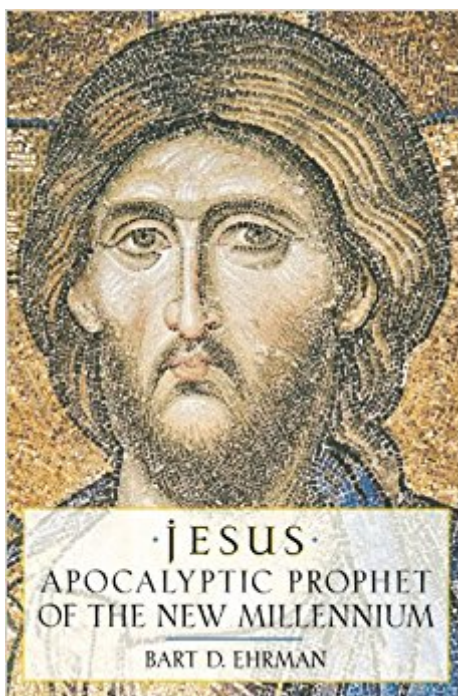


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Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet Of The New Millennium



Synopsis

In this highly accessible discussion, Bart Ehrman examines the most recent textual and archaeological sources for the life of Jesus, along with the history of first-century Palestine, drawing a fascinating portrait of the man and his teachings. Ehrman shows us what historians have long known about the Gospels and the man who stands behind them. Through a careful evaluation of the New Testament (and other surviving sources, including the more recently discovered Gospels of Thomas and Peter), Ehrman proposes that Jesus can be best understood as an apocalyptic prophet--a man convinced that the world would end dramatically within the lifetime of his apostles and that a new kingdom would be created on earth. According to Ehrman, Jesus' belief in a coming apocalypse and his expectation of an utter reversal in the world's social organization not only underscores the radicalism of his teachings but also sheds light on both the appeal of his message to society's outcasts and the threat he posed to Jerusalem's established leadership.

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Customer Reviews

C.S. Lewis once noted that nowhere do the Gospels say, "Jesus laughed." He's probably laughing now, if he's got access to Bart Ehrman's *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. The title doesn't even hint at the yuks that Ehrman's prose delivers, but from its very first page, Jesus will tickle your funny bone and stimulate your brain. "At last count," Ehrman begins, "there were something like 8 zillion books written about Jesus It's not there aren't enough books about Jesus out there. It's that there aren't enough of the right kind of book. Very, very few, in fact. I'd say about

one and a half." The right kind of book, according to Ehrman, is one that portrays Jesus roughly as Albert Schweitzer did, as a first-century Jewish apocalypticist: "This is a shorthand way of saying that Jesus fully expected that the history of the world as we know it (well, as he knew it) was going to come to a screeching halt, that God was soon going to intervene in the affairs of this world, overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment, destroy huge masses of humanity, and abolish existing human political and religious institutions. All this would be a prelude to the arrival of a new order on earth, the Kingdom of God." Ehrman's is a historical-Jesus book, a very smart, humble, and humorous popular summary of Christian and secular evidence of Jesus' life, work, and legacy. He believes that apocalypticism is the true core of Jesus' message, and that comfortable middle-class complacency among scholars, clergy, and laypeople has forged a counterfeit, domesticated, "ethical" Jesus to cover up their befuddlement about his misprediction of the apocalypse. The book will frustrate many readers because it offers no real guidance regarding what one should do with Jesus' apocalypticism. Its project--to prove that Jesus was wrong about the apocalypse--may even appear destructive to some. Yet the argument is convincing enough to induce among careful readers a constructive experience of confusion. Jesus makes readers ask the very question it appears to ignore, in a newly humble way: how, then, should we live? A serious matter, but considering humanity's endless string of wrong answers and infinite capacity for self-delusion, worthy of some good belly laughs, as well. --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

At the end of the millennium, there are as many views of the historical Jesus as there are scholars who writing about him. In his engaging study, Ehrman, associate professor of religious studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, argues that Jesus can be best understood as a "first-century Jewish apocalypticist...who fully expected that the history of the world as he knew it was going to come to a screeching halt and that God was going to overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment." The author contends that this portrait of Jesus, first proclaimed by Albert Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906), has been overlooked in the rush to draw Jesus in the images of whatever scholarly or popular movement is painting Him. Ehrman examines carefully noncanonical and canonical sources as he reconstructs the life of Jesus. He uses already established critical criteria--independent attestation, dissimilarity, contextual credibility--to determine what elements of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life can be considered authentic. For example, according to the evidence, he asserts that we can seriously doubt that the virgin conception, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the story of wise men following a star are historical events. Ehrman then proceeds

to provide a lucid overview of the turbulent political and religious times in which Jesus lived and worked. Finally, the author provides a detailed examination of Jesus' words and deeds to show that they present the work of a Jewish apocalyptic prophet who expected universal judgment and the coming Kingdom of God to occur within his own lifetime and that of his disciples. While Ehrman's provocative thesis will stir up controversy among scholars, his warm, inviting prose style and his easy-to-read historical and critical overviews make this the single best introduction to the study of the historical Jesus. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Here is a great understanding of the message and mission of Jesus as he actually lived it. Ehrman with his extensive scholarship places Jesus in context of his own time. The various Jewish factions, Roman occupation, and the apocalyptic movement of his day, and the social standing of Jesus and his early followers, all elucidate the historical meaning of Jesus' message. He taught that God would imminently intervene in the world and destroy evil and bring in an utopia. All would be judged on keeping God's Law by a Son of Man. In this New World Order the previously downcast and oppressed would be exalted and the lofty oppressors brought down and Jesus and his disciples would be rulers. But Jesus was crucified and the New World Order never arrived. However the experience of the resurrection gave life to the followers and led to an evolving set of beliefs. Jesus' conquering death and his exaltation to heaven as his followers experienced it, led to seeing Jesus' sacrifice as necessary for salvation. But the continued absence of the Apocalyptic Order, necessitated further evolution. Ehrman also elaborates the historical research methodology and let's us know what we can and cannot know historically. This is a great work to help understand the origin of the Christian perspective in which many of us have found ourselves today.

Ehrman's book is fantastic. He's a very clear writer, drawing the reader in. His style is very conversational, non-academic (i.e., not dry), and you actually want to know what happens next. As a historian, Ehrman is called upon to reconstruct what we can actually know about the historical Jesus and his teachings. As such, Ehrman uses the earliest sources to tell the reader about Jesus and what he did. He dissects which aspects of the Gospel we can fairly conclude as historically accurate. Ehrman utilizes three tools along the way: (1) Multiple attestations [i.e., are the sayings attested to in many of the earliest sources (or, those sources least likely to be effected by future Christianization)?], (2) Dissimilarity (do the sayings/deeds go against some Christian teaching or at least not further a Christian agenda?), and (3) does it make sense in a historical context (given

what we know about the first century, does what is said to have happened make sense?). Ehrman makes the case that it is absolutely essential that we understand Jesus in his context. Too often we hear Christians attempting to make sense of Jesus in modern terms. That just can't be sustained, because as a historian, Ehrman wants to know what Jesus actually did and said. Although many Christians won't like what Ehrman has to say, his conclusion is substantially backed up by the evidence we have: Jesus was a Jewish apocalyptic preacher. Jesus taught that the world was going to end in the lifetime of his followers and people better heed his warning. Anyone interested in Jesus from a purely historical (and not theological) perspective could not start at a better place.

This book presents the evidence for the historical Jesus, clearly and fairly, and explains how Christianity, which developed after the death of Jesus, has very little to do with what he actually preached when he was alive. Ehrman is not a scoffer or a debunker. He is scrupulously polite to the beliefs of Christians, but he insists on the distinction between faith and history. This is a well-written summary of the last two hundred years of textual scholarship on the New Testament. I've read many other works in this field over a number of years and I think this book would serve as an excellent introduction to the field for anyone who only knows the bible as it is taught in churches. A few quibbles: the Oxford Press paperback is printed in absurdly small type. I had to wear high powered reading magnifiers to get through it. Also, hoards and hordes are not the same thing.

The main premise of the book is that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who anticipated the end of the physical world as we know it within his or his followers lifetime. Most of his arguments and supporting facts would have taken up half the space. He instead spends much time discussing topics of interest to him, but not relevant to the premise. The author also does not adequately address preterism or any other alternative views that add complexity to his conclusions. I would have also liked to see more discussion on the topic of Paul and how he was apocalyptic as well.

This is a book that should be read by Christians and non-Christians. Dr Ehrman shows through analysis of scripture how Jesus's message was thoroughly apocalyptic and focused on repentance so as to escape the imminent wrath of the Son of Man and to enter the coming Kingdom of God. After belief in the resurrection took hold, the message of Christianity became instead about Jesus being Saviour and cosmic Messiah instead. Christians interpreted and develop traditions about Jesus not taking a cue from his actual message but from the beliefs they came to hold about him.

Dr. Ehrman has produced a remarkable work that should not be missed regardless of one's religious beliefs. His insights and integration of the methods to understand the life and times of Jesus stand as a true testament to scholarly work written for all to comprehend. By explaining early sources, independent assessment and the importance of understanding the context in which words and actions occurred, he provides the reader with new wisdom that I found extraordinarily valuable. I will read his other books for sure! Best I have read this year!! Dr. Tom Accardi

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