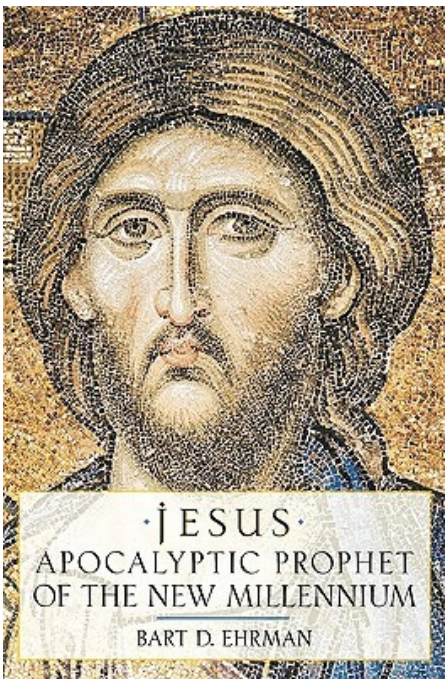

Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium

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.

Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium Details

Date	:	Published May 31st 2001 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published January 1st 1999)
ISBN	:	9780195124743
Author	:	Bart D. Ehrman
Format	:	Paperback 288 pages
Genre	:	Religion, History, Nonfiction, Christianity, New Testament, Theology, Biography, Atheism, Spirituality, Ancient History

From Reader Review Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium for online ebook

Justin Evans says

I can forgive biblical scholars for writing impenetrable prose. They have to know about 8000 languages. They study the most studied book of all time, and the temptation to split hairs must be overwhelming. On the other hand, biblical scholars write about *the bible*, so they've got an enormous in-built audience that other humanities people can only dream of. So maybe they should actually take advantage of that?
Well, Ehrman does. Kudos to him; he writes clearly and says exactly what he thinks. What he thinks, along with a whole bunch of other people whom he's happy to praise, is that Jesus was a Jewish prophet who thought the end of the world was really, really nigh; that his ethical preaching and his actions were all geared towards this thought, and that most Christian theology, and much of the new testament, has very little to do with the man Jesus who wandered around a couple thousand years ago. It seems pretty plausible, and he's very clear that this is a history book, and not a theology book.
Two problems: first, this is the sort of thing that you might read and then say to yourself, well, you know what? Hell with the Christian tradition then. A more productive angle for a conclusion or something might have been to suggest that since the 'identity' or 'biography' of Jesus never had squat to do with Christianity, people could more productively spend their time thinking about living good lives (and, if you're Christian, therefore deserving God's forgiveness), rather than being New Atheists or Creationists and thinking all the time about other peoples' genitals.

Also, it gets really repetitive over the last few chapters. A bit too much padding over all.

Alford Wayman says

If you read this book before you have read Ehrman's "Did Jesus Exist" then you are in for some what of a treat as to how the historical Jesus might have been viewed by his followers and the type of environment and world view he originated his theology from and those who may have influenced his teachings. Published in 2001 Bart uses many sections from this in other books he has written. This text was more about Jesus the person and his message and who hos followers later thought he was rather then a book on the apocalyptic view of Christ. Bart spends almost half the book as a sort of introduction before he gets into the meat of things. Ehrman then makes some good observations concerning the beatitudes and how Jesus may have been a follower of John the Baptizer, then the book fizzles. A lot of information here is used in other books, so it might do one good to leaf though up coming books and read the chapter or two that is not repeated information. His NT text book and NT readers are excellent however, but the rest is almost a broken record I am sorry to report. However a beginner in early NT studies may find this some what useful. A text that I have read that was far more conclusive on this topic was the book, "Apocalyptcism, Anti-Semitism And The Historical Jesus" by John S. Kloppenborg. Also the text "Judaism of the Second Temple Period: Qumran and Apocalypticism" By Flusser.

Dobook says

Very clear, easy-to-read introduction to the topic.

Paul Grealish says

Bart Ehrman is a diligent academic with a plausible theory and a deep understanding of his topic. Unfortunately, he has a serious problem with tone that badly drags this book down. Full disclosure: I am not a Christian and I actual find the central argument here quite believable. I just have a serious problem with the presentation.

Ehrman adopts a jocular tone throughout the book, with myriad exclamation marks and the occasional anecdote about his family and friends that add nothing to argument. He also displays a remarkably arrogant and sweeping tone when discussing the New Testament. He appears convinced that only he and a few other experts know the 'true' story of Jesus and the rest of us don't know a crucifix from a hot cross bun. He seems to divide the world into 'experts like Bart Ehrman', 'Christians who are wrong about Jesus' and 'lay people who are woefully ignorant about this subject.'

This arrogance spills into the arguments too. Ehrman likes to use sweeping statements like 'Everyone believes' 'Nobody thinks', even when presenting highly controversial material.

All of this is very unfortunate, because if you look past the tonal issues, you will find a carefully researched and meticulously argued theory.

Khenpo Gurudas says

The publisher calls this book "highly accessible", but I am afraid I would call it trite and baseless.

Ehrman lacks the scholarship, background and foundational appreciation of theological anthropology, which one might find in the books by contemporary scholars, including John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg and others.

It would seem that Professor Ehrman possesses little appreciation for, or knowledge of the Aramaic texts that preceded the horribly mistranslated Greek and Latin interpretations of the canonical scriptures, and very little comprehensive grasp of the other non-canonical sources.

Nothing in the teachings of the Palestinian Rabbi could be mistaken as being apocalyptic. Rav Yeshua never taught that that, as Ehrman errantly suggests, "The Kingdom of God would be established on earth." That's the stuff that Protestant superstition is made of, not accurate biblical scholarship.

Rav Yeshua's (alleged) words, when properly translated from the Aramaic say, "The Sovereign Domain of the Sacred is WITHIN YOU," not "The Kingdom of God is at hand."

I'm afraid this book won't be on my recommended reading list.

Ehrman too quickly dismisses the work of more recent and far more qualified scholars, who have discovered new insights to Jesus from careful study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the study of Church father's and early Aramaic writings that shed some doubt on many of his conclusions. He flat out gives no consideration to

Crossan's views that Jesus was primarily concerned with ethical eschatology and not apocalyptic eschatology.

Nick says

http://deeperwaters.wordpress.com/201...

Tori4 says

Professor Ehrman writes with characteristic wit and clarity. Within this book he presents a fascinating portrait of the historical Jesus, taking care to support his assertions with evidence drawn both from non Christian literary works, (the Dead Sea Scrolls, Tacitus' Annals, Josephus' Jewish Antiquities,) and, from the early Christian texts themselves. He concludes that Jesus is best understood as a Jewish apocalyptic prophet who fully expected that a cataclysmic final judgment, (brought by a third party he referred to as "The Son of Man,") would occur in his lifetime. This final judgment, expected imminently, would bring an end to the current world, overrun by cruelty, hate and injustice and would establish in its place a good kingdom on earth, aligned with God, in which there would be no more suffering, hunger pain or misery. Ehrman demonstrates how this understanding of Jesus' historical character fits neatly with the evidence available to us in the Gospels by drawing a telling parallel between Jesus' apocalyptic expectations and the immediacy of many of his teachings. Witness the words: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place." I also found it fascinating to discover which of Jesus' teachings Dr. Ehrman understood to be historically verifiable, (when carefully assessed using a range of scholarly criteria specifically designed to filter out theological bias and invention.) I found his treatment of the ethical aspects of Jesus' teachings particularly poignant and moving. I am so very grateful to Dr. Ehrman for freeing my mind from cultural assumptions and for making such complex scholarship accessible to a lay reader. He is an academic inspiration. I am so very glad I found his work. :)

Kent says

Perhaps the most influential book I've ever read regarding the life of the Jewish teacher living in first century Galilee. Dr. Ehrman clearly,rationally, and most importantly, persuasively builds the case that Jesus is best understood as a Jewish apocalyptic prophet that was convinced that the Kingdom of God was coming within his lifetime. In other words, the man that lived and died in the first century was not the one that was created by his followers as in the gospels, especially in the Gospel of John.

Ben says

Discovering the historical Jesus is pertinent to the development of one's faith. But is this really Him? Bart D. Ehrman argues that Jesus was no more than an apocalyptic prophet of the first century; no different than the several men who have claimed the imminent end of the current world order in our own time. His historical methodology is reasonably irrefutable. His logic and critical assessments of our available sources in reconstructing a reasonable image of Jesus is solid.

I have no illusions about bringing my own beliefs to the table in this discussion of the historical Jesus. Undeniably, this plays a large part in my pondering of Ehrman's presentation; similarly as anyone else would bring their different beliefs to the table as well. Considering the controversial nature of the subject matter, I think current biases are a stumbling block Ehrman expected.

Again, Ehrman's methodology is reasonably flawless and he has a gift of accessibility when presenting his arguments. I won't outline all the details of his assessment guidelines. Suffice it to say, they work. I did, however, have a few questions. And I think Ehrman may have stumbled by not anticipating these questions, at least not including his responses in this publication.

First, he claims that the apocalyptic culture of first century Judaism helps us understand Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet of the same variety as previous Old Testament prophets. However, wouldn't this culture help us understand the perspective of the Gospel authors as well? Or, if the authors were Greek Gentiles, as Ehrman reasonably argues, wouldn't *their* sources, even if by oral tradition, have that same first century Jewish bias? Wouldn't it be just as reasonable to assume that the author of Q, for example, brought his belief of an imminent world end to his interaction with Jesus' words and deeds? If so, perhaps the theological developments weren't religiously coercive but rather a spiritual realization; finally getting the point.

Secondly, Ehrman argues that some of Jesus' apocalyptic phrases used a very specific future tense, understandably negating the idea that the Kingdom of God was a present manifestation of the spirit in Jesus as the Christ. But rather than consider the present tense apocalyptic phrases and teachings as indications to the opposite, Ehrman interprets them in the imminent political and economic establishment of the Kingdom for which he already argued. Let's also consider how Jesus taught mostly in parables. How is it unreasonable to consider that his apocalyptic teachings were parabolic of the renewal of the spirit? Ehrman makes a compelling argument for why a spiritual apocalypse is unlikely, mostly because the later Gospels were the ones to profess this, not the ones closer to Jesus' time, but again, this is *unlikely* not *impossible*. And it is just as reasonable to assume that the Gospel authors were products of an apocalyptic culture, including Gentiles converted by Jews of the this culture, as Jesus was.

From my own estimation, I find it quite sensible that God would likely establish a Kingdom of the heart since his first try, even with Eden and eventually Jerusalem, did not fare so well. What's to say that a new political, economic and earthly Kingdom wouldn't crumble, even by abolishing evil? The world is relatively transient. It will eventually crumble. If God is spirit, and infinite, isn't this the only way to establish a Kingdom of God? Of course, this is a theological analysis, and according to Ehrman, one that John and the later Gospel writers would have employed as the religion spread and grew. But wouldn't Jesus, an acknowledged wise teacher in the Jewish tradition, consider this as well?

There are other such discrepancies which I, as a relatively novice reader in these matters, found troubling. But as I said before, I commend Ehrman on his excellent analysis of the material. Both believer and skeptic have to admit to the quality of Ehrman's presentation. So it's not Ehrman who I find troubling. So what is it?

Any picture of Jesus has ramifications for a world of believers. For scholars who paint him as the Son of God, believers sigh in relief and most likely store up those arguments in their arsenals. And perhaps skeptics do the same when seeing an image of a man whose identity was manipulated and generally constructed to serve a purpose other than what was intended.

For me, it's troubling to see an image of Jesus as a crackpot who could have easily been on the 2012 bandwagon in our day. Fortunately for the believer and the skeptic, these assessments *cannot* absolutely prove Jesus' essence. We are limited, as is the historian, to the tools of reason and logic. Yes, limited.

Ehrman himself claims that his discussion is simply portraying what is most likely. When establishing his criteria of dissimilarity, he acknowledges that if a historical claim does not pass this criteria, it doesn't necessarily mean it didn't happen, just that it's harder for us to believe. Or consider this:

> Finally, I should emphasize that with respect to the historical Jesus, or indeed, with respect to any historical person, the historian can do no more than establish historical probabilities. In no case can we reconstruct the past with absolute certitude. All that we can do is take the evidence that happens to survive and determine to the best of oru abilities what probably happened. Scholars will always disagree on the end results of their labors. But nothing can be done about this. The past an never be empirically proved, it can only be reconstructed. p. 96

If historians consider only what they can believe beyond a reasonable doubt when reconstructing history, then we are only privileged to a portion of the picture. Just because a historian can't prove something by historical methods, it doesn't mean it didn't happen. Therefore, I think it of the utmost importance for both skeptic and believer alike to consider this limitation when drawing their conclusions from this book.

I have always felt that there is an absolute power in this world, outside of our influence. If human beings are the climax of worldly power and understanding, how did the Earth get on for so long without us? The existence of things, supernatural or not, do not hinge on our ability to understand them or prove them.

But, alas, I must remember that this is simply a reaction to a book and not my own personal treatise on the integrity of Christ. The book is *excellent*. There's no denying it. Ehrman is persuasive, accessible and reasonable. But by his own words, he is not trying to prove anything, but paint the likeliest picture of the historical Jesus. He achieves his goal impeccably. It would be unwarranted to attack or embrace Ehrman as a source of spiritual truth. For skeptic and believer alike, this is a good read.

Jacob Aitken says

Despite being written by an apostate, it is not entirely worthless. Here is why it is annoying, though: Ehrman starts explaining concepts which NT studies have known for 30 years, yet he is acting like he just discovered them and that they are really dangerous to Christianity (they aren't). Further, he really does believe, or so how he writes, that anyone who disagrees with him is a total moron who thinks the Left Behind novels are real (he comes very close to saying that).

While Ehrman is correct to note the apocalyptic context, he seems adamant that the phrase "end of the world" means "end of the space time continuum." He is not familiar, being a modernist, with the echoes to OT texts that speak of judgment on Jerusalem. He continues to cling to out-dated modernist scholarship

Despite all of that, it is an easy read and he does touch upon the basics which we've already known (but bless his heart, he probably does think he discovered them).

Huyen says

I've always been semi-interested in religion. Interested enough to have many conversations and debates about it, but not enough to read any thorough book on it. Not even the Bible. And admit it, most of the time, books on religion are quite dry and intense, like you need to know lots of the details and stories before you can even make sense of what they're trying to argue about. Or the other end of the spectrum is militant bastards like Richard Dawkins, who I'm totally fed up with or apologists like Francis Collins. They don't really educate me at all on the subject matter. So stuff that, I have many other interesting things to read in my life.

So I was quite reluctant to read this book when my friend Matt introduced it to me. You know the sort of book atheists recommend to other atheists, don't you? But the fact that he was religious and is now atheistic and can defend his viewpoint so convincingly made me think this book must be good. And it turns out to be a wonderful book, Bart Ehrman is like totally my hero these days.

The book is not just what he learns about religion, but really his life story and how he changed his mind from being a devout Christian to an agnostic. Not the kind of getting frustrated with God and giving up the faith, but he certainly reflected on it very deeply and rationally. He was raised in an evangelical family and when he was in highschool, he found a void in his soul. He turned to Christianity and was so overwhelmed by the solace of God that he decided to spend the rest of his life to it. Ehrman went to a super fundamentalist school, and thank God, went on to study theology at Princeton. Here, he had access to the most extensive collection of Christian texts and decided to learn many ancient languages so he could read these manuscripts himself.

What he found out shook him to the core. There are many variations in the canon over time and he gradually came to realize that the Bible is a totally human text, with very human errors, emotions, inspiration and prejudices. It drove him to learn more about ancient Christian history and traditions, not to refute it completely, but to point out the inconsistencies and alternative texts that were left out in the process. And this guy obviously knows his stuff, knows it so well and can argue so persuasively with reason and empathy that you find it hard to believe he's no longer a Christian. He doesn't convince you to become an agnostic like himself, and he doesn't need to. All he does is be an honest historian and present all the evidence, examine it closely and weigh the possibility of each event, and I think every reasonable person can walk out learning a lot from this man.

So much for his life story. Jesus, the first millennium apocalyptic prophet is an amazing book. I mean, if a religiously retarded moron like me can understand it, you can be guaranteed of its quality. In this book, he points out a lot of inconsistencies in the four Gospels, such as the account of the birth of Jesus or his death. How do you reconcile the story of King Herod and the wise men in Matthew with the shepherd in Luke? Did he die on the Passover or the day after? What was his reaction to his crucifixion, did he cry out in pain as in Mark or did he accept it willingly as in John? What happened to the women who found the tomb, what did they see, did they go straight to Jerusalem or go to Galilee first?

These contradictions are inevitable because the first account of Jesus' life was Paul's letters, which were written 20 years AFTER Jesus' death. The earliest Gospel, Mark, possibly 30 years, other gospels, 50-80 years. So here you go, you have four accounts written decades after the events, not by eyewitnesses, in a different language (Greek, Jesus spoke Aramaic). There is also very little evidence of a man called Jesus living around that time in other sources, either pagan or Christian. Other Christian sources such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas or Coptic Gospel of Thomas or the Gnostic Myth all tell very little and different stories about Jesus' life and deeds. What we can really construct about Jesus is quite limited and we must always take it with a grain of salt.

The best point of the book deals with what I've always been wondering about Jesus: was he a revolutionary? A social reformer? A self-sacrificing loving saint? What exactly was his purpose? Why did he teach bizarre things such as turn the other cheek, or give away everything, or if someone wants to enslave you, let them or forgive all acts of evil? No, I won't pretend that any of these things ever made sense to me. The question of forgiveness strikes me as the most puzzling thing Jesus preached. I don't believe in complete mercy, I do believe in just and humane punishment. Forgiveness is not given, but earned. So why did he teach these things?

Bart Ehrman offers a hypothesis, a very good one to explain it. Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who was expecting the coming of the Kingdom of God WITHIN HIS GENERATION. His ministry began with his association with John the Baptist, also an apocalyptic prophet. Throughout the gospels, you can find his teachings about the coming judgment, the coming Son of God, when those oppressed will be vindicated and rewarded and unbelievers will be sent to hell, all governments and institutions will be destroyed.

And if you put all his teachings in that context, everything makes perfect sense. He was not so concerned with this life, because the end is coming imminently when you'll live in perpetual heaven, and if you don't care about this life, why would you care if someone steals your money, enslaves you, slaps you in the face? He did not intend to be a social reformer because he advocated the ABOLITION of all governments and institutions. He did not expect this world to become better; he expected it to end and every believer to enter the Kingdom of God IN THIS WORLD, not in heaven. His point is, simply put, believe in God, repent, sacrifice, forgive, give away, do anything to enter the Kingdom of God. Ah, Remember to be quick because it's coming within your generation. He might have taught a few good things but maybe it wasn't his purpose after all.

Bart Ehrman is simply a beautiful writer, he writes eloquently, coherently and honestly. He doesn't attack religion, he analyses it and leaves us to find an answer for ourselves. We definitely need more people like him in this world. Thanks Matt, you're my hero for introducing this book to me.

David says

It is important to be selective with Bart Ehrman books, since he has the tendency to write the same book over and over in different forms. However, this is an early one, and he does an excellent job in setting out his understanding of the historical Jesus. If you are a believing Christian, you should know going in that this is not written from a pro-Christian or anti-Christian point of view. Ehrman writes as a secular historian. In my view, it is not a threat to anyone's faith. If anything, he is open-minded and fair about the possibility of miracles.

The book, as all of Ehrman's books are, demonstrates excellent scholarship, written in a very accessible fashion. Serious students will appreciate the shout out to Albert Schweitzer's, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus". Ehrman follows Schweitzer's lead in interpreting Jesus in his own times and as someone who had an apocalyptic point of view.

The book provides an excellent and concise overview of first century Palestine, covering all of the major religious groups, practices, politics and the governance of the Roman Empire. It tells us about the society of the time, how people lived, and what the early life of Jesus must have been like. It is a great review for someone like me, who has been out of seminary for 20 years! Again, because the writing is so accessible,

anyone can pick this book up and get some seminary-level insights without a huge vocabulary barrier.

In the end, I agreed with most of Ehrman's conclusions, not all. They are usually argued well, although some of the time, Ehrman seems to be taking some of the same liberties he criticizes other scholars for taking. But, on the whole, he makes cogent arguments, does not overstep his bounds too often, and as a result, uncovers a picture of Jesus Christ that is well worth reading.

Don says

For anyone interested in trying to distinguish the historical Jesus from the Christ of Faith, I'd highly recommend this book. Bart Ehrman is a wonderful writer. His ideas are expressed in a manner that makes them easy to understand.

Ehrman's whole book is built around a single thesis: we can best understand the historical Jesus as a failed, apocalypticist, whose every action and teaching were to wake people up to the immanent dawning of the kingdon of God.

Ehrman's view is not universally accepted by Jesus scholars. In particular, Jesus Seminar scholars like John Dominic Crossan argue that the strong apocalypticticist message of the synoptic gospels is a post-historic accretion. The problem with such a view, as Ehreman argues, is that it ignores large sections of the gospels in terms of what they actually say.

My impression is that Ehrman tries to reconstruct the historical Jesus in a way that does the most justice to the early sources, including Mark's gospel, the Q gospel, the writings of Paul, and the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Ehrman also tries to locate Jesus within the cultural and theological context of his time. He points out, for example, that in first century Judiasm there was a strong apocalypticist movement, particularly in rural, backwater areas like Galilee.

Ehrman's view of Jesus is similar to that of Albert Schwitzer, who thought of Jesus's teachings as an emergency, interim ethic designed solely to provide entry into God's dawning kingdon. In Ehrman's view, Jesus' teachings weren't about developing a longterm morality, because Jesus didn't believe there was going to be a "longterm." Many of Jesus' parables make sense in this light, as Ehrman points out at length.

Excellent book.

Emily Fuentes says

Please note before reading: Though this is a historical look at Jesus (and the author claims it is not theological), it is inadvertently going to touch on theology just in the very nature of the title (suggesting Jesus is a prophet rather than the Messiah/God). So know this before going into it- as a Christian myself, I

like to either have my beliefs challenged or confirmed and read differing view points to be a more well-rounded and open-minded human. Just a bit of what to expect, so you know if this book is something you would want to read.

I believe and agree that there are some historical inaccuracies within the gospels, but this author does a lot of "jumping to conclusions" as a result. He tends to throw the "baby out with the bath water" and often claims a whole section, book or the gospels themselves as inaccurate (instead of focusing on how much is actually similar for an original oral transcript). The author fails to fully comprehend the political impact of other historical documents about Jesus besides the gospels (those who rule write history and omit what they want i.e. The Jews and Romans) and seems to have a difficult time marrying his 20th century historian detective nature with something like oral transcribed tradition. I truly believe that all historical documents are tainted because of politics and we need to take it all with a grain of salt. We will never know for sure all the finite details, but can get a general grasp of what the story is. All this to say, there were some solid points, but there were some conclusions that he made that were just as much as a "stretch" as what he claimed was inaccurate with the gospels. Other big issue is he compares English translations to one another (I.e. When talking about how some biblical authors called Mary a virgin and some a woman). He also omitted a lot on prophecies that had been fulfilled by Jesus (according to scripture).

Good food for thought, especially because I am not of the sola scriptoria tradition, but didn't 100% hold up the burden of proof on his end. However, even the author notes that this is impossible (pg 96) because reconstructing history is based on probabilities rather that empirical proof. I really appreciate how this author took a scholarly debate and made it so accessible to the masses. He presents a plethora of information in an interesting and informative way to non-historian scholars.

Jenni Valentine says

Dr. Ehrman’s monograph, Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, is an insightful account of the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth—the man whose legacy launched one of the world’s most adhered to religions: Christianity. Through erudite methodology, Ehrman deconstructs current notions of the historical Jesus, and attempts to contextualize his personage within the era of his lifetime, by carefully reviewing the earliest sources available to us at present—both Christian and pagan alike. Though a careful cross-comparison of such documents, we are given a more complete picture of the historical Jesus, which while perhaps not the one framed by Christian churches today, may better allows us to understand his words and deeds without the theological frameworks which surround such Biblical accounts as passed to us from antiquity.

Ehrman posits a picture of the historical Jesus that paints him as an apocalyptic prophet. That is, a man who teaches that the end of times would occur, not in the distant future, but within his own lifetime with the coming of the Son of Man (e.g., p. x, and 125). At this time, a great reversal of the world order will occur and only those of whom faithfully adhered to the principles of his precepts will be allowed to enter the New Kingdom—which he would rule as supreme with the help of his 12 disciples by his side (pp. 141-162, and pp. 184-185). These precepts, Ehrman claims, are that of: total nonviolence, forgiveness, love to all, and complete rejection of wealth and family (pp. 167-181).

Yet, more than developing a pellucid codex of the Christ’s historical teachings, we are granted an insight to the biographical elements of his life. Yes, Ehrman states, Jesus was from Nazareth, and yes he could have very well been born in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great (p. 98). His parents raised him—and

his siblings—in the Jewish tradition, and he spoke Aramaic, some Hebrew, and possibly some Greek as well (p. 99-100). His parents were “salt of the earth” type people who worked the equivalent of blue collar jobs (p. 97). Unfortunately, we have no credible sources depicting his early life (although the Infancy Gospel of Thomas is quite amusing, and may be worthwhile to pursue for such matters alone), but we can assume he had a normal childhood in which he probably apprenticed under his mother’s husband, Joseph, to learn the family trade (p. 100). When he was about 30, he was baptized by John the Baptist, an apocalyptic prophet preaching in the wilderness before beginning his ministry in the Galilean region of Palestine (p. 138).

Unfortunately, accounts of the Christ’s ministry are fraught with supernatural elements, rendering them historically elusive. However, Ehrman does provide the reader with a few proposed theological lenses which others have tried to account for the wonders and miracles associated with the Biblical accounts: as supernatural histories requiring faith in their verity, as natural histories with logical explanations that could not have been understood by the ancients who lacked our modern scientific understandings, and finally—the one of which Ehrman adheres—as myths: history-like stories told to convey a religious truth (pp. 23-29). It does seem as though Jesus did have a tendency to attract followers who would have been considered societal rejects: the poor, the day laborer, the tax collector, and the harlot, as well as children and women, who were typically marginalized as a general rule in culture and politics (pp. 185-190).

Finally, Ehrman holds that the last sure thing we can know of his person, is his manner of death. He was crucified under the direction of Pontius Pilate around the time of the Jewish Passover in the city of Jerusalem (pp. 207-225). After a life-time of wandering the countryside of Palestine, he finally enters the city of Jerusalem, possibly on a donkey since the streets were probably crowded for the holiday, and without much fanfare (pp. 219-220). While in Jerusalem, he continued to preach his message to those who would listen, attempted to disturb the workings of the Jewish Temple priests, and was betrayed by one of his closest followers, who probably was named Judas Iscariot (pp. 211-219). At this point, he was brought before the Jewish leaders for a preliminary trial before facing Pilate in a quick trial where he was condemned to death for proclaiming himself as king—albeit one of the New Kingdom, not this one (pp. 219-223). He was then probably flogged or tortured some, then crucified as King of the Jews outside the city walls, probably alongside a few other criminals and trouble-makers, and died within a matter of days (pp. 223-225). Whether he rose from the grave or not, we cannot know as historians, Ehrman says, but we can know that many of his contemporaries claimed to have seen him after his death—and it is these stories which have helped found the Christian religion we familiar with today.

As aforementioned, this historical narrative pieced together by Ehrman was done through rigorous scholarship. Using only the earliest sources available today, from both Biblical and non-biblical documents — he cross compared historic elements using a scheme involving 3 criteria: the criterion of dissimilarity, the criteria of independent attestation, and the criterion of contextual credibility — to render what known values may be rendered from them (pp. 85-96). The earliest sources appear to be — in order from oldest to newest — the works of Paul, Q (an imaginary document containing the texts held in similarity between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which are not found in the Gospel of Mark), the Gospel of Mark, M (another imaginary document containing the texts found in neither the Gospel of Mark or Luke, but only in the Gospel of Matthew), L (ut dicitur the texts found in neither the Gospel of Mark or Matthew, but only in the Gospel of Luke), then the Gospels of John, Peter, and Thomas, followed by non-biblical sources by Josephus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Tacitus (pp. 55-85). Thus, Ehrman provides his readers an a posteriori picture of the Christ, utilizing the tools best suited to providing any person the known elements of his life.

I myself found his argument fairly compelling for such a small tome. His work is especially approachable for a historical study on such a controversial subject. I found his anecdotes and witticisms almost cathartic, as literature on this subject have always been especially loathsome for me. However, I must admit a small level

of frustration. I do feel that undue attention was perhaps given to the message of the Christ, as he may have spoken it, and its implications to the modern reader, than what the political, economic, and social climate of his time was like during his life (yes, he does touch on these items a bit, but I suppose I want more). Then again it is possible that the fault is not Ehrman's, but my own, since his book does appear to accomplish what it sets out to do—portray the Christ person, and his message, as an apocalyptic prophet of his time. Yet, I wanted more story and less theology, and for that I cannot blame Ehrman exactly—just sigh as many women and bibliophiles do when they have been failed by their objects of affection by reasons not their own. And finally, I must admit to finding his argument a tad contrived at times, and definitively "in your face" towards the end (pp. 239-245). The former is mostly due to the brevity of his monograph, which left certain sections a little less filled out than I personally care for, though he certainly does attempt to cover for such failings by incorporating a rather wonderful bibliography at the end. The latter I find only problematic inasmuch as it may in-fact be off-putting for readers "of the faith" (of which I am thankfully not), but could have learned on their own accord the lesson he was attempting to teach through this scholarly endeavor without having their noses rubbed in it as well. Overall, I would recommend this book to a friend likewise interested in what Ehrman has to say, though I wouldn't lend them my copy (as I am a notorious book hoarder), or even buy them their own to read (as I would with other literature I found at least half-way worthwhile to read).
