to achieve military victories over the enemies of the Jewish people and restore the kingdom of David. Jesus did not become the peoples' hero and their commander-king. On the contrary, before him lay a much more important task: become the spiritual Savior and shepherd of the people of Israel. This was the original purpose of Jesus's entire mission. And he gave his earthly life not for the redemption of abstract sins of all mankind, but for the annunciation of the higher world and for the preaching about the path for man's salvation from our material world. Jesus could not allow himself to achieve freedom by using his supernatural powers for destructive purposes. This was clear from the beginning, even during the period of his wanderings with his disciples. For example, when they, the Judeans, were traveling to Jerusalem, the Samaritans did not take them in or offer rest in their homes; angry, Jesus's closest disciples, James and John, wanted to punish the people, but Jesus forbade them to do so, saying that the Son of Man came not to bring ruin to man's souls, but to save them (Luke 9:53-56). Thus, he once again confirmed that the world that sent him excluded any use of his power for negative purposes. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" – reminded Jesus – "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:10-11).

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus began his preaching at around thirty years of age and led it for a fairly short time – only two or three years. The main postulates of his message to the people break down to the following: our material world presents itself as only a temporary and secondary home for us. The primary is the other, immaterial world of our Creator. Trying to be clear to the people, Jesus called this world the "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven". Man should strive not for prosperity and success in our earthly world, but for admittance to our Creator's world. But very few, truly righteous people are honored with the kingdom of God. The path to this kingdom lies through repentance and acceptance of the new moral, which comprises unconditional love for others, including one's enemies. It is diametrically different from the Old Testament's moral – "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," and it is not by chance that this new set of principles still has not developed in our world.

Jesus taught that predetermination rules the material world; therefore, any attempts of man to arrange earthly life in his own way are doomed to fail from the start. On the basis of predestination, Jesus called for non-resistance to evil and obedience to the authorities, as man would not achieve anything with his opposition and would only cause irreparable damage to his soul. The soul – a special non-material substance that gives life to the body – presents itself as the most important aspect of man; his body is earthly dust and is merely a means for improving and perfecting the soul. In the other, immaterial world, which is the primary for man, peoples' souls will not be divided between men and women, parents and children, husbands and wives. The souls of the righteous (depending on the degree of their

moral perfection) will be rewarded in the kingdom of our Creator, while the souls of the sinners will end up in worlds much more terrible than the earthly one. Our material world is a world of suffering, pain, and temptation, existing only for the improvement of our souls.

The real master of our earthly world is a certain “prince” that rules not according to the moral of the kingdom of God, but by the laws of matter. Power over us (so that our souls may be tempted) is given to him by the Creator himself, but it is temporary and limited. Our earthly home, in its way a purgatory of souls, inevitably will come to an end, but no one, other than God, knows the time of it. Therefore, the people, so as not to damage what’s most valuable – their immortal souls, should always be ready for the apocalypse, and must care not for multiplying wealth, but for leading a righteous way of life.

Jesus considered himself to be the Son of Man, playing the role of mediator between the people and the kingdom of God. It is no coincidence that he was called to be among the Judean people, as they were only monotheistic people of that time and were thus most prepared for understanding the moral of our Creator’s world. Admittedly, Jesus warned his disciples and followers that he was not the Messiah from whom the people expected victories over the enemies of Israel and the restoration of the kingdom of David. He came for another reason: to call upon the people to repent and in this way save their souls. “Unless you repent, you will all perish” – in this reminder and warning was the essence of Jesus’s message (Luke 13:3,5).

Jesus’s preaching from the point of view of Judaic laws

In Christian literature there formed a point of view that Jesus’ preaching principally differed from the ideas and practice of Judaism of that time. In reality, the texts of the canonical Gospels do not confirm this. Moreover, the Gospel texts testify that Jesus firmly stood on the ground of Judaism’s laws, carrying them out not formally, like his critics did, but essentially. It should not be forgotten that Judaism at the time of Jesus was not one monolithic teaching, but several relatively different religious directions. In some instances, Jesus’s preaching converged with and even was identical to the views of the Pharisees, in others – had much in common with the Essenes. Jesus did not revoke the laws of Judaism, but taught that they be honestly and sincerely adhered to. This is best shown by the Gospel texts: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” – said Jesus – “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus also acknowledged the authority of the Sanhedrin – the supreme Judean court. The fact that Christ was ready to turn over to the court “anyone who is angry with his brother,” attests to his respect towards this supreme religious and judicial authority (Matthew 5:22). Thus, any attempt to separate Jesus from Judaism is unsubstantiated. Much more interesting is another issue – what Jesus brought into Judaism and how he interpreted Moses’s laws.

The texts of the canonical Gospels delineate three tendencies in Jesus’s approach to the laws of Judaism. The first of these tendencies manifested itself in

much stricter demands of adhering to several key rules of the Written Torah (Pentateuch). The following are only a few examples of Jesus's sterner view towards the fulfillment of the Mosaic laws: "You have heard" – reminded Jesus – "that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22).

Jesus was equally intransigent to adultery: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:27-29).

Divorce was a matter that Jesus treated more strictly than Moses: "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32). Jesus was convinced, "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6). He saw only one reason for divorce – adultery, and when the Pharisees reminded him that the lawgiver, Moses himself, permitted divorce, Jesus countered with the following: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8). Jesus's approach to divorce was so strict that even his disciples could not but notice: "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." But Jesus gave them a noteworthy answer: "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given" (Matthew 19:10-11).

Jesus held the same uncompromising position regarding all oaths. "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

The second tendency is associated with Jesus's attitude to the laws of the so-called Oral Torah, which were later recorded in the Mishnah, then in the Talmud, and finally, in the twelfth century, in the Halakhah. Unlike the rules of the Written Torah (Pentateuch), Moses never recorded them anywhere; however, the Pharisees claimed that the lawgiver passed them on to the Levites in oral form. It remains unclear as to why Moses deemed necessary to record one set of laws, but not the other. The priests of Jerusalem's Temple, representing another trend in Judaism – the Sadducees – did not recognize the Oral Torah and considered it to be the law-creation of the Pharisees themselves. Contrary to the Sadducees, Jesus accepted the laws of the Oral Torah, but unlike the Pharisees, believed that they came not from God, but from the people,

and thus treated them fairly liberally. In particular, he approached very flexibly the laws of Sabbath observance, supposing that man was not created for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. The Gospels give many examples of this. “At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.’ He answered, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests’” (Matthew 12:1-4). Jesus’s opinion is better expressed in the episode in which a sick man is healed on the Sabbath, in the synagogue: “He went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ He said to them, ‘If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other” (Matthew 12:9-13). The Gospel of John mentions another statement of Jesus on this occasion: “Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man’s whole body on the Sabbath?” (John 7:23).

It is necessary to say that the question of what to do during Sabbath – on the day of rest and prayer – was really important for the Jews. The Pharisees’ ideological predecessors – the Hasideans (“pious”) in their reverence for the Sabbath went to the point of allowing their enemies to kill them unpunished during the Maccabean wars, fearing that any opposition might desecrate the sacred day. Jesus separated the laws of Judaism into those given by God and those added by man. While he demanded that the former be strictly followed, the latter should be adhered to only when possible and without losing common sense.

Finally, another distinction in Jesus’s approach to the laws of Judaism was the preaching of a completely new moral, sharply different from that of the Old Testament. This moral’s principles had their roots in neither the Written, nor Oral Torah, and were, as Jesus stated, the reflection of the moral from the world of our Creator. Addressing the people with the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:38-42).

From this principle logically flowed another: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and

the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ...Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-46,48).

Jesus put special emphasis on forgiveness. His answer to Peter, his closest disciple, is very characteristic of this. When the latter asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:21-22). The ideas of forgiveness, mercy, unconditional love, and non-resistance to evil were unquestionably a new trend in Judaism of that time; they witnessed, apart from the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, the appearance of another religious direction – the so-called "Nazarenes"; admittedly, it formed completely only after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God

The Judaism of Jesus's time had very vague ideas about the afterlife. Moreover, the Sadducees – priests of the Temple of Jerusalem and direct descendants of the Aaronites – completely denied its existence. Unlike them, the Pharisees believed that after one's death, the soul transitioned to another, immaterial world; they did not know, however, in what form it existed there. The Old Testament practically does not mention anything about the world existing beyond the boundary of human life – and probably, not by chance. "You set a boundary they cannot cross" – states one of the biblical psalms, admitting that man will never be able to comprehend the depth of the Lord's intentions (Psalm 104:9). Our Creator initially set some limits for the breadth of man's knowledge, and one can only assume that this was done in the interests of humanity itself. Nevertheless, an episode from the life of the Israelite king Saul sheds some light on early biblical views of the afterworld: Saul, on the eve of the fatal battle with the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, decided to summon the soul of the prophet and judge Samuel, in order to learn about his fate. But it would have been better if he had not asked at all, as he received a terrible answer: "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (I Samuel 28:19). And so, in ancient Israel there existed wizards and sorceresses who summoned the souls of the deceased, but – and this is noteworthy – Yahwist priests, referring to the will of God, not only refused to do this themselves, but also categorically forbade others to perform such an act, deeming it paganism and sin. It is no coincidence that Saul had difficulty finding a woman who would call upon the souls of the dead, as he himself, at the insistence of the high priest, ordered the persecution and extermination of such individuals. Early and late Judaism alike permitted people to communicate only with God – either directly with Him, or through His intermediaries (prophets, for instance). The same position in unchanged form passed along to Christianity.

Jesus was the first who brought us some knowledge of the afterworld, and not from pagans and idolaters, but from the kingdom of God. He made it clear that in man, the "dust of the earth", there is only one immortal part – his soul, which, upon

the end of his life, transitions to the immaterial world. But to imagine the soul's stay in this other world as a continuation of earthly life would be completely wrong. Being tempted by the Sadducees, who did not believe at all in the existence of souls and the afterlife, Jesus answered them: "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). Jesus warned that in the "kingdom of Heaven" or "kingdom of God" – he thus called the immaterial world, trying to be more easily understood by the people – many of the first from our earthly world would be the last, while the last would be the first. "What people value highly is detestable in God's sight... So the last will be first, and the first will be last... Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (Luke 16:15; Matthew 20:16; 21:31-32).

Jesus, attempting to reach the level of his listeners (which was extremely low), schematically divided the afterworld – where peoples' souls go – into two parts: one gave "eternal life", while the other – "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46). He best conveyed the idea of the different fates that awaited the righteous and the sinners in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man, having received all the good already during his lifetime, suffers after his death in hell, while the righteous Lazarus, who only came across evil in his earthly life, is comforted by "Abraham's side." Between the first and second is "a great chasm that has been set in place", one that cannot be crossed (Luke 16:19-26). This parable speaks of two things at once: first, about the inevitability of reward for one's good deeds and retribution for sins; second, that reward and retribution usually come only in the other, immaterial world.

"The Lord - God of the living, not the dead"

Speaking of man's connection with the Lord's incorporeal world, Jesus actually added new input to previous biblical views of the soul. He rethought a very renowned biblical phrase: "The Lord – God of the living, not the dead." The ancients were convinced man's death interrupts his connection with God. The following psalm of King David is very characteristic of this: "Turn, Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave?" (Psalm 6:4-5). Early biblical authors believed that death put an end not only to man's relationship with God, but to God's power over people too: "Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?" (Psalm 88:10-11). The meaning of these psalms boils down to the fact that the deceased do not know God and cannot praise him, while the Lord is deprived of the opportunity to perform miracles over them. It was because of this belief that the early authors of the Bible asked for their lives to be extended, so that they could continue giving praise to God. Jesus changed this phrase, giving it a different meaning: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive" (Luke 20:38). Jesus meant that for God, all are living – even those who had concluded their earthly paths long ago; it is not

about the dust of the earth – that is, the physical body – but rather about the soul, which remains in his hands and under his power even after one’s death, and which continues its existence in the immaterial world. In this way, Jesus emphasized that for God, the corporeal shell of the soul does not matter at all, and that this shell merely constitutes temporary, material “clothing”, which can repeatedly change.

Jesus was forced to reckon with the fact that his listeners comprised mostly illiterate, common people of Galilee; therefore, he tried to talk in parables and simplify as much as possible any abstract concepts. In spite of this, his statements about peoples’ souls being in the kingdom of God indicate that these immortal, immaterial substances lose over time the personalities and memories individuals had. As a result, the division of people into men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children – basically all family ties, characteristic of our earthly existence, are totally absent in the immaterial world. Souls of relatives who left with a large interval in time will not be able to recognize each other in the afterworld. However, if they achieved a similar degree of moral perfection on earth, they will stay together on the same level in the immaterial world. Attempting to explain all this to the people, Jesus used to say: “My Father’s house has many rooms” (John 14:2).

Who rules our world?

Already the ancients noticed that they live in a world dominated by evil. Times changed, rulers were replaced, but evil remained. The first authors of the Bible talk about this with pain: “Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts... The wicked, who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race” (Psalm 12:1-2,7-8). People long wondered and asked the question: could our world be from God, if there is so much evil and injustice in it? The apostle James (brother of Jesus) wrote sharply: “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). Could this have been said, if our world was truly controlled by God?

Another apostle, John, testified that our earthly world, in which we live, is not from God: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world” (I John 2:15-16). The apostle divided all people into two unequal parts: the absolute majority, who “are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them...” and the select few who are “from God.” But one who is part of this select few is much greater than the one belonging to the majority. “We know – stated John – that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (I John 4:5; 5:19).

Jesus separated himself and his disciples from the surrounding world, as it was incapable of accepting the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, “because it

neither sees him nor knows him” (John 14:17). On the night before his arrest, Jesus warned his disciples, telling them to be brave: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!” (John 16:33). He said that in him they will have peace. Moreover, in his prayer to the Father, Jesus unequivocally expressed his attitude to our world: “I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours... They are not of the world, even as I am not of it (John 17:9,16).

Jesus repeats the same thing to his followers: “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19). Jesus’s openness in opposing himself to our world was noted by his disciples: “Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, ‘But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?’” And Jesus replied: “My peace I give you” (John 14:22, 27).

In this way, Jesus makes it clear that the world in which we live is not from God, and that if we wish to enter his kingdom, we can arrive there only through him. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

But if our material world, brought into existence like everything by one Creator, is not controlled by Him, then who is its real master and why was it given to him by God Himself?

Jesus gave an answer to the first part of the question only on the night before his arrest. He told his disciples: “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the **prince of this world** now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear” (John 16:7-12).

And so, our material world is controlled by a certain prince, who is already condemned by the Lord. But this is not the only time that Jesus mentions who rules our world. On the eve of the end of his earthly mission, Jesus again addressed his disciples: “I will not say much more to you, for the **prince of this world** is coming. He has no hold over me” (John 14:30).

If this prince, the ruler of our earthly lives, has nothing in common with Christ, then how can we say that our world is from God? Even if our material world was initially created by the Lord, the issue remains: it is not controlled by Him. But why are we given into the power of a certain “prince”, whose laws are as different from God’s commandments, as our earthly world is from the kingdom of God?

Jesus responded to this second part of the question in his preachings, calling upon the people **to repent** – as a means of salvation from the rule of this prince, and as the only path to the kingdom of God. Jesus often reminded that for God, our bodies – the corporeal shells made of earth’s dust – carried no importance; what mattered to Him were the special, immaterial substances that we call souls. It is this immortal part that fills with life the material body, and leaves it lifeless upon departing. Only

this special, spiritual energy is of interest to the Creator, who, with its help, is transforming the universe. Our material world, like our earthly civilization, was created primarily for the improvement of these spiritual substances. By nature, however, our souls can only improve through suffering, torment, and struggle. Conflicts, wars, revolutions, social collisions – all this is a necessary background for personal stress and moral pain, which make possible qualitative development in our souls – an essential requirement put forth by God. Yet people are not only tested with pain and suffering, but also tempted with power, wealth, and success. The fate of those who failed to resist earthly blessings is not enviable: their souls are doomed to severe suffering in their new body shells. Morally perfect souls (the righteous) do not return to our terrible, material world; they remain in Jesus's kingdom of God. If souls undergo negative development that leads to moral degradation, they are sent to worlds more terrible than our own – to Gehenna ("Burning Hell"), as Jesus had talked about. But the fate of the absolute majority is to be sent back, to our earthly world – the purgatory of souls, whose master is the very prince that Jesus had mentioned. Apparently, the evolution of our souls would not have been possible without this prince and the blatant injustice, meanness, and temptations of his world. This is the purpose of the prince of darkness, and it is for this that he received his power from God. But, as Jesus had warned, the Lord has already condemned this prince, and so the latter's rule is temporary – till the end of our world. Moreover, his control is limited, as sincere and passionate prayer to God may overrule the prince's will. Notable are the words of the only prayer known to us – the Lord's Prayer – that Jesus had given to his disciples. As it says: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). These words admit the fact that God does not rule our material world, which is why we are calling upon Him to intervene and spread His own power over it. And again, the same prayer asks: "...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13) – that is, it asks for freedom from the rule of the prince of darkness, who controls us. We appeal to the Creator because it was he who made all the known and unknown (to us) worlds and reigns over this very prince: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen" (Doxology. Didache 8:2; Episcopal BCP).

People, like the entire material world, do not live nor can live by the laws of the kingdom of God. Only a select few are able to do so. But in order to enter the kingdom of God, it is necessary, according to the apostle Paul, to live by the spirit, not the flesh. "Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

On non-resistance to evil and authority

If our earthly world – one of suffering and pain – is merely a tool for improving human souls, then both evil and the evil prince's rule are inevitable and necessary. In that case, resisting the rule of the prince and his servants would mean going against the will of God, who had created our world as it is. On the other hand, peoples' stay in this earthly world entails being under the laws of the "prince of darkness", which will

never allow justice and truth to triumph; thus, there is no sense in fighting for what is, in principle, unattainable in the material world. For destroying one injustice, people involuntarily create another. Furthermore, any resistance to offenders would lead one to commit no less evil (than those very wrongdoers) and may inflict an irreparable blow to his soul. Bearing in mind that our material world is ephemeral and transitory, Jesus reminded that people should care not about their bodies, which were destined to turn into dust, but about their immortal souls, and should avoid everything that could make it difficult to reach the kingdom of God. In a similar way, any disobedience to the authorities threatened to result in violence, which could aggravate the fate of one's soul. In this lies the main reason why Jesus rejected any resistance to evil. Instead, he proposed to defeat evil through repentance and love. He spread unconditional love not only to friends and neighbors, but to offenders and enemies as well, preaching that only in this way, would it be possible to enter the kingdom of God, as well as accelerate the end of the earthly world and the evil prince's power over it.

What's more difficult to understand, is Jesus's attitude to the Romans in Judea. None of the canonical Gospels contain any clear remarks of Jesus on this matter. However, there is an episode where Jesus, tempted by the scribes, unambiguously speaks in favor of payment of taxes. "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" – he states (Luke 20:25). But payment of taxes does not yet entail blind obedience to Roman authorities. Furthermore, biblical scholars specializing in the study of evangelical texts, believe that this entire episode was a mere addition made by later editors of the New Testament works. Yet the question remains: what was Jesus's attitude to Rome?

Unlike his disciples and the apostles of early Christianity, Jesus tried to avoid expressing his opinion of the Romans. Given the heated political atmosphere in Judea of that time, voicing one's thoughts on the matter was unsafe. The Judean people hated the Roman occupiers and their appointed local authorities. Galilee, the birthplace of Jesus, was the main hearth of the Jewish resistance; Roman procurators had to call reinforcements from Syria on more than one occasion, in order to organize "sweeps" of places native to Jesus. Condemning the authorities was as dangerous as supporting them. In the first case, there was a high threat of clashing with the Romans; in the second – with their own people. However, judging by the spirit of Jesus's preaching, he could not call for revolt against Rome or disobedience to its appointees. Those historians who assumed that Jesus was a failed leader of the Jewish Resistance, were greatly mistaken (Hyam Maccoby, *Revolution in Judea: Jesus and the Jewish Resistance*, 1981). In reality, Jesus, who called for the second cheek to be substituted for the first when the latter was beaten, – that very Jesus who urged the people to pray for their offenders and enemies – could not, in any way, enter into conflict with the authorities. In this respect, we can completely trust the words of his closest disciple, the apostle Peter: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right". Furthermore, Peter excluded any disobedience in principle: "Slaves, in reverent

fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God” (I Peter 2:13-14, 18-20).

When calling upon the first Christians to submit before the evil of our world, Peter always gave the example of his Teacher: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (I Peter 2:23).

Jesus – an apocalyptic?

The early biblical writers already understood that the earthly world surrounding us was not eternal and, sooner or later, would come to its end. One can only be surprised at the insight and depth of thought of those, who almost three thousand years ago, addressing God, wrote the following words: “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Ps. 102:25-27).

The thought of the apocalypse – that is, the inevitable end of our material world – arose in the Bible very long ago, long before the appearance of Jesus. But only during the times of Jesus did this idea begin to rapidly spread and become clearly expressed: the people started to await the end of the world and the coming of the Messiah during their lifetimes. Those who believed that the end of our earthly world would come very soon were called apocalyptics. Such were John the Baptist, the disciples of Jesus, the apostle Paul, and, generally, all of the first Christians. This is best demonstrated by their own words.

Here is what the apostle James, the brother of Jesus, wrote to the first Christian communities: “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near” (James 5:8). Jesus’s closest disciple, the apostle Peter, thought just the same: “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray” (1 Peter 4:7). A similar idea was expressed by John the Evangelist, author of the Gospel and of three canonical letters: “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

John the Evangelist was the author of another New Testament book, the Book of Revelation, where he similarly showed himself to be a convinced apocalyptic, who awaited the fast-approaching end of the world and second coming of the Messiah. “Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy... Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will

give to each person according to what they have done” (Rev. 22:10-12). And finally, so that no one doubts the fast-approaching end of the world and Jesus’s second coming, John ends his book of prophecies with the following phrase: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

And so, Christ’s circle and all his followers believed in the fast-approaching end of the world and the coming of the Messiah. But what did Jesus think of this? Was he too an apocalyptic? The majority of biblical scholars believe that he was, but the texts of the canonical Gospels do not allow such an unequivocal conclusion. The problem is that the Gospel authors, writing of Christ 40-70 years after his crucifixion, mixed Jesus’s statements on two completely different events that were destined to happen.

The first was the prophecy of the impending destruction of the Temple and fall of Judea. Jesus did not indicate the time of when it would happen, but he knew for sure that it was to occur during the lifetime of his generation. “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Luke 21:32). And, indeed, the Judean War, destruction of the country, and banishment of the people from their homeland, all occurred around 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

Second was the prediction of the nearing end of the world and the second coming of the Son of Man, who would judge everyone. And in this case, Jesus, in contrast to false prophets, admits that he does not know the exact date of the apocalypse: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matthew 24:36,42). By “keeping watch”, Jesus meant the righteous way of life, prayer, fasting – everything that makes man morally prepared for the apocalypse.

Still during his life, Jesus tried to separate his predictions of these two, completely different events: the destruction of Jerusalem and Judea, and the end of the world. “When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, **but the end will not come right away**” (Luke 21:9). Due to the distance in time and, more importantly, the transfer of information through second, third, and even fourth hands, the words of Christ about the different – in their significance – events were completely mixed, as actually were many other episodes from the lives of Jesus and his disciples. Thus suffered not only the sequence of events, but also the integrity of Jesus’s statements. This incomplete and inaccurate narrative, combined with the mixing in chronology, was already present in the first original texts of the canonical Gospels. For instance, the Gospel of Luke, having taken from Mark’s Gospel Jesus’s warning of horrible disasters that would befall Judea (by that was meant the Jews’ Great Revolt against Rome), used it as a prophecy about the end of the world (Luke 17:26-29). Still, all this is nothing compared to the distortions added to the Gospels by copyists in the second century.

The biblical scholars claiming that Jesus was an apocalyptic always cite the following words of Christ from the Gospel of Luke: “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27).

They interpret this statement as undoubtable proof that Jesus believed in the impending end of the world, which would already occur during the lives of some of his disciples. However, another interpretation of these words is possible, namely: there are people capable of achieving such righteousness, that their souls will be worthy of the kingdom of God still during their earthly lives. Moreover, the immortal soul is the only part that connects man to God's world and belongs to him, while the souls of the righteous already represent the grains of the kingdom of God. Talking in favor of a similar interpretation is another of Jesus's statements from the Gospel of Luke: "Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20-21). After this, can Jesus be considered an apocalyptic?

Son of Man

Who did Jesus consider himself to be and how did he identify himself to the people? Here, all three synoptic Gospels significantly diverge from the Gospel of John. According to Mark, Luke, and Matthew, Jesus behaved like the Messiah (Christ), but, while performing miracles, forbade everyone to talk about it. Why? First of all, to not clash with Roman authorities and their henchmen – the priests of Jerusalem's Temple. The Romans saw in the Messiah's appearance anti-Roman rebellion; after all, the Savior was to drive them out and become king of Judea. The priests viewed any new religious leader as a threat to their authority. This was why Jesus performed his miracles unwillingly. And he was constrained to do so not only because of mercy to the suffering, but also on account of the profound conviction of the people that the true Messiah must perform supernatural feats. Without the miracles, the people were not ready to believe in Jesus. But any one of these miracles arose suspicion from the authorities and priests; therefore, Jesus, upon healing the terminally ill, asked them not to say anything of it (Mark 8:22-26). And so, according to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus knew that he was the Messiah (and so thought his disciples), but, for the time being, deemed it necessary to keep it secret from the people, especially from the authorities (Mark 16:20).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus no longer hides anything from anyone: he ubiquitously and publicly proclaims himself the Messiah. But even here is an episode that supports the point of view of the synoptic Gospels. Thus, in the Temple of Jerusalem, "the Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly'" (John 10:24). Consequently, Jesus, in reality, carefully concealed that he considered himself the Messiah, rightly fearing confrontation with Roman authorities. It is likely that the statements where Jesus claims before everyone that he is the Messiah and the Son of God, came as later additions to the texts, made by copyists in the second century, when they basically took advantage of complete freedom in editing the Gospels.

At the same time, before Jesus was another problem: in his native Nazareth, the people saw him as a regular man and as being neither the Messiah nor even a

prophet. It was his countrymen and those who knew his family that showed the most skepticism. “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simeon?” – they questioned – “Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mark 6:3-6). Any mention of his mother, brothers, and sisters, emphasized his purely human nature and essentially belittled him in the eyes of the people. In response, Jesus, avoiding calling himself the Messiah, tried to appear before the people not as a member of his family, but as a spokesman of God’s will. In this respect, very typical is the following episode from the Gospel of Mark: “Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:31-35).

And so, if Jesus was afraid to publicly admit that he was the Messiah, but also did not want to be perceived as a regular man, who did he present himself to be to the Judean people? Jesus called himself the “Son of Man”. This name came from the Old Testament and meant no more than belongingness to the human race. It was used exactly so by the prophet Ezekiel, when he spoke of himself as the “Son of Man”. It was only the prophet Daniel who gave an entirely new meaning to this name. According to the book of his prophecies, God will give eternal rule over the world to the “Son of Man” (Daniel 7:13-14). The prediction implied that the “Son of Man” must come from among the Judean people and become the mediator between the people and God; however, it did not determine the nature of this “Son”. Later, when the idea of the Savior spread, the name “Son of Man” began to be perceived as one of the definitions of this Messiah. But these names were not identical to each other. While the Messiah had to be the “Son of Man,” the latter did not have to be the Savior. In short, in biblical literature and tradition, the notion about the “Son of Man” was much more vague and uncertain than that concerning the Messiah. Jesus could freely speak of himself as the “Son of Man” without fearing accusations of anti-Roman rebellion and blasphemy, as the Scripture itself gave different meaning to this name. As for the common people, who were not knowledgeable in the Scripture’s details, they, unlike the authorities and priests, did not see any difference between these names. This attitude became firmly fixed in the books of the New Testament where, in contrast to the Old Testament, the terms “Messiah” and “Son of Man” are essentially identical.