

A Review of Bart Ehrman's *Armageddon: What the Book of Revelation Really Says*
(How This Book Failed to Help This Pastor and Why Atheists Cannot Trust Bart Ehrman)

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Introduction

With this latest volume (*Armageddon: What the Bible Really Says About the End*. Bart D. Ehrman. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023. 250 pp. \$27.99.) Bart Ehrman returns to what he does best, questioning the Bible enough to raise doubts in the heart of some, but not really providing any new insights for those to whom the Bible really matters. The review at hand is not from a “historical scholar” as Ehrman quite often likes to refer to himself, but from a pastor of a church in the Bronx, New York City.¹ The question to be answered is: did Ehrman’s book help me understand what the book of Revelation really says, as the subtitle promises? Did it give any answers (I Peter 3:15) or did it primarily minister questions (I Timothy 1:1-4)?

In reality, the subtitle of the book reveals the philosophical Nicolaitanism of which Ehrman has long projected over his audience, and which, ironically, the book of Revelation records that Jesus hates (2:6 & 15), namely, that Ehrman is finally going to let the rest of us know what the book of Revelation really says. This comes across as a sort of sensationalism that is more designed to help sell books and make money than to assist the humble student of the Bible to understand the truth.

We are reminded at the outset of the words of the Apostle Peter, “*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old...*” And we also think of Paul’s warning regarding those with a feigned faith which they have swerved from and have ended up on the trajectory of empty words, despite the fact that they have a desire to teach the Word of God, though they lack understanding (cf. I Timothy 1:4-7). We certainly want to give Mr. Ehrman the benefit of the doubt that he is no scoffer and that he is not being willingly ignorant of the word of God; we will not be the ones ultimately to judge him. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit who indwells us has warned us that this sort of scoffing and wilful ignorance will corrupt the minds of some.

There are 8 chapters in the book, with endnotes (unfortunately) and no bibliography, although there is an index. There is also an acknowledgements section, and a notice that Scripture quotations are either from the NRSV or Dr. Ehrman’s own translation. The reader

¹For a good discussion of the qualifications of biblical scholarship, see W.A. Strouse’s article, “What is Biblical Scholarship?” http://www.bbc-cromwell.org/Seminary_Articles/What-is-Biblical-Scholarship.pdf

should note that the New Revised Standard Version is not to be confused with the other updated RSV, the English Standard Version. Both the NRSV and the ESV are based upon the RSV of 1952.

Note also that my review will aim to reflect the structure and organization of the book, or the lack thereof. This is particularly true in the section dealing with the preface.

Preface

Ehrman opens up with a topic that he will come back to several times, that of the alleged resistance by some to receiving Revelation into the NT canon. He says, “Many early Christians opposed the book of Revelation and argued it should not be included in the New Testament.” (p. xvii). These sort of statements look quite impressive at the outset, but upon deeper consideration they are not really proving anything. Many is certainly not all, and it is not even most, and it might not be all that many. It would just happen to be whatever historical accounts have been preserved for us, assuming they are relatively accurate. And of course the word “Christians” had a broad application in ancient times just as it does now, and the term has never been restricted just to the Lord’s NT churches which were His candlesticks, the pillar and ground of the truth and the body of Christ on earth with the Lord Jesus as the head, having been given His promise to be guided into all truth. The multitudes who stopped following Jesus during His ministry would have been considered “Christians” by observers, so these sort of arguments really don’t help us understand Revelation any better. Again, these alleged claims do nothing to undermine the fact that the Lord’s NT churches, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), have received Revelation as the canonical word of God as led by the Holy Spirit in accordance with Christ’s promises (cf. John 14-16).

Another topic that comes up repeatedly in the book is the authorship of Revelation. Ehrman continually puts forth the strange idea that the author of the 27th book of the NT, whom he calls “John of Patmos,” is not the Apostle John² and that the Lord’s churches have been mistaken about the writer of Revelation. This theory is not biblical and can easily be disproved by the Bible itself.

To deny the Johannine authorship of Revelation, Ehrman must dismiss significant amounts of internal and external evidence. The internal evidence includes but is not limited to the fact that John names himself 5 times in the book (1:1,4,9, 21:2 and 22:8), all with the expectation that his audience would know him, including, of course, the church he pastored in Ephesus which is one of the recipients of the book (2:1). He also claims at the outset (1:2) to have been a witness to Jesus Christ, which fits with the testimony of the Fourth Gospel.

Despite the protests of some, the vocabulary of Revelation is in fact consistent with John’s Gospel and John’s three epistles in many significant areas. Examples of this include John

² Even Lenski must admit, “Until the time of Origen and including him (254) the whole church knew of only one John, i.e., the apostle.” R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1943), p. 10.

identifying Christ as the overcomer (Rev. 2:7 & John 16:33), as the shepherd (Rev. 7:17 & John 10:11), as the vine (Rev. 14:18-19 & John 15:1-5), as the word of God (Rev. 19:13 & John 1:1,14 & I John 1:1-4), as the water of life (Rev. 21:6, 22:1 & John 4:10) and as the light (Rev. 22:5 & John 1:4-5).

Furthermore, the Gospel of John is known for its “I am” (*ego eimi*) sayings of Christ (about seven or eight, including 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 10:11&14, 11:25, 14:6 and 15:1), and the book of Revelation is known for them as well, about seven or eight, occurring in 1:8, 1:11, 1:17, 1:18, 2:23, 21:6, 22:13 and 22:16. There are about the same number of “I am” statements in John as there are in the Apocalypse. This is a great indicator by John the son of Zebedee, the Apostle who wrote the fourth Gospel, that he also wrote the Apocalypse.

Also, it is clear that neither John the Baptist, nor Peter’s father John, nor John Mark, nor John of the Sanhedrin can be expected to be the John in view here. The lack of the use of the word “apostle” is an argument in favor of it being the Apostle John, who at this point was likely the last living Apostle and would not find it appropriate to use the title here.

The external (secondary) evidence includes but is not limited to the 2nd Century testimonies of Justin Martyr, the Muratorian Canon, and Irenaus, and the 4th Century testimonies of Clement of Alexander, Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian. All of these writers also believed that the fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John. More importantly, the Lord’s NT assemblies have historically received John to be the author of the five books of the NT associated with him.

The different writing styles argument is of limited value, as even Dr. Ehrman’s corpus shows a wide range of styles from his more scholarly works to his more popular works. My own writing does the same thing. That argument is truly inconclusive (I will mention more about it toward the end of this review) and Mr. Ehrman has provided no compelling evidence to support this argument.

It should also be pointed out that the book of Revelation contains more references to the OT than nearly any other NT book. Does Ehrman ever acknowledge that the author of Revelation was a Jew? I don’t recall him making much of the Jewishness of this book.³ But again, this is hardly relevant to understanding “what the Bible really says about the end.”

Continuing with the preface, Ehrman seeks to divide all interpreters of Revelation into two camps (while saying he belongs to neither): camp one sees Revelation as a blueprint for events soon to come, while camp two sees it as a metaphor for hope in suffering. Ehrman says he thinks both camps are wrong, and we are left to wait to find out which camp he is in. He states that the first part of his book shows why the futuristic view is wrong, and the second part of his book shows why the comfort view is wrong. He states, “the love of God - for anyone or anything - is never mentioned in the book of Revelation, not once.” (p. xix). This one sentence reveals how Ehrman has missed the big picture of Revelation, as well as individual verses such

³ Also, Ehrman does not seem to acknowledge Jesus as an apocalypticist in his seeking to establish a false dichotomy between Christ and John the Revelator. However, Kaseman, Pannenberg, Hartman and numerous others have argued the opposite to be the case. For discussions of this, see for example C.A. Patrides & Joseph Wittreich eds., *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

as 3:19 which says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” The Lord’s love is seen throughout the book, with the intent of having mankind turn to Him.⁴

Ehrman then says that the end of the book will show why Revelation was nearly excluded from the NT. A big part of Ehrman’s view is to pit “John of Patmos,” whoever that is (he doesn’t believe that it is the Apostle John) against the Lord Jesus Christ. He finally admits in the preface that he has no third view (“My book is not, however, meant simply to provide a better interpretation of the Apocalypse of John,” p. xx) and ultimately the reader is only going to be reading Mr. Ehrman’s doubts about the book. This is typical of the atheist viewpoint which has no better explanation of origins, but just cannot get itself to accept the Biblical account due to an issue of the will.

Chapter One - The End is Near

Like many critics without a biblical epistemology, Ehrman begins his book with some anecdotes. Anecdote number one concerns his moving from New Jersey to North Carolina and immediately then having to deal with the Edgar Whisenant hysteric foolishness, specifically his false prophecies that Christ was to return in 1988.

Another tactic which Ehrman will use throughout his book in his efforts to discredit the Apocalypse is to revive the old argument that the doctrine of imminence was unknown to the Lord’s NT assemblies until the 20th century. Ehrman states on page 2, “Since the end of the nineteenth century, most fundamentalist Christians have maintained that all this is taught in the Bible. That would have been news to Christians throughout most of the first nineteen hundred years of the church, who thought no such thing.” I will answer this false charge momentarily.

Mr. Ehrman then introduces another anecdote, that of Hal Lindsey and his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which, Ehrman is careful to note, sold twenty-eight million copies by the 1990s (p. 8). It is here that Ehrman recounts, “when I was fifteen, I had a “born again” experience” (p. 5) and he goes on to describe some of his subsequent struggles with Revelation, though he gives almost no details.

The anecdotes don’t really prove anything and maybe they really aren’t supposed to, but they segway into another subsection on “The Rapture in Scripture?” This is a bewildering section because Ehrman is rehashing so many arguments that have been answered so many times. But then again this should not be surprising, because in his other books and online lectures and debates, 100% of every so-called “contradiction in the Bible” that he cites has been answered by a variety of authors, whether it be from theologians, historians, or (gasp) pastors of NT churches. In fact, Ehrman will often admit that the “contradictions” have been answered, but that he is clearly not satisfied with the answers. The Lord Jesus had the same experience with

⁴ Moses laid the foundational teaching that the LORD “turneth man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men” (cf. Psalm 90). Even the half hour of silence in heaven before the seventh seal is opened (8:1) is another dramatic example of the just and righteous and holy God of the Bible taking a compassionate and pitiful space before unleashing his justice upon the earth with the hopes that some would see Him.

critics of His day, who were always asking for one more sign, and not being satisfied even though one came back from the dead (cf. Luke 16:31, John 11:46).

In this section Mr. Ehrman states, “But here is a little known factoid: The word “rapture” never appears in the Bible.” (p. 9) This level of Bible illiteracy is puzzling to me, as one of the most widely used Bible translations in the history of Christianity did have the word *raepimur* in it, which is the Latin word for “rapture.” I speak of course of the Latin Vulgate, which was at one point the most popular Bible in the world.⁵

The common trope that Ehrman repeats, that the idea of “the rapture” did not exist before 1830 (just as some try to say that argumentation for the exclusive use of the KJV did not begin until around that time as well), has been answered so many times, but I will simply appeal to a book that every single reader of ours has access to, the Oxford English Dictionary. The OED lists as the fourth definition of rapture: “the act of conveying a person from one place to another, especially heaven; the fact of being so conveyed.” The OED provides two examples of this usage, a 1647 usage by an author named Ward, and a 1693 usage by an author named Edwards. These examples are 150-200 years before Ehrman’s claim.⁶

The Calvinist Baptist John Gill (1697-1771) in his commentary on I Thessalonians 4:17 stated, “suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which rapture will contribute, the agility which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have: and this rapture of the living saints will be “together with them,” with the dead in Christ, that will then be raised;”⁷

This elementary survey of just a few of the ancient historical sources that refer to the rapture dismantles Ehrman’s argument and discredits his worldview. For Ehrman not even to reference a single of these sources in a book that promotes itself as a help to the sincere seeker of truth who wants to understand the Apocalypse betrays his intentions.

Ehrman doubles down on this historical inaccuracy by stating, “this idea of the rapture occurred to no one until John Nelson Darby came up with the idea in the early 1800s.” (p. 9). These claims of omniscience on the part of Ehrman are similar to the impossible assertion: “I know there is no god.” The examples I gave are just a small handful that came to the mind of this bi-vocational pastor. For fuller studies, I exhort the sincere seeker of truth to avoid Dr. Ehrman’s assumptions and consult books such as *Evidence for the Rapture* (edited by John F.

⁵ Cf. I Thessalonians 4:17 - “*deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquitur simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obvium Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus.*”

⁶ Ehrman’s fuzziness with numbers here is not restricted to this topic, but in his dating of books, manuscripts, etc.

⁷ John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Vol. 9, p. 238. Gill’s is a fairly standard 18th Century commentary, and he uses the word “rapture” twice in the same sentence as though it were a common enough term that did not need defining. I have also read that Joseph Mede’s 1627 commentary on Revelation, *Clavis Apocalyptica*, (translated 1833 by R. Bransby Cooper) makes reference to “the rapture” as well, but I have not been able to verify the quote at this time in the English translation that I am reading.

Hart, and published by Moody Press),⁸ or David Cloud's work in numerous places such as "*When Was the Pre-Tribulation Rapture First Taught?*" on the *Way of Life* website, or the paper by Dr. James F. Stitzinger, "*The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation*," or William C. Watson's 2015 book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, or Corey M. Marsh's 2023 book, *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*.

As Ehrman continues to comfort himself in his ignorance of the plain teaching of the rapture, he claims that I Thessalonians 4:13-18 is the most important passage on the subject and yet does not teach it. He avers, "It is important to read the passage, and all passages of the Bible, in context - a point I will be beating like a drum throughout this book." (p. 10). Somehow, in this context of "the context of I Thessalonians 4:13-18", he does not quote I Thessalonians 1:10, where Paul told this church to "wait for His Son from heaven." Further, he brings up the legitimate point that Bible readers should not let chapter divisions prevent them from seeing the connection that runs through each of the Bible, but that hermeneutic point doesn't bolster his argument here. He also ignores or misses the context of this argument as it continues in that same verse where Paul says that God's son is "Jesus, who saved us from the wrath to come." Contextually, the wrath to come is the time of Jacob's trouble, the day of the LORD, the seven year tribulation.

Ehrman's explanation of I Thessalonians 4:17 is that "it can't be a rapture" (p.11). That really is the core of his argument. What biblical proof does he give? None. What penultimate historical proof does he give? Without citing any sources he simply alludes to some "image familiar in antiquity" (p. 11) of a king visiting one of his cities. These cities would then send "leading figures" (p. 12) out to meet the king and welcome him to the city. Whether or not this sort of thing happened according to historical sources Ehrman would lean upon, the analogy completely breaks down. I Thessalonians 4 does not refer at all to "leading figures" being the ones to meet the Lord in the air, but "the dead in Christ" and "we which are alive," i.e., everyone equally, not some exclusive group of superior Christians who make up the "leading figures." For those who hold to forms of a supremacy complex, such as White Supremacists and Darwinian evolutionists, such language may be comforting. But to the members of the Lord's churches there is no such application.

Furthermore, those who deny the biblical doctrine of the rapture should ask themselves why there is a doctrine of the rapture in the first place. If the future 7 year tribulation, known as the time of Jacob's trouble, is clearly taught, why would the Lord remove NT church age saints from the earth ahead of this event? Has God indicated that He has distinct programs for Israel and for NT church age saints?

Fortunately, Ehrman is correct in pointing out, as most biblical theologians and premillennialists do, that Matthew 24:39-40 is not referring to the rapture. Most students of the

⁸ Bart Ehrman often refers to the fact that he attended Moody Bible Institute.

Bible are able to figure that out after their first couple of times through the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit and their pastor.

Beginning on page 13, Ehrman takes to task those who are “mass marketing the rapture.” Ehrman has done lots of mass marketing of his books, paid subscription website, and other ways to pay him. Ehrman’s targets in this section are the 1972 film *A Thief in the Night*, and the novel series *Left Behind*. I am certainly aware of these pieces of media though I have consumed absolutely zero of them, and their existence is yet again irrelevant to the interpretation of the book of the Apocalypse.

He asks “Is it all about us,” and refers to a couple “recent polls” with no sources (p. 14). And again without sources or any proof, he claims, “Revelation was almost never read as a prediction of the near future for nearly two millennia.” (p.15). The insertion “almost never” allows him some wiggle room, but ultimately he has no basis for this view and shows ignorance of the many sources cited above that provide verifiable data of 20 centuries of belief in imminence. It is also historically reasonable to conclude that if these many written sources expressed this belief, countless other Christians throughout history also held to this belief but did not get to write about it.

Ehrman is correct again to take people to task for their strange ways of reading the Bible, namely, as he puts it, like a Christian ouija board (p. 16) where the Book is just randomly opened and a verse is read and applied on the spot. (I will say that God’s grace is so amazing that there certainly are people who have found help in time of need from doing that very thing, but no, that is not the way that one should go about reading the Bible.) Ehrman is right that, “if God inspired a book, surely that means he wanted it to be read as a book” (p. 19). However, Ehrman should have at least made reference to the way that the NT authors utilized the OT (and it would have been helpful for him to clarify that he does not believe that God did inspire any book ever, because according to Ehrman there is no God).

Ehrman makes immature theological foibles like saying God “inspired different authors” (p. 19). This is sloppy theology more fitting of the sort of people Ehrman imagines Christians to be, ironically.

Harold Camping is the next anecdotal false prophet that Ehrman targets, and we are glad he does it. Harold Camping was another heretic who caused many foolish people to behave more foolishly, and the whole story is very sad. If in fact Camping confessed and repented then we can believe that God forgave him, and we should forgive him too. But the lesson to be learned is never to make predictions as to when the Lord Jesus is returning.⁹

Ehrman closes this section by stating, “I don’t hear about Christian prophets of doom and their millions of followers in my day-to-day life, even though I used to be one of them and am a scholar who deals with their texts” (p. 21). I assume that Ehrman here means he used to be a follower of prophets of doom, not a prophet of doom himself.

⁹ Harold Camping certainly is an extreme case for Ehrman to use, as the man’s sad ministry ended with false prediction after false prediction, and he promoted numerous heresies to his deceived followers in such books as *1994?*, *The End of the Church Age*, and *Baptism: The Washing Away of Our Sins*.

Chapter 2 - The Most Mystifying Book of the Bible

Ehrman declares, “For centuries it was not widely read... even scribes were not particularly interested in copying it” (p. 23). That seems to be an especially questionable statement for Ehrman to make since he has been telling people for years that they cannot even know what the Bible really says even though we have well over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the NT. We have exactly how many written ancient documents saying, “for centuries Revelation was not widely read”? And Ehrman’s conjecture seems to be based on what he says next: “We have far fewer manuscripts of Revelation than for any other book of comparable size in the New Testament.” (pp.23-24). But that does not prove at all Ehrman’s theory that scribes were neither reading nor copying Revelation. It could just as easily mean that because of its importance copies of it were targeted for destruction by the Roman government and the Roman state church. It could mean that copies were read and destroyed. Furthermore, we have more Greek manuscripts containing all or part of Revelation (over 300) than we do of many of the ancient historical records Ehrman is fond of quoting (some of which only exist in one or two manuscripts, etc. as we shall discuss).

To prove his point, Ehrman’s first witness that he calls to the stand is Martin Luther. That is a very unfortunate decision by Ehrman. Luther does not make the best witness in this regard as he was not a member of the Lord’s NT churches, and his antisemitism was widely expressed although it may not be as widely known today (though much has been written on the subject in recent decades). With the book of Revelation having so much to say about the 12 tribes of Israel, and having more allusions to the Hebrew *Tanakh* than any other NT book, it could have easily been the antisemitism of the author that has turned him against the Apocalypse and against the God of Israel. That Luther had a spiritual problem seems further evidenced by his infamous quote which Ehrman cites, “The author says they are to be blessed who keep what is written therein; and yet no one knows what that is” (p. 24).

Ehrman emphasizes “the need to read literary works, even inspired works, as texts situated in contexts.” (p. 25). But he fails to emphasize the context of Revelation as a letter written from a NT church member to NT churches from their divine head. Ehrman continually trips up on the theory that somehow Revelation is written outside this context.

He also tells the reader that he “will not overburden you with a detailed, verse-by-verse, or even passage-by-passage exposition.” (p. 25). This will enable him to skip any passages that do not fit with his biases, and will also take him outside the realm of expository teaching, which therefore will severely limit (before he even gets started) how helpful this book could be to students of the Word of God.

The beginning of the end -

Ehrman spends about 6 pages dealing with Revelation chapter one. He uses the first couple of pages giving his opinion that the Greek of Revelation “is the worst of the entire New Testament” (p. 26) and then posits five explanations for why this is the case. Ehrman’s personal

theory is that “John simply did not write well. Most people don’t” (p. 27). These simple sentences reveal much of Dr. Ehrman’s attitude toward others. False humility appears to be evident when Ehrman says, “a revelation from God himself would be too exalted, too divine, to come directly to us peons.” (p. 27) This sort of mindset is not warranted by Scripture either.

Ehrman takes issue with the word “servant” being used in place of “slave” (p. 28) and he even cites Bob Dylan to bolster his view. He should have taken the time to point out here that whichever English word is used to translate *doulos* the preacher will have some explaining to do.

Ehrman’s poor understanding of ecclesiology is evidenced when he writes, “John was writing to seven groups of Christians that he personally knew”(p. 28), Group is not a good translation of *ecclesia*, but it is good to see Ehrman acknowledge that John knew these church members.

One of Ehrman’s arguments against the Apostle John being the author is that some hold to the view that the 24 elders in chapter 4 comprise the 12 Apostles, and John therefore could not be seeing himself. First of all, that view may or may not be correct. In fact, it would have been helpful for Ehrman to acknowledge here that there are many views. But regardless, John would not be the first person to refer to himself in the third person. The Apostle Paul did this very thing when writing to the church at Corinth in the context of knowing a man who was called up to the third heaven (cf. II Cor. 12:2). How could Paul know this man and be this man? Perhaps in the same way that John could be one of the twelve Apostles and see the twelve Apostles, if in fact that were the correct interpretation.

Ehrman’s exegesis through the rest of chapter one is sloppy at best. He states that Rev 1 is the first time Sunday is called the Lord’s day, but how does he know that? By his own epistemology he would not be able to make that claim. He also stumbles over John seeing the voice, asking, “how do you see a voice?” (p. 30) being ignorant of the first story in the Bible where the voice of the LORD (not the LORD) is walking through the garden (cf. Genesis 3:8).

The Letters to the Seven Churches -

Ehrman presumptuously states, “Most readers find the letters written to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 a rather uninspiring beginning to the Apocalypse” (p. 31). It has been this author’s privilege to preach through the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 at least 3 times verse by verse, as well as several stand alone sermons, and I can testify that neither I nor the hearers found the chapters uninspiring. In fact, in numerous cases the study provoked good questions and profitable discussions, and left the audience wanting to hear more. Ehrman’s problem with these chapters is a spiritual problem and relates to the fact that when he reads Revelation he is reading someone else’s mail, because he is not a member of one of the Lord’s churches. In that sense, Ehrman’s mockery of “most readers” turns out to be accurate, because unfortunately there are many people who have not identified with Christ and His assembly.

Ehrman makes reference to the historical view changing as it relates to Domitian’s dealing with Christians (p. 32). Whether this is accurate or not is besides the point, as this admission by Ehrman illustrates that history changes and that assertions Bart Ehrman makes in the 21st century may be completely rejected by superior scholarship in the 22nd century. In fact,

Ehrman's position opens up the possibility that everything he has written may be false and he may find himself as a sinner in the hands of an angry God.

Ehrman uses this theory regarding Domitian to set up what he calls "perceived persecution," (p. 32) and that these Christians who testified of their sufferings were making mountains out of mole hills. This is the philosophy today that energizes the denial of the Nazi holocaust in Germany occupied Europe, as well as the White Supremacists who minimize the horrors of slavery in America.

Some of Ehrman's comments on the 7 letters have some value, such as when he notes, "False teachers are not outsiders trying to lead Christians astray. They are church leaders" (p. 34). This is where we must commend Ehrman for at least having the integrity to leave his church and so-called Christendom, although we also feel it is disingenuous that he still calls himself a Bible scholar. Biblical scholarship, according to the Bible itself, requires faith. However, he does not look at all 7 churches, and therefore provides little help for the student of the Bible who "really" wants to know what Revelation says.

The Throne Room of God and the Lamb -

Somehow Ehrman sees meaning in the four creatures as "representing the four zoological categories" (p. 37). Ehrman's slavish devotion to Dawinian theology causes him to see a human as just part of God's zoological creation and not the Imago Dei.

On page 38, Ehrman states, "In the Christian tradition, Jesus is identified as "the lamb who takes away the sins of the world." This is a reference of course to John the Baptist who is indeed part of the Christian tradition, not an Old Testament prophet. We commend Ehrman for this observation.

The heaven-sent disasters - and The fall of Babylon

Ehrman gives fairly standard overviews of these sections.

The New Heavens, Earth, and Jerusalem

Ehrman repeatedly emphasizes the "they and no one else"(p. 45) aspect of the message of Revelation: that God's salvation is not universal. He also refers to "the curse formula similar to those found in other ancient writings, telling scribes who later copy the book not to make any alterations or mistakes" (p. 46). This is a significant statement for two reasons: 1) Ehrman and his school continually double down on contextualizing the Bible as just another book, and 2) Ehrman's position is that no scribes ever did what the book of Revelation told them to do.

Chapter 3 - A History of False Predictions

Ehrman begins this chapter by saying that Christians changed their minds from being chiliasts and believing in imminency, and he cites Augustine, "the most influential theologian of Christian history" (p. 49) to prove his case. He states that Augustine's views "sent the "futurist" understanding of Revelation into long-term hibernation." (p. 50). Again, Ehrman does his readers a great disservice by not referring them to the volumes of theology books and journal articles that have given evidence of the doctrines of imminence and millennialism throughout

history. Augustine represents the Roman Catholic view, and the churches that were outside of the State church were not able to write their views or keep them available because these documents were being thrown into the same fires as these unsanctioned Christians. As many who study history know, the victor is the one who often gets to write the history books.

The Earliest Interpretations of Revelation -

Ehrman again is basing this entire section on the non-omniscient record of history, which he believes to tell an entirely accurate story. The careful reader of Scripture would conclude that the Apostle John was committed to fulfilling the so-called Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) as is evidenced within the book of Acts, and that the Lord's candlesticks, despite all their problems, would be led by the Spirit of God into all truth, including the truth of the imminent rapture and return of Christ, the tribulation, and the future millennial kingdom.

It is bizarre that Ehrman says that readers of Revelation, which he acknowledges as the seven churches of chapters 2-3, would have both understood Revelation with ease (I can accept that) and that they knew John because he was among them as a preacher possibly for years (p. 50). Then who was he, if he was not the Apostle John?

Ehrman seems to grossly overstate things when he implies that all church fathers were opposed to chiliasm because of its emphasis on a physical kingdom (p. 51). As many histories of dispensational theology have shown, chiliasts were in existence from the first century. He traces the immense influence of Augustine to Joachim of Fiore to the Protestant Reformation and after. Unfortunately, there really is limited value in this portion of the book, because Ehrman makes no pretense of being exhaustive in his survey of history, and cherry picks the sources that he finds interesting and that fit with the points that he wants to emphasize. Furthermore, appealing to penultimate sources like history is part and parcel with Nicolaitianism and at best serves as anecdotal interest.

Ehrman then has a lengthy section on Dispensational Premillennialism, with special attention paid, of course, to John Nelson Darby and to Cyrus I. Scofield's reference Bible. But naturally he goes down the well-worn dead end trail of giving them credit for the invention of the rapture, inaccurately stating in no uncertain terms: "And so, in 1833, Darby pronounced his new idea: The followers of Jesus would not be here to experience these catastrophes. There would be a "rapture" before the coming tribulation." (p. 71). He also covers the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, including the impact of German rationalism on literalism and of World War 1 on optimism. Ehrman concludes this section by belittling Christians, stating, "most evangelicals could not define a dispensation if you threatened them with seven years of tribulation." (p. 74).

Chapter 4 - Real-life consequences of the imminent apocalypse

This chapter might be Ehrman's most audacious and inflammatory. Ehrman begins by stating, "the expectation that the end is near has never done anyone much good, except perhaps the prophecy authors who have made fame and fortune writing about it." (p. 75). Ehrman's fortune must be included in this as well, for his books have sold millions of copies as he wrote on

these subjects. He then gives four case studies in American religion to prove his point that belief in the imminence of the Apocalypse has dangerous consequences. These four case studies are 1) The Great Disappointment, which refers to the failed prophecies of Protestant cultists like William Miller and the results that their heresies brought, 2) The Disaster at Waco, which of course refers to the horrors of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, 3) US Policy on Israel, which refers to the United States' support of the Jewish people, and 4) The Environment, Climate, and the Imminent Return of Jesus, which refers to evangelical apathy toward conservation issues.

The first consequence of believing in the imminent return of Jesus, according to Ehrman, is the Great Disappointment, which is something he touched on earlier in this book when he brought up false prophecies. Here, he is specifically referring to the false prophecies of William Miller and how they, according to Ehrman, "shattered lives." (p. 76). Miller, of course, had a great influence on many sects that formed after his ministry, including the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are many resources and reference works that the reader may consult to see how the teachings of these "Christian cults" are in conflict with the teaching of the Bible, and promote such false teachings as salvation by works and a denial of the doctrine of the Triune Godhead. While we would agree with Ehrman that Miller was a false teacher and that the break-off groups that followed his teaching have had a detrimental impact on the spiritual health of their own adherents, we would remain unconvinced that somehow God or the Bible or the doctrine of imminence is to blame. Ehrman fails to prove this "guilt by association" point.

The second consequence of believing in the imminent return of Jesus, according to Ehrman, is the disaster at Waco involving David Koresh and the religious sect of Branch Davidians (which can ultimately trace their history back to William Miller as well). Ehrman starts this section by stating, "Koresh and his followers were devotees of the Apocalypse" (p. 83). Of course, no one is biblically a "devotee of the Apocalypse" without being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and a believing student of the entire Holy Bible, dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God and exercising his spiritual gift in the NT immersionist assembly, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. In these cases, Koresh was not a devotee to the truth, but to himself and his own heart (cf. Proverbs 18:2). Ehrman states that the SDA sect is "one of the most rapid growing of the Protestant denominations with over twenty million adherents" (p. 84) with no source given. He then does a biography of David Koresh and a brief examination of his beliefs. Ehrman concludes this section with the following moral to the story:

"I try not to pass moral judgment on anyone who believes such things. All of us are almost certainly wrong about one thing or another when it comes to ultimate reality. But the belief that the divine plan of the entire human race has now climaxed with us (lucky us!) is, if not delusional, then at least a bit narcissistic. Narcissists, like their eponymous ancestor, do not see what is in the water when they gaze into it. Or for that matter what is in the Bible. They see themselves. This is not always disastrous, but it is nearly always sad." (p. 91).

Ehrman's morality tale does contain a truth that all of his readers can benefit from: life is not about us. It is about something greater than us. Of course, Ehrman cannot tell his reader what that greater thing is, but perhaps he suspects it. However, Ehrman's morality tale here sets up the straw man of narcissism as the motivation of those who would believe in the imminent return of Christ, and he seems to leave the reader with the dichotomy of choosing between narcissism and nihilism. There is no blessed hope and no rapture generation because nothing is special. This of course fits with the theory of origins that everything came from nothing so nothing is where everything will end up.

The third consequence of believing in the imminent return of Jesus, according to Ehrman, is "US support for the nation of Israel" (p. 92). Ehrman states up front that he is "emphatically not taking a stand on the Israeli-Palestinian situation in general or American support of Israel in particular" (p. 92). And in a most revealing moment he muses, "Who woulda (sic) thought the crisis in the Middle East would be about the Antichrist?" (p. 92). The OT has been giving its readers that thought going back a long, long time ago.

We need to pause and point out that Bart Ehrman's books and videos are hugely popular with the religious who seek to discredit Christianity, and that Christianity is of course built upon the Jewish Bible commonly called (beginning with Paul, cf. II Cor. 3:14) the Old Testament. It is not a surprise then to be reading him express opinions which seem to scold the USA for supporting Israel, the historic enemy of many Arab and Muslim nations.

Ehrman spends some time going through the history of what he calls "Christian Zionism" (p. 92) though, as far as I could tell, he never really defines it. He then, in what feels a bit like a moment of pearl-clutching, seeks to evoke an emotional response from his audience by stating, "Many evangelicals love Israel but believe most of its inhabitants will be sent to the fires of hell." (p. 95). This is perhaps meant to coax some head-shaking and shouts of "shame" from the reader, perhaps on the level of "many Christians believe that God loves the world but that most of its inhabitants will be sent to the fires of hell." This of course is the point of the *biblaridion* of Revelation chapter 10, which Ehrman does not address.

Ehrman then has an interesting division where he seems to grapple with his own hermeneutical approach to the Bible. He states, "Unlike historical scholars who see the Bible as sixty-six books written by different authors at different times with different points of view, these readers see the Bible as a single book with many parts that tightly cohere from start to finish." (p. 96). The easiest way to dismiss this straw man is to start by asking, "how does God define scholarship?" and, "Is the way Bart Ehrman handles the Bible the way that the writers of the Bible handled the Bible?" In other words, did John the Baptist, the Apostles, and even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He cited it, do as Bart says to do, or did they see a unity in the Bible while indeed recognizing that there were different authors, different dispensations, etc.?¹⁰

As Ehrman goes about to prove his point there is one major piece of the puzzle he leaves out: What does Israel say about this? Does Israel see US policy in the Middle East as being

¹⁰ I have discussed this in my chapter on the Bibliology of the first Baptist in *The Church that John the Baptist Prepared* (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2021).

based upon a belief in the imminent apocalypse? Why is that important question never so much as brought up?

The final point to be made about Ehrman's third point is: if it is true that "a belief in an imminent apocalypse influences our government" (p. 102) then is this the government as a whole or just certain parties / branches? And if so, what is influencing the parties / branches that are not influenced by "a belief in an imminent apocalypse"? And is a Biblical precept being applied? Ehrman never addresses this point that he inadvertently brings up. Surely if one of the parties is influenced by this belief, then the other parties must be influenced by other beliefs, and what are those other beliefs?

The fourth and final consequence of believing in the imminent return of Jesus, according to Ehrman, concerns the environment / climate. His entire premise for this is built upon polling (no source given) that those who believe in the imminent return of Jesus are apathetic, indifferent, and unconcerned with God's creation, the earth. He states, "many who oppose active involvement in these causes do have arguments and often they come from the Bible" (p. 103). Ehrman's main piece of evidence for this is a 1981 quote of 61 words from James Watt, who was Secretary of the Interior under President Ronald Reagan, wherein the Secretary says, "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns." (p. 104). This really is the main piece of evidence that Ehrman summons to the fore.

He goes on to cite UCLA professor Lynn White, who, Ehrman says believes that, "the notion that humans were granted supremacy over all has made Bible-believing Christians unconcerned for the health of the planet." (p. 105). Ehrman builds on White's statement to say, "the rest of the world was made for humans, after all, and so could be exploited in any way they choose." (p. 105).

Ehrman then contradicts and disproves his entire premise in the next paragraph when he admits, "White's view proved to be controversial in part because one could use the Genesis creation story to make just the opposite argument: since God awarded the planet to humans, he expected them to be good stewards of it. Many Christians have understood the passage that way, including increasing numbers of evangelicals today, especially in the younger generations, many of whom are taking climate change more seriously." (p. 105).

This entire point by Ehrman is full of ignorance, stereotypes, and obtuse thinking. It reinforces offensive stereotypes that are based in prejudicial and inflammatory thinking, and betrays a shallow knowledge of history with hardly any support. This reviewer who has lived and operated in Christian circles for nearly half a century (longer than Ehrman has called himself a Christian) has found "just the opposite argument" to be the main and majority view of those who call themselves Christians (cf. Proverbs 12:10), and entire volumes could be called upon to make this point.¹¹ Even Catholicism is known for St. Francis of Assisi, and the conservation

¹¹ Countless anecdotes could be provided by this reviewer to refute Ehrman's foolhardy notion (a notion that would be right labeled racist were it made about an ethnic group instead of a religious group) and to illustrate that biblical Christianity leads to a heart of compassion and conservation for God's creation (while not succumbing to the sinful tendency to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, cf. Romans 1). One single anecdote is shared here: this author was privileged to know a dear older Christian brother named Harold who was a cattle

movement has been popular within Christian circles predating the modern day Environmental movement. In conclusion, Ehrman's fourth chapter on dangers of imminency completely fails to prove his point.

Chapter 5 - How to Read the Book of Revelation

Ehrman begins this chapter by exhorting his readers to read the Bible in its context. This is somewhat ironic if it cannot be known who the author is and who the audience is. But Ehrman does not appear interested in the biblical context of the book of Revelation, and so who the author is and who the churches were that received it really don't matter so much to him. He goes on to explain what he means by "the literary context of Revelation," and that is, "Revelation is not a sui generis work that requires unique principles of interpretation. A number of ancient writings are very similar to it..." (p. 111). Ehrman goes on to give examples from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (insofar as they may be identified). So the context that Ehrman is talking about is to see Revelation as one of many "Apocalypses" that need to be understood altogether. This scholarly myth is a NT version of the ultra popular myth that demands that the creation account of Genesis be understood in the context of other "creation myths" such as Enuma Elish, the tale of Gilgamesh, etc. However, neither the NT Apostles nor the LORD Jesus Himself ever instructed the NT churches to practice literary contextualization in order to understand these books. In contrast, Paul commended the Thessalonians for receiving the word of God (cf. I Thessalonians 2:13).

Ehrman goes on to make several conjectures in regards to Apocalyptic literature, and several times repeats the long refuted trope that Daniel was written in 160 BC. (p. 111-12). Ehrman acknowledges that a 6th Century BC date for Daniel is a popular view ("the early sixth century BCE - at the time when the book of Daniel was allegedly written..." (p. 116). He even admits, "Daniel, allegedly living in the sixth century BCE..." (p. 117). So Ehrman's insecurities re: the date of Daniel are on display repeatedly. He goes to great lengths to argue for the theory of the late date of Daniel, basically accusing the author of deceiving his readers (which is a common Ehrman tactic, see p. 118), and ultimately concludes with the empty statement, "Ancient apocalypses are filled with expectations that are never realized." (p. 119). This may be true of non-canonical "apocalypses," but Daniel does not fit this description, as any detailed study of Daniel's 70 Weeks can demonstrate.

After spending some time defending the idea that Revelation is Apocalyptic literature, Ehrman seeks to use Revelation 9 as a case study to illustrate wrong approaches to interpreting

rancher by trade in the American West. He told the story of riding his tractor back and forth all day carrying huge pails of water to a lone tree out in the middle of one of his hundreds of acres in a seemingly futile effort to save this one tree's life. Harold was one of the most sincere Christians this author has ever known, and he believed every single word in the Bible was inspired and preserved by the living Triune God of eternity. He risked his own physical health to save this one tree. I could share countless stories like this, and many from my own life. To suggest that Christians could ever be less than devoted stewards of God's creation would have been anathema to this man, and it is in fact anathema to me as I ponder Ehrman's straw man argument.

the book. He argues, “The invariable thesis of all of these books - that the Bible was not written for its own time but for ours - encounters a rather obvious problem: it would mean that the biblical authors who address specific readers did not expect them to have any clue what they were talking about. That’s not how authors, ancient or modern, work.” (p. 124). This is a straw man argument that ignores the nature of prophetic statements that go all the way back to the protoevangelium. Of course Genesis 3:15 had a direct application to Eve, but it also had a prophetic element, as is the case with all of the Bible’s prophetic literature.

A couple other problems with Ehrman’s biblical scholarship at this point are: 1) those books to which he refers are not the book of Revelation but are about Revelation and as such they will only have limited value and are not the basis of the church’s understanding of the Apocalypse, but even more egregious is 2) how in the world can Ehrman not bring up here or anywhere else in his entire book the account of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 which are killed, and who’s dead bodies shall be seen by people and kindreds and tongues and nations, and shall cause the rejoicing of they that dwell on the earth (Revelation 11:9-10).¹² How does Ehrman not deal with the popular view that this event is possibly explained by the advent of telecommunications technology such as satellite TV and internet feeds, and that in that scenario this account was being written for a future generation? And even the promise to John in Revelation 10:11 that he must prophesy again before many peoples, nations, tongues and kings indicates some degree of futurism for John and his readers.

Ehrman then attempts to give a historical approach to interpreting the woman on the beast of Revelation 17. As one would expect, Ehrman here brings up the King James Version and takes issue with its wording. He states:

“Unfortunately, John’s horror and amazement may not be evident to those who read the passage in the King James Version. In that translation, after seeing this “whore,” John says: “I wondered at her with great admiration” (17:7). This has long been one of my favorite verses in the King James. The prophet sees this grotesque woman and greatly admires her! But, alas, that is simply one of the problems with using a brilliant but four-hundred-year-old English translation. At the time of King James I, the word “admiration” meant “astonishment” (p. 129)

There are several incredible errors that Ehrman makes here, the blame of which may be shared by incompetent editing, but which nonetheless betray a lack of true scholarship. First and most obviously, Ehrman cites Revelation 17:7, but that is not the verse he quotes. Revelation 17:7 in the KJV reads as follows: “*And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath seven heads*

¹² The language is such that there will be an enormous, even global, scope of those who were tormented by these prophets, who saw them dead, and who rejoice and give gifts at their death. Cf. Thomas, who notes, “The suggested limitation of these earth-dwellers to people in the land of Palestine might be feasible if it were not for the worldwide scope of the listings in v. 9 and the use of the technical expression for “those who dwell upon the earth” in the rest of Revelation (Charles). A globe-spanning interest in these two deaths is anticipated, but not every single person will see the corpses in person. Because of the cosmopolitan backgrounds of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, representatives from all groups will be there to witness it personally however.” Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), p. 96.

and ten horns.” Does that sound like the verse Ehrman quotes? Of course not, he gave the wrong reference. This is easy mistake that may be expected of kindergarteners and those who have never picked up a Bible in their life, not of a man who continually promotes himself as a “scholar” and uses that word over, and over, and over again.

Second, whatever Bible version Ehrman is quoting, it is not the King James Version; neither the KJV of Revelation 17:7 nor the KJV of Revelation 17:6 nor of 17:8 nor anywhere in the King James Version of the Bible. Here again is Ehrman’s quote: “In that translation (King James Version), after seeing this “whore,” John says: “I wondered at her with great admiration” (17:7). This has long been one of my favorite verses in the King James.” Here we must actually quote the King James version in Revelation 17:6, which says this: “*And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*” Where in the world does Ehrman get the words “at her”? Not from the King James Version. Ehrman doubles down on his fallacy by saying, “The prophet sees this grotesque woman and greatly admires her!” (p. 129) But that is not at all what the King James Version says, and Ehrman’s entire point is built upon untruth and falsehood. The words “at her” are added by Ehrman, and he tells his reader that the KJV says “at her” when it does not say that. Many of Ehrman’s readers will believe him without ever checking the King James Version for themselves.

Thirdly, if Ehrman had in fact looked at 17:7 instead of just erroneously putting the reference there, he would have seen that the Bible interprets itself for the reader and the KJV is plainly understandable. 17:7 says, “And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.” Note that the angel does not say what Bart Ehrman would claim: “Wherefore didst thou marvel at her?” And primarily, we see that the word translated “admiration” in verse 6 is translated “marvel” in verse 7, both from the same root verb *thaumazo*. As one of the KJV contributors might say, Ehrman is guilty of making much ado about nothing in his fretting over Revelation 17:6 (or as he would wrongly call it, 17:7). So when Ehrman concludes by saying, “At the time of King James I, the word “admiration” meant “astonishment,” he could have been genuine and gone on to say, “which the KJV translators obviously knew and meant because of how the next verse translates the same Greek word as “marvel,” and which we should note that Mr. William Tyndale nearly 100 years before the KJV also translated as ‘marvel,’” but Ehrman did not do that.

Ehrman goes on in his attempt to interpret Revelation 17 for his trusting readers by seeing the imagery as referring to Rome and its persecution of Christians. He states, “Our principle account of these events comes not from a Christian source but from the Roman historian Tacitus” (p. 131). It is really hilarious to see Ehrman cite Tacitus with such certainty and authority, when there exist only 2 manuscripts of Tacitus in all the world (dated around 1,000 years after he lived), while at the same time constantly questioning the Bible’s certainty with its amount of manuscripts (more than two). Ehrman’s epistemology should prevent him from being

able to quote Tacitus with anything more than negligible certainty, but, of course, when disparaging the Bible is the goal the rules can be bent if not broken.

Ehrman's conclusion re: Revelation 17 is that the woman who rides the beast is Rome, and by that he means only the Rome of John's day. Ehrman is not wrong in following the nearly universal interpretation of Rome being in view, but his myopic bias prevents him from seeing any notion of a revived Roman empire, which was prophesied by Daniel the prophet as well.

Ehrman then attempts to tackle Revelation chapter 13 and the mark of the beast, and begins with a non sequitur that a writer is not able to imbue his apocalyptic text with an infinite number of interpretations (p. 132). One thing that Ehrman's interpretation never shows is how the Roman government of John's day fulfilled the prediction of requiring all members of society to receive the mark of beast without which they could neither buy nor sell.

Furthermore, Ehrman trods down the tired path of making a big deal of 616 versus 666. Ehrman states, "It is odd, though, that some Greek manuscripts of Revelation do not give the number as 666, but as 616. Why would that be?" (p. 133). He repeats this on page 135, asking again, "Why do some early manuscripts of Revelation give the number as 616?" Notice again Ehrman's tactics to confuse, intimidate, and in fact be sloppy with the facts and the history. Ehrman's statement, "some Greek manuscripts" should more accurately be edited to read: "exactly two Greek manuscripts: P115 and C 04."¹³ Furthermore, Ehrman should have gone on to say, "and there is one manuscript (2344) that reads 665." By wording his arguments as he does, he seduces his audience to think much more of something than they ought. Ehrman's slyly worded questions do nothing to help the reader "understand what the book of Revelation really says," but only ministers doubts, casting doubt on Ehrman's own scholarship.

Ehrman then goes down the road of sharing theories involving the number of the beast relating to Ronald Reagan or Donald Trump, sounding more like a poster on Qanon or Reddit than a "historical scholar." If Ehrman could take a breath he would realize that there is not enough historical evidence in the past for any event to qualify as the fulfillment of Revelation 13, nor is there any event in the recent past, not even from the Republican presidents he brings up, to qualify as fulfillment of the chapter either. Finally, Ehrman spends a section on the second beast of Revelation 17, and appears to correctly identify it with a religious leader. But he stops short of committing to identify one religious leader from John's day that it could be referring to.

Ehrman concludes this section with a final appeal of his historicist view. "This is a message written for John's day," (p. 140) he says. "Futurist interpreters who claim these events are yet to transpire are misreading the book, not heeding its literary genre and not paying attention to its historical context." (p. 140). He does admit that there is an application to today's readers, and, speaking as an atheist or agnostic says that Revelation "conveys ideas that must be taken seriously by readers of all times - ideas about who God is, how he interacts with his world, what he expects of people, what he exacts from those who do not give him what he demands, and

¹³ This information is readily available in numerous reference works and journal articles, see for example : <https://mastersbible.institute/blog/hisnumberis666or616>

how he rewards those who do” (p. 140). Whether he is being disingenuous or not is up to the reader.

Chapter 6 - The Lamb Becomes a Lion: Violence in the Book of Revelation

Ehrman’s sixth chapter concerns his thesis that Revelation is a wrathful book that does not harmonize with the teachings of Jesus. He introduces this with a bit of a rabbit trail on Joshua, and then ominously says “Revelation presents the dark side of Christianity” (p. 147).

He spends a large section of this chapter talking about certain aspects of the wrath of God, and gives surveys of portions of Amos and Hosea, at the end of which he indignantly states, “You may think God is justified in his anger. But having infants dashed to pieces and pregnant mothers ripped open?” (p. 154) and refers to “death on innocent boys, girls, and infants because of the sin of others.” This is a perfect opportunity to wonder about Ehrman’s position on partial-birth abortion or late term abortion, but we digress a bit. He ends by concluding that the God of the Bible is a wrathful God.

Ironically, when introducing the topic of violence in the book of Revelation, Ehrman chides, “When people read the Bible, they tend to see what they want to see” (p. 155).

Ehrman shows his hand pretty early in this chapter, saying that he no longer believes “we simply cannot judge the Almighty,” (p. 156) which would be in accordance with Matthew 7:1, but that he does “not see it that way any longer. I am not saying I am more moral or just than the true God. I am saying that, in my view, the God of Revelation cannot be the true God. I certainly would not be inclined to think the true God was like the God of Revelation if the book were not in the Bible” (pp. 156-157). This leads into a long expression of the age-old practice of questioning the goodness of God, which goes all the way back to Genesis and has had believing and unbelieving practitioners alike. There really is no new ground covered here, nothing that annihilationists, modernists, and others haven’t already protested about since the modern age.

Ehrman tries to manipulate his audience by asking, “If the book of Revelation had been left out of the canon of Scripture, would Christians be so invested in saying there is nothing wrong in accepting the vengeful, jealous God of violent wrath portrayed here?” (p. 158). I am not sure how Ehrman has missed all of the references to the wrath of God in the four Gospels (many from the lips of the Lord Jesus) and throughout the NT.

Interestingly, Ehrman acknowledges that the book of Revelation contains numerous references to the wrath of God and of the Lamb (he lists five passages, p. 159), and this of course is further evidence that the writer of the fourth Gospel also wrote Revelation, and that it was the Apostle John. The word wrath is used in John 3:36 in the preaching of John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 3) and it is the same word that is used in Revelation.¹⁴

¹⁴ For an example of popular historical scholars taking extreme views, cf. Yale’s Anchor Bible Commentary on Revelation written by J. Massyngberde Ford wherein she argues that the John who authored Revelation was the Messiah’s forerunner, John the Baptist.

Ehrman then has a long section grappling with Christ's identity as both Lamb and Lion. The tension between the slain Lamb and the wrath of the Lamb is a line that Ehrman seems unable or unwilling to walk. He is not breaking any new ground in pointing out that the day of the LORD is something to be feared - the entire corpus of OT prophets have been warning that for centuries, as the Messiah's forerunner rightly pointed out to the religious leaders of his day (cf. Matthew 3). For Ehrman, there is no reconciling the Jesus pictured in Revelation and the Jesus pictured in the Gospels. Unfortunately, this revelation shows Ehrman not to be such a close reader of any of these books. He states, "It would have been simple for John to write a nonviolent account of the glorious future to come for the followers of Jesus" (p. 167). This sounds like someone who has never read the Bible at all. Why did Christ have to die a violent death? Why did God have to slaughter an animal and clothe Adam and Eve with skins? Why is Christ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world? Why the shedding of blood at all? Has Ehrman read the first 3 chapters of Genesis? His argument argues against that, but of course he has. There is just a great spiritual blindness here, and this chapter lays that blindness bare.

To further illustrate this, remember that Jesus received Baptist baptism from a man that He called the greatest who ever lived, and who preached both in Matthew and John about the wrath of God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned that it is better to enter into life with one eye or one hand than to be cast into hell. The sermon to the Apostles of the church in Matthew 10 contains some of the most dire imagery in the NT. There are so many examples of the wrath of Jesus in the four Gospels, toward His disciples, toward the religious leaders, toward the money changers, etc., that Ehrman's shock at Revelation's picture of Christ is quizzical at best.

Chapter 7 - The Ideology of Dominance: Wealth and Power in Revelation

Before we read what Ehrman has to say about wealth and power, we should note that a quick internet search reveals that Bart Ehrman has a net worth in the millions, anywhere from 2 to 8 million. There is nothing wrong with that, but we should just keep that in mind as he begins to talk about money.

Ehrman begins this chapter with a lengthy anecdote about the poet D.H. Lawrence and his hatred of the book of Revelation, which he called "the dark side of Christianity" and with which Ehrman apparently agrees (p. 172). Ehrman then attempts to classify Revelation as a book where "in the end, the right people will get what the wrong people have now" (p. 172), and to contrast that with Jesus' teachings on wealth (cf. Matthew 6:19-21).

In footnote 10, Ehrman trods down the well worn trail of those who take issue with the KJV's rendering of John 14, "in my Father's house are many mansions" (again failing to note that the wording is not original with the KJV. The translators, whom Ehrman has gone on record acknowledging knew Hebrew and Greek better than we ever have, elected to keep the phrase from earlier translations and not revise it). The scoffer's question, "how can a house have mansions?" is easily answered with the question, "how can a footstool have mansions?"

This chapter gets even stranger. On page 179, Ehrman states, “For Jesus, the things of this world belong to the mighty and powerful who rule it. God has nothing to do with such trivialities. He does not care about material goods. He wants your soul. So give him your soul. Devote yourself completely to God. Then you will become truly rich, not in material possessions but in what really matters: the knowledge and love of God.” These are the words of a man who identifies as an atheist or agnostic, so is he just mocking? Who is he talking to? He has said he doesn’t believe the Bible, so what is the point of what he is saying? It is confusion.

When describing the immensity of the New Jerusalem Ehrman says, “by comparison ancient Rome would look like a termite nest” (p. 181). Speaking as a New York State licensed pesticide applicator working on a certification in entomology I am not sure which species of termite Ehrman has in mind, but colony is often the more accurate term than nest. Termite colonies can greatly vary in size and can be relatively enormous, so it may not be the best analogy.

Another interesting side note is when Ehrman refers to people “dressed in incredibly rich fabrics (scarlet and purple), and adored with gold...” (p. 181). This is noteworthy because critics of the Bible often imagine a contradiction in the Gospels where the robe of Christ is described in one account as purple and in another account as scarlet, and here Ehrman uses the two words together.

As Ehrman chastises the redeemed of the Lord for their “exalted schadenfreude” (p. 182), he makes reference to “our earliest Gospel, Mark” (p. 184). Again, this is pure conjecture that is absolutely impossible from the biblical standpoint. The four Gospels are not dated, but there is no reason whatsoever to think that Matthew was not the first Gospel written. Matthew was a seasoned man in a profession that required detailed notetaking. Just as the Apostle John took notes during the Revelation (cf. chapter 10) Matthew took notes during his ministry alongside Christ. There is no reason why Matthew would wait decades to start writing the Gospel. Matthew’s Gospel is the one of the four specifically written to a Jewish audience, and Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel is to the Jew first.

This section here ends with the dizzying logic of: “If Jesus comes from God, and God is Almighty, then surely the followers of Jesus are to be mighty, right?” (p. 187).

Ehrman ends this section with a lengthy consideration of Christianity’s views of service in contrast to Rome’s ideology of dominance, such as, “Prior to Christianity, there were no such things as hospitals, orphanages, or organized charities to help the poor” (p. 190). He then seeks to make the case that Revelation’s views of dominance do not fit within the Christian teachings of service as proclaimed by Jesus. This is another bewildering fallacy, because from the start of His life Jesus was identified and worshiped as a king (even to the panic of current rulers like Herod), as a young boy His teaching dominated the religious leaders of His day, He began His ministry being heralded by a forerunner as a King would, and then He began declaring that the Kingdom was at hand, which implicitly demands that the current dominance is being overthrown, and His disciples realized this and proclaimed, “there is another king, one Jesus” (cf. Acts 17:7).

Ehrman concludes by asking, “But no one who engages in abomination or falsehood can do so, because no sinners could possibly set foot in the city of gold where Christ resides. Was that Jesus’s view? Did he shun sinners?” (p. 194) Let’s analyze some of the major problems with Ehrman’s fallacies here. First, we should point out that Ehrman is disingenuous when he asks, “was that Jesus’s view,” because his entire money-making career has been built upon casting doubt upon what we know Jesus said, and questioning the certainty of Scripture. So for Ehrman he cannot really know Jesus’ view because he says no one knows for sure what Jesus actually did or said. Secondly, he makes a sly shift here, moving from 1) who gets to reside with Christ to 2) did Christ shun sinners. That is a false dichotomy and a case of “apples and oranges” which Ehrman does quite often because he really has no biblical authority. A response could be, “thank you for bringing up two important but unrelated questions, both of which we are happy to answer.”

The first question: ‘did Jesus indicate that sinners could not reside with Christ in the city of gold / heaven,’ is answered thusly: In Matthew 5:20 Jesus declared, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, you need to be more righteous than the most righteous people you know in order to get into heaven, meaning that sinners could not enter the kingdom of heaven with their own righteousness.

The second question: ‘did Jesus shun sinners,’ is answered thusly: If by shun do you mean Jesus was personally pure and not partaking of sinners’ practices, then yes, he did shun them in that regard. But if you mean did He not love them and serve them and talk with them and eat with them and pray for them and tell them the truth that could save their souls, then no, He did not shun them.

Chapter 8 - The Apocalypse of John and the Gospel of Jesus

This chapter is basically a rehash of much of what Ehrman has been unable to prove up to this point, that Revelation doesn’t fit with the Gospels or Christianity as embodied in the Lord Jesus. He begins by conjecturing: “The book of Revelation was one of the least copied and read books of the New Testament and had difficulty making its way into the canon” (p. 195). Ehrman has no way of proving this conjecture, and the Bible testifies against him. In fact, based on Revelation itself and the testimony of the Bible, it is safer to theorize that the book of Revelation was one of the most destroyed / tampered with books of the NT, but thankfully due to the Lord’s promise of preservation it was received, read, and copied by the Lord’s NT churches through the ages. Ehrman gives no alternative nomination for which book of the Bible should be last if not the Apocalypse.

Ehrman goes on to theorize, “The only “apostolic” John was Jesus’s disciple, John the son of Zebedee. By the end of the second century, a virtual consensus emerged that he had written the Gospel of John and at least one of the letters that eventually became canonized (I John; only later did 2 and 3 John come (sic) in on its coattails). These books all shared similar

points of view and were closely connected in their themes and writing styles. What about Revelation?" (p. 196). So here again Ehrman sludges down the well worn path to nowhere arguing that an author / artist / creator is absolutely, positively not able to produce two pieces of creation that are not entirely similar.

Ehrman cites Dionysius' reference to some predecessors who struggled with the book of Revelation, and this of course would have come as no surprise to John and the Apostles and the NT churches. The Apostle Peter was an eyewitness to this sort of thing in his day, referring to "they who are unlearned (despite thinking of themselves as scholars) and unstable," and how they "wrest" (twist, wrestle with) Paul's writings and the "other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (cf. II Peter 3:16).

Ehrman's completely erroneous bibliology is on display on page 199 where he states, "As with all the books of the Bible, there was no actual vote at a worldwide church council to include Revelation in Scripture; it came to be accepted more or less as a matter of informal consensus." Is there anywhere in the Bible where the LORD prepares His people to vote on the word of God? Would the NT churches expect to do that? Or did Christ say that the Holy Spirit would guide the Lord's immersionist assemblies into all truth? Does he know what the Bible says about the Bible?

Ehrman's appeals to Dionysius or Martin Luther (p. 199) as examples of those who struggled with the book of Revelation does nothing to prove his belief that the Apocalypse is not the inspired and preserved word of God. John clearly struggled with Revelation as he wrote it, which was not unheard of among the prophets of God, and is true for all of us as we read it today.

One last time Ehrman tries to bolster his theory that the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of Revelation could not be the same Person. Ehrman again exhorts his readers to "bear in mind the objections raised to John's Apocalypse by its opponents in the early church" (p. 199). But again, Ehrman cannot not know if these objections are historically accurate, since he also says he does not know if the Bible is historically accurate. If we can't be sure about the words of the Bible, how can we be sure about the words written about the words of the Bible? Ehrman has no foundation on which to stand.

Ehrman's ignorance of the Gospel of John is on full display when he admits that Jesus did in fact declare the coming widespread destruction of the wrath of God, but that "this is not Jesus's message in the final Gospel, the Gospel of John." I don't think I've ever heard anyone deny that John is different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, or that those three are more similar to each other than to John. That is why in our NT we use the term "synoptics," meaning to see together.

How can Ehrman miss the message of John the Baptist in the Gospel of John, where he cites the Isaiah passage to prepare the way of the LORD, which in context refers to the day of the LORD? What does he think is significant about Jesus being called "the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?" Why is this passover lamb (the term JTB used) slain in the stead of the world of sinners? What if the sin is not taken away for a sinner? The Gospel of

John starts with the message of fleeing the wrath of God to Lamb of God here, and that message continues throughout the book, with explicit sections in chapters 3, 6, and 16-17.

Ehrman's attempt at denying that the message of John is compatible with the message of Revelation echoes the fallacious theory that the Gospel of John does not teach repentance simply because it does not have the word "repent" in it. John's Gospel is full of repentance, and it is full of the warnings of the synoptics and the Apocalypse to flee the wrath to come by coming to the Lamb of God.

This final chapter appears to have been thrown together in haste or ad hoc as Ehrman tries to get his loyalists to think his way about end times events. For instance, on page 200 there is the incomplete sentence, "That it is reported as "good news," no "bad news." And on page 201 he says, "In an earlier chapter, I discussed the rich man who approaches Jesus and asks how to have eternal life. Jesus tells him simply, "Keep the commandments" (Mark 19:17)." Perhaps Ehrman thinks the Gospel of Mark has 19 chapters and has a super long ending.

In keeping with his company, Ehrman closes out the book with an appeal to the parable in Matthew 25 as the main thing people should be doing: good works, but of course he misses the bigger point of the identity of "my brethren" and how that fits within Matthew's presentation of Jesus as Messiah. And in lock step Ehrman takes time to proclaim, "Jesus never talks about eternal torment; he talks about destruction" (p. 204). This is nonsensical of course, because Jesus Himself used the word "torment" when He told the account of the rich man in hell (Luke 16) who referred to his fate as a "place of torment," and the demons that Jesus cast out begged Jesus for mercy that He not torment them before the appointed time (Matt 8, Mark 5, etc.). Ironically, the modern-day Millerites that Ehrman referred to back in chapter two have used the same faulty hermeneutic to arrive at the same destination.

Ehrman's final section begins with his last ditch effort to convince his followers, and he does so by at the 11th hour bringing in Albert Schweitzer and *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. But this actually undermines Ehrman's entire view, because he teaches all along that there is not certainty about what Jesus actually did and said, and he himself has produced the "Ehrman Jesus" to stand right alongside the White Nationalist Jesus and the Aryan Jesus, etc. So Schweitzer is completely irrelevant to understanding the book of Revelation.

The final paragraph of Ehrman's book begins with these words, "For those of us who choose to follow Jesus" (p. 207). Ehrman is a self-proclaimed agnostic-atheist, a hero of those who reject the God of the Bible, whether they be irreligious or from non-Christian religions. For him to write these words is utter confusion, what the Apostle Paul called, "deceiving, and being deceived." It would have been less confusing to write, "for those who choose to follow Jesus." What is the reason Bart Ehrman calls himself a follower of Jesus here?

Those who claim to have been born again by the Spirit of God by putting their trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior shall in no wise be cast out, even if they appear to leave their faith for a time. Bart Ehrman certainly would not be the first person to go in the wrong direction for a while. And that is a big reason why his book couldn't really help this pastor or his church: because Bart needs to figure out his own life first, and really see what the truth is. And

this is why atheists cannot truly trust Bart Ehrman to help them. His so-called scholarship, as evidenced in this case study of *Armageddon*, has in fact done nothing to undermine the truth of God's word. Critics of the Bible will need a greater champion than Mr. Ehrman, as the numerous inaccuracies in his latest book demonstrate. If I were seeking to build a case against the Bible, and to find out what the book of Revelation really said, Mr. Ehrman's self-contradictory approach would not be a tool I would lean upon.

I do believe that God is using Bart Ehrman, but not in the way that his religious practitioners are following their pastor. Inadvertently perhaps, Ehrman's bestsellers are causing some to strengthen their faith in the word of God, all the while Ehrman and his devotees chuckle amongst themselves. But Elijah has already told us who shall have the last laugh.