



Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium

By Bart D. Ehrman

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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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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

From Publishers Weekly

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 criteriaAindependent attestation, dissimilarity, contextual credibilityAto 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.)

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From Library Journal

Ehrman admits that there are "something like eight zillion books written about Jesus." Then why add another book to this mountain of verbiage? Because, according to Ehrman, very few of these books are aimed at a popular audience; most are "inexcusably dull and/or idiosyncratic" as they don't consider the evidence and they scarcely show the view that is held by "the majority" of scholars. Unfortunately, this comes dangerously close to the pot calling the kettle black. Although Ehrman's writing is lively and thorough, he glosses over scholarly debate, making heavy use of phrases like "almost all scholars" and "most historians" and wrongly giving an illusion of certainty and agreement where there is none. He finds very little of historical value in the Gospels, seeing them as theological documents pasted together from a patchwork of sources after decades of oral change. A more balanced look at the scholarly debates can be found in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Donimic Crossman* (LJ 1/99). Those desiring a more intensive introduction to the questions discussed here will find that Raymond Brown's *An Introduction to the New Testament* (LJ 2/15/98) repays the extra effort. Still, this is a well-written exposition of one side of an important scholarly debate; recommended for public and academic libraries.

Eugene O. Bowser, Univ. of Northern Colorado, Greeley

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Users Review

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