



A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization

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"[The Book of] Revelation has served as a 'language arsenal' in a great many of the social, cultural, and political conflicts in Western history. Again and again, Revelation has stirred some dangerous men and women to act out their own private apocalypses. Above all, the moral calculus of Revelation—the demonization of one's enemies, the sanctification of revenge taking, and the notion that history must end in catastrophe—can be detected in some of the worst atrocities and excesses of every age, including our own. For all of these reasons, the rest of us ignore the book of Revelation only at our impoverishment and, more to the point, at our own peril."

The mysterious author of the Book of Revelation (or the Apocalypse, as the last book of the New Testament is also known) never considered that his sermon on the impending end times would last beyond his own life. In fact, he predicted that the destruction of the earth would be witnessed by his contemporaries. Yet Revelation not only outlived its creator; this vivid and violent revenge fantasy has played a significant role in the march of Western civilization.

Ever since Revelation was first preached as the revealed word of Jesus Christ, it has haunted and inspired hearers and readers alike. The mark of the beast, the Antichrist, 666, the Whore of Babylon, Armageddon, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are just a few of the images, phrases, and codes that have burned their way into the fabric of our culture. The questions raised go straight to the heart of the human fear of death and obsession with the afterlife. Will we, individually or collectively, ride off to glory, or will we drown in hellfire for all eternity? As those who best manipulate this dark vision learned, which side we fall on is often a matter of life or death. Honed into a weapon in the ongoing culture wars between states, religions, and citizenry, Revelation has significantly altered the course of history.

Kirsch, whom the *Washington Post* calls "a fine storyteller with a flair for rendering ancient tales relevant and appealing to modern audiences," delivers a far-ranging, entertaining, and shocking history of this scandalous book, which was nearly cut from the New Testament. From the fall of the Roman Empire to the Black Death, the Inquisition to the Protestant Reformation, the New World to the rise of the Religious Right, this chronicle of the use and abuse of the Book of Revelation tells the tale of the unfolding of history and the hopes, fears, dreams, and nightmares of all humanity.

A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization Details

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Katie says

If this book were food, it would be peanut butter crackers. I suggest an alternative title for the next edition: "1001 Things I Hate About the Book of Revelation." From the review I read, I'd been hoping for a balanced, scholarly critique of the Revelation to John, but instead I got a 200-page polemic by a lawyer whose sloppy research wouldn't get him through a master's thesis, let alone the lavish praise of someone like Karen Armstrong, who should be embarrassed to be quoted on the front cover.

Kirsch's theme can be summed up thus: The Book of Revelation is the elaborate, violent fantasy of a man named John who expected the imminent end of the world, whereupon he would see someone vaguely resembling Jesus kick the asses of all the people John didn't like. The world didn't end, and since then millions of deluded people have embraced John's vision and hoped to see the end of the world and Jesus kicking their enemies' butts too. Along the way, these have included kings, Crusaders, invaders, monastics, the Nazis, televangelists, and presidents.

I love peanut butter crackers, but man lives not by peanut butter crackers alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; and there is something of worth even in this last book of the Bible, even for millions of us Christians who are repelled by its violence and vengefulness. Spiritual writings before John's were read allegorically, not literally. Readers from Augustine to Martin Luther King who did not take the story literally have found in Revelation reason to work for the perfection of the church, or to care for God's creation, or to hope for spiritual elevation. Kirsch dismisses all of this. While he argues briefly (and not always effectively) for an allegorical reading of Revelation, he shows little comprehension of the hope that moved its readers: "Augustine prefers to see all the spooky and scary details in the prophecies of Revelation as a series of elaborate metaphors for a divine truth so ineffable that John is compelled to reduce it to concrete words, numbers, and images because the ordinary human mind could not otherwise comprehend them." Indeed. That is the very problem with the un-world, other-world, dream-world that is God—and the reason Jews do not write God's name—words cannot comprehend it.

The book isn't entirely bad. Every fifty pages or so, in the middle of flogging a horse carcass, he tells me something I didn't already know, such as that the Tenth Legion stationed in Judea had standing orders to execute any Jew claiming to be a descendant of King David, which is one possible answer to why Jesus was executed. He's also a reasonably good storyteller when he's not foaming at the mouth. Unfortunately he does that a bit too often. You know how eventually you get sick of peanut butter, but there's nothing else in the house that doesn't take a lot of effort? It's like that.

Kirsch didn't even bother to work with original sources. "I have taken the liberty of omitting some words and phrases from some quoted material," he remarks, which presumably excuses the fact that he also omitted to point out in the text exactly where he omitted them. I took the liberty of glancing at the endnotes now and then, and I admit that he does seem to have read several books. But his most interesting citations are "Quoted in" so-and-so's history or review. After ten or fifteen similar citations of the same author, you wonder why he didn't just go and read the original. Josephus' *History of the Jewish War*, for example, is readily available in translation. Kirsch's facility with English suggests that he would be capable of reading it. At other times he doesn't bother to cite anybody at all, such as his long discourse on the early church fathers' linking the

Antichrist to the Jews, leaving the reader wondering where he came up with this—a more interesting question given how often he brings up the topic for the next 100 pages.

Kirsch is good enough to provide the text of Revelation in an appendix. He does not explain why he chose the King James Version, which has fallen out of favor in many circles both for its archaic language and the quality of the translation. Kirsch seems to have his own problems with it, given that he quotes from six other, wildly different translations of the Bible, freely and without justification, sometimes even within the same biblical chapter.

He includes a nice glossary with long definitions of terms like *preterism* and *dispensationalism*. It has a nice definition of *messiah*, much better than the one I've typically gotten in the Episcopal Church—"Messiah means Christ." "Christ means messiah." Tautology means oh forget it. Still, after reading the rest of the book, I'm inclined to distrust his glossary and go back to the encyclopedia after all.

Raughley Nuzzi says

This was a fascinating look inside the Book of Revelation from the identity of the author to the debate over its canonicity to the impact it has had on western thought through the millennia. It's essentially a literary criticism of one of the strangest books of the Bible and it does a good job of walking the fine line required to take on such a task.

I only gave it 4 stars because I went into it thinking it would be more focused on particular doomsday cults and while they featured, they served as illustrations of how fringe movements can take things to far, rather than highlights of the book.

Still, overall, great read!

Michael T. says

I haven't written a review in a while, but this book was really REALLY good. Americans in particular are a nation of apocalyptic thinkers (think some of your favorite sci fi films), and we are so for historical reasons. The very founding and early settlement of the US was based on the Puritan pursuit of "a new heaven and a new earth." "A shining city on a hill" as Ronald Reagan quoted it. It's all in here. Including the invention of the concept of "the Rapture," a very American, and historically rather RECENT innovation. Granted, John Nelson Darby was a Scotch-Irish preacher. But his theories caught on nowhere as much as in the United States, where he spread his cult with seven speaking tours over the course of as many years. Perhaps it is in our human DNA to seek patterns which indicate an "end time." (After all, one of the most apocalyptic civilizations ever was the Aztecs, developed without ANY assistance from European sources.) But it's good to have a history of, at least, the western world's fascination with it. Saint John of the Book of Revelations (almost certainly a different person than the Saint John of the Gospels) lived in a time when the "end time" was real. The Romans had destroyed Jerusalem, dispersing the Jews (and first century Christians very much thought of themselves as Jews) throughout the ancient world. When John of Patmos wrote of "things which must shortly come to pass," he was speaking of within his own lifetime, or at least certainly within the lifetimes of those who heard or read his words. But I'm giving some of it away. And Jonathan Kirsch tells it

much better than I do. Suffice to say, if you've ever wondered about this stuff, or wanted an answer when some member of this cult comes knocking at your door (to be fair, I rather like Jehovah's Witnesses... they've always been very patient and gentle, avowed pacifists as they are), or babbling on your TV set about why peace in the Middle East would be a BAD thing, here is the book you've been looking for in order to have a few intelligent answers for them. Peace. Shalom. Salaam.

Lee says

This book was not what I expected at all. Instead of a discussion of the Book of Revelation from the Bible, it is was a hate-filled diatribe poking fun and sneering at the Christian and Jewish faiths at every turn. The Antichrist is described as an arch-villain instead of evil incarnate as those of my faith believe as if this was a simple movie with the "good"guys and the "bad" guys. It is suggested that the Apostle John was not the author but a sanctimonious nut who believed he was victimized by fellow Christians and "nursed a bitter grudge" against "rival preachers". This John was sanctimonious "and by the deepest of ironies, a great many readers over the ages have succeeded in convincing themselves that the author of Revelation was a benighted soul who failed to grasp the actual meanings of the visions that he beheld and described so vividly," This had to be one of the worst books I've ever read.

A.J. Deus says

Is A History of the End of the World an expedient critique or a sarcastic attempt to highlight the Christian delusions in the Book of Revelation? While Jonathan Kirsch's treaty is well structured and placed in the context of the Book of Daniel, it provides nothing new or illuminating.

It is an easy and non-offensive read in a sermon style, so much so that I perceive it as ignorant and arrogant. It is strikingly brilliant how the author lists truly offensive passages and analysis as if they would not have had a catastrophic impact on human development through millennia. For example:

"If John is seeking to scare his readers and hearers into shunning their pagan friends, neighbors, and kinfolk, the demonization of Roman coinage?and the condemnation of the 'cargo' that it could buy?was a clever psychological tool. After all, Christian true believers could congratulate themselves on their own poverty, whether self-imposed or not, by reminding themselves that participating in pagan commerce was equivalent to bargaining with the Devil. They are encouraged by the book of Revelation to console themselves with dreams of the day when God will punish the collaborators who took the Devil's coin. And revenge, as we shall see, is among the core values of Revelation."

As an author that focuses on social economics of poverty, I am alarmed at what level Kirsch seems to be desensitized or contempt to a wording that has, according to the writer, clearly Jewish origins. There is no compassion for and no relation to billions that live in (Jewish) religion induced poverty today and through the ages. A mere statement of the intolerable makes it seem as the author welcomes the consequences of the Jewish follies (or at least not condemns it). Glorification of poverty by Christians (and Muslims, both guided by Judaic scriptures) seems to me offensive in itself. It merited the mentioning of a strong connection between ongoing humanitarian disasters and teachings that should have been rooted out on inception as crimes against humanity. Instead, Kirsch seems to like the teachings of the New Testament where quite obviously (the Roman) civilization is rejected.

The author repeatedly refers to the possibility that numerous writers thought the Book of Revelation should not have been included in the New Testament, Luther among them. The point is: the discussion about its potential elimination is in vain. Christians cannot pick and choose from the “prophetic” stock of Judaic writings. They believe or they don’t. They half believe in what the New Testament says? A History of the End is selective reading at its best, and that is also the main shortcoming of the book. In other words, while the author rejects the Book of Revelation, he obviously embraces the rest and seeks out an expedient version of history and context.

Like other authors with similar interests and background, there seems to be no critical thought as to a possible placement in time of the Revelation, despite illuminating every possible angle of its authorship. The first century is a done deal. However, “prophesies” arose from necessity in a slow moving context of either sectarian conflicts or clashes with the authorities. More importantly, they were written AFTER a disaster. Given that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in the first century and six thousand Jews were crucified (not Christians), one could be content with this marking the end of the world (for the Jews). However, this is the twentyfirst century and our critical capabilities should have evolved a little further than that. In my book The Great Leap-Fraud, which is certainly not beyond error, it is demonstrated when and how prophesies were written and embedded into pre-existing material. If carbon dating on the earliest known copies would be conducted, we had a starting point +/- 50 years or so, provided that it had not been written on the back of an older text or on top of a washed off subscript. So far, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri are dated with Palaeography to the early fourth century. Palaeography is not good enough, though. The forgers knew quite well what they were doing. My hypothesis is that the book might have been fathered much later, possibly based on Augustine’s core ideas, which have also been edited. Augustine displays precise doctrinal ideas that were fought over only after his death. Distractions into the relationship between church and state as well as Chalcedonian definitions should be strong hints at dating later edits. A simple analysis of word use in The City of God reveals an over utilization of terms in books XVII, XVIII, and XX. The word Revelation (as in the book) only appears in book XX and notably not thereafter. Any attentive reader of Augustine should immediately recognize that the Revelation is a prerequisite for the study of book XX. Rather than dealing with the big picture, it explores expertly details in an abstract fashion that is far removed from those that have not pondered the deeper meanings of the New Testament including the Revelation. But why the need to forge the Revelation into fifth century Augustine? Is the Revelation possibly altogether a post-Chalcedonian invention? Given the convoluted consensus, the Book of Revelation just does not seem to fit into an early context. Hence, instead of thinking and exploring, the author resorts to the consensus.

The scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are a house of cards that rests on serial frauds. It is time to apply reason rather than blind faith in assessing “A History of the End of the World” as presented by the author. For starters, the consensus accepts the unreliability of Eusebius’s testimonies, which the author includes in his evidence. However, by erasing this single author, the history of the Book of Revelation before Constantine the Great simply vanishes, except for a few dubious passages that may or may not refer to the text. However, since Constantine is (fraudulently) claimed a Christian, the Revelation would make absolutely no sense?it was Christian heaven under the guiding hand of that Roman Emperor, so it is claimed. There lies the paradox to be solved. As the author points out, the source could not have been the Eastern Syrian Church or Christian Orthodoxy. For the West it can be excluded also. The Great Leap-Fraud shows that Pope Gregory the Great had no knowledge of the Revelation in the sixth century. Hence, where then is it coming from? I think that the author treats the most exciting questions of his topic with contempt.

Given this riddle, it seems noteworthy that the author does not make an effort to include the pre-Islamic or Persian worlds in the events around the millennium, the supposed end of the world. As laid out in The Great Leap-Fraud, the Muslim world?for some inexplicable reason (for the consensus that is)?was shaken by the Doomsday, so much so that they resorted to destroying churches all over the caliphate(s) and displayed a

lifestyle of the walking dead. The author comments about a post-millennium monk of Fleury in France, who seemed perplexed about the content of a sermon, as if he had heard the Revelation for the first time. Why not start wondering? Is it possible that Revelation was absent from the West? If so, who were its carriers? When did it arrive and where? Is it an eastern text? The same issue remains with the fifteenth century Savonarola. Why did he go against Rome with the help of Revelation? Papal excess and cultural decay (as the culprit, according to the consensus) were not new in his generation. There must have been a deep sectarian reason smothering below the surface that has been wiped out and cleaned up by the winning Catholic Church. But with whom?

The language in the book is polished and with no frills, repetitive at the beginning. It keeps the reader focused on the general ideas until after World War II. However, after that, the lecture becomes painful. Irrelevant sects and personalities are highlighted beyond their importance in the context of Revelation. Also, it is noteworthy that the author makes no forward looking statements about 2012.

For readers that are content to reaffirm what they already know, A History of the End of the World is a pleasurable read?without the risk of being intellectually challenged?for the sake of reading. It is the expediency of criticizing the Christian belief for the pleasure of mockery without actually bringing forth anything new, but to enforce the selective wishful thinking that fails to recognize that Christianity, Judaism and Islam are based on hatred against mankind (e.g. the exclusion of the Roman way of life at the expense of millions of lives and for one single purpose: the redemption of Israel). Five stars! The sad core is that the book of Revelation is not the end of the world but the judgment over humanity. It promises a renewal of the world for 144,000 Jewish males and the same number of Jewish virgins (for the sake of ethnic cleanliness), composed from the twelve tribes of the Chosen People. The rest of us is doomed regardless of their faith or disbelief. If that does not challenge the intellectual happiness of the Christians, what will?

Those that ask for more have better things to do. No star!

A.J. Deus, author of The Great Leap-Fraud - Social Economics of Religious Terrorism
ajdeus.org

Libby says

I could not help noticing my fellow reviewers are all over the map when rating this book. (Veering from one to five and back again and quite emphatic about their opinions!) My little inner voice tells me that the variation in stars has a lot to do with the controversial nature of its contents. The Apocalypse of John, or Revelations, has had nearly two thousand controversial years now and has confounded, astonished and obsessed readers for most of that time. I admire Jonathan Kirsch for his exceptional audacity in even attempting to chronicle the history of this literary dynamite. It requires amazing dexterity, like juggling lit blowtorches, to essay the story of John's lurid, vivid, flamboyant vision.

First of all, for a book that has been in print for 2000 years, most of us know very little about it. For example, who was John that we should care to read his dreams? For some, there is a swift easy answer. John was St. John the Evangelist, Jesus' Beloved Disciple, author of the Gospel of John. But for others, identifying John is not so easy. For example, the writing style in the Gospel and the Revelation varies to an extreme. The voice of the Gospel is smooth, stylish and educated, while the Apocalypse is crude, colloquial and ungrammatical. Time is also not on the side of the simple answer. The Apocalypse seems to have been written in a time when Rome has already conquered Jerusalem, which would make John implausibly old at the time of his

exile to Patmos, where he states he wrote his work. For these and many more complicated reasons, a lot of Biblical scholars think that John of Patmos and John the Evangelist are two different people. Next, the content of the vision is disturbing, violent and morbid. John does not hesitate to revile his enemies and he rejoices at the coming vengeance. There is no gentle Good Shepherd in Revelations. Instead we find evil, frightening, multi-headed and horned beasts rising from land and sea to torment all humanity. The four horsemen thunder forth to bring famine and pestilence and war and death to mankind. The Messiah is huge, crowned with gold and armed with a sword. John describes the chaos and disaster with relish and gory detail. From the first, the church has had issues with the Apocalypse. Several of the respected early church fathers felt it should not be a part of the canon. Others felt that worshipers should be warned against taking it literally or seeking to interpret it to fit current events. Naturally, readers have been doing both to the present day. Some of the most interesting history in Kirsch's book tells us of various obsessed scholars attempting to "crack the code" of Revelations to predict the timing of the end of the world. John, himself, seemed to feel that the end would be upon his readers very swiftly. Unfortunately, the world has failed to end when the calculating scholars predicted. However, that fact has not deterred many present day commenters from trying their calculators and calendars. Kirsch also gives us some insight into the enormous impact the Apocalypse has had on our literature and language. Without John of Patmos, Handel did not have much of the inspiration for his sublime Messiah. Julia Ward Howe borrowed John's imagery for The Battle Hymn of the Republic. The famous "Four Horsemen" of Notre Dame owe John for their nickname. The world's great painters and sculptors have found John's vivid descriptions challenging and inspiring. Kirsch tells us the when and who and why of Revelations' influence. The tale is lively, fascinating and perhaps more important than we can know.

Christopher says

Enlightening cultural history of the book of Revelation--showing its origin and sources as well as its presence and effects over the last two millennia.

Rusty says

"Today... at the edge of our hope, at the end of our time, we have chosen not only to believe in ourselves, but in each other. Today, there is not a man or woman in here that shall stand alone. Not today. Today, we face the monsters that are at our door and bring the fight to them. Today, we are cancelling the apocalypse!"

Jesus, The Revelation of John Chap 22, verse 19.

Sometime in the last two years I think I read a scholarly look at the biblical book of Daniel. That was a dry read, filled with references and light on context. It was still an interesting read, but with so many references that are only explained by a footnote directing me to dig up the original paper and read it myself... I was left feeling like I was reading a Marvel Comic from the 90's, you know, the ones where you had to purchase about seven different titles in order to follow the single story being told. But like those old comics, I was able to pick up enough via contextual clues to figure out the larger tale. But it wasn't very satisfying.

So when I eventually got around to doing something similar with the book of Revelation, I chose to get a more fun version to read. Granted, this book was not written for the purpose of having a scholarly look at the book, but it does give a nice recap of how modern scholarship views it. The short of it? Nero Cesar is the beast (possibly resurrected in Domitian) and all the dragons, whores, and tortured souls in the book are evil cities, or the church, or the saints.

This book spent a few chapters going over all this stuff, but it really shined for me when it got past the inexplicably complicated book itself and focused more on the effect it's had on believers throughout the ages.

And put simply – it's wound people up on a relatively regular basis since it first found an audience. Widely considered fraudulent among the sophisticated Christian readers of the day, it picked up steam (i.e., legitimacy) as time went on. By the early middle ages it was about as accepted in Christendom as it is today.

Anyway, it drove folks nuts. Seems like the universal opinion of any age was the prophecies in the book of Revelation were meant for the generation of folks actually reading them. Long after Domitian was gone, folks thought the beast was the Pope, or Islam, or whomever the latest war was against. In the 20th century it was Mussolini, then Ronald Reagan, and on it goes. Every generation seems to have a large segment of the Christian church unabashedly certain that Jesus is coming back at any moment due to the fulfilled prophecies.

As is mentioned in the book, every believer susceptible to this way of thinking seems to see no irony in thinking each preceding generation was full of idiots who couldn't see the signs that are obvious to them.

For example, one of the more famous passages from the book details that a great beast will come at the end. It will be a man, or at least appear to be one, and do all this somewhat evil stuff to believers. The writer of the book of the Revelation of John was so cryptic that it might be impossible to figure out who it is. But no worries, he gave us a clue - the number of the beast is 666 (or possibly 616). So there. I mean, Barak Hussain Obama translates as 616 in the Jewish gematria, after all... sure, I have to misspell his name, and go with 616 instead of 666 (to elaborate on that point, scholars aren't sure if the number of the beast is 616 or 666, since both appear in our oldest copies of the book of the Revelation) but it's close enough for prophecy, I guess.

It got me curious and so I decided to play that same game. So, according to one gematria calculator I found online, "Lego Batman is the beast" equals 666 (in Jewish gematria). I'll let modern day experts determine the theological nuance there. But then again, see below:

"Dumb people sell ads" = 666

"Helen, artificial cheese is crap" = 616

"The Baptist church" = 777 (oooh)

"Starbucks lol" = 666

I could do that all day long, and was tempted to, but I stopped there. I think the point was made. Which is that the book is vague enough that every generation has been able to fit some current figure into the role of the beast of Revelation. And people have. And do.

Anyhoo - if you're interested in this sort of thing, I think it's a fine summary and is written entertainingly enough to appease anyone who doesn't want to be drug into the endless minutia of the more scholarly works on the topic.

James (JD) Dittes says

This could have been a really good book, considering how widely Revelation has been interpreted (and how disastrously in many cases). However, Kirsch doesn't seem to have the ability to discern between the good sources and the poor ones. Waaaaay too much of the book is given to explaining the explanations of Revelation, and too little covers the historical use or providing insight into how the post-modern Christian world can look at it.

Julie Dawson says

"A History of the End of the World" chronicles the history of the Book of Revelations and its impact on Western Civilization. Characterized by Kirsch, and in the minds of many readers rightfully so, as the single scariest book in the Bible (and arguably in all of Judeo-Christian writing), Revelations is a strange book that is both at odds with the rest of the Bible and yet surprisingly the biggest attraction in the Bible.

To serious scholars, much of what Kirsch discusses here is old news. He covers in great detail the theories behind the origins of Revelations and the identity of its author, and points out how Revelations borrowed and adapted the apocryphal works of the time period. But the bulk of Kirsch book is less about the Book of Revelations itself than how it has been used, and misused, by the Catholic Church, politicians, and most recently the Religious Right to both soothe the minds of the faithful and as a weapon against the "enemy," whomever that enemy might be.

One of the recurring themes in the book is the fact that, despite several millennia of biblical scholars and street corner preachers' claims; the world has "failed to end on time." Kirsch exhibits a slightly sarcastic tone on occasion as he goes through the litany of previous attempts to determine the end of the world, and how the world refused to cooperate. For casual readers, the history lesson is enjoyable and provides some perspective with which to view the current cries of the impending Apocalypse. "True Believers" will take offense to the tone, however as Kirsch points out they want to be offended. And in truth, need to be for Revelations to be legitimate.

One of the key elements of Kirsch's arguments focuses on how the Book of Revelations, and the belief in the end of the world, feeds the psychological needs of the believer. He notes that the book is written for an oppressed audience. The original audience of the Book of Revelations were early Christians who still felt the sting of persecution. However Revelations has become the favorite book of those who simply believe they are oppressed, but aren't necessarily being persecuted. Revelations is a book that does not seek to uplift the spirit of the reader, but instead seeks to sate the hunger for revenge against all the non-believers and allies of Satan that have wronged them. While violence is a normal topic in the Old Testament, nowhere do we see a Biblical author revel in depicting violence against the enemies of God like we do in Revelations. If Revelations was a "fiction" book, it would be banned from most schools.

Revelations, as Kirsch points out, is meant to provide a feeling of empowerment to those who feel they have no power; whether that feeling is based on fact or delusion (and as Kirsch explains, more often than not it is delusion). It allows the reader to shift blame for all of societies' real and imagined ills onto otherworldly forces, and provides a succor that these forces will be overcome by God for them.

One interesting point addressed by Kirsch is how Revelations factored into the push by Christian Zionist after WWII to establish the Israeli state. Kirsch notes that at the time, many Jewish leaders would have been happy with a land anywhere and were not themselves pushing for the lands of Israel, because they believed only God could restore their homeland. But for the Christian Zionists, it was vital that the Jews return to Israel in masse not out of compassion for the Jewish people, but because they considered it a prerequisite for the Apocalypse. Kirsch discusses the beliefs of these Christian Zionists when he notes "...that the Jews who returned to the land of Israel were destined to suffer and die during the reign of the Antichrist and to burn in hell for the rest of eternity." Further, he notes that "Christian Zionists, in fact, tend to regard the prospect of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors as an obstacle to the second coming of Jesus Christ and, therefore, the work of the devil."

The book does, however, suffer a stylistic flaw. Kirsch has a tendency to pound away at a thought, rehashing it dozens of times after the point has already been made and explained. There is also an annoying tendency to overuse the phrase "as we have seen" and its evil cousin "as we shall see." Having read his previous work "God Against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism," which was much more succinct in its arguments, I can only chalk this up to a bad editor. Someone should have slapped his typing fingers with a red pen over this.

But that issue aside, readers with an interest in understanding the psychology and history behind the Book of Revelations will find a book written with the casual reader in mind. It is very accessible to the reader and presents complex issues in a manner that is clear without oversimplifying.

Frederic Pierce says

Fascinating. I had no idea that so many elements of modern American culture have roots in an ancient text that almost didn't make it into the final version of the Bible. And I was surprised at how little basis there is in the Bible for some of the most stridently held ideas regarding an ultimate "Day of Judgement." This is an eye-opening book for anyone who thinks about the end of the world. And among Cold War kids like myself who grew up in the shadow of nuclear holocaust with movies like "The Omen" and "Rosemary's Baby," I'm guessing that includes pretty much everyone. If you've ever shaken your head sadly over all the lives wasted in service to a Domsday that's been scheduled and postponed hundreds of times over the last 2,000 years, yet never happens, this book is probably for you.

Kris says

A partial read, I actually lost interest.

Dan Weaver says

Only one quarter in, I find this hard going. I am struggling with the organization and writing style. It reads like notes hastily edited together rather than a book; clearly a lot of research went in, but not enough effort went in to make it build smoothly from chapter to chapter as books for lay-people like this one should. The phrase "as we will soon see" keeps coming up, which would be the first thing I'd try to eliminate in a

revision. Apocalyptic factoids come up in multiple places, causing chapter 1 to steal some of chapter 2's thunder, for example. Adding to the confusion, the chapter titles don't seem to correspond to what's in them. A chapter called "The History of a Delusion" is about the identity of Revelation's author.

The prose is adjective-heavy in a way that distracts from content that should generate its own interest.

It could be I've become spoiled by reading Ehrman, another who writes about this sort of thing and does better at revealing information in a progressive way.

More to come as I hurry through; here's hoping it gets more focused in the last three quarters.

Catalin Negru says

Target audience: People interested in the Book of Revelation and Christian eschatology. But I think that common people may have a hard time reading it.

About the author: Not be accused of being biased, I'll quote exactly from book the information about the author: Jonathan Kirsch is the author of ten books, including the national bestseller *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*, *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel*, *Moses: A Life*, and his most recent work, *God Against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*. Kirsch is also a book columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, a broadcaster for NPR affiliates KCRW-FM and KPCC-FM in Southern California, and Adjunct Professor on the faculty of New York University, and an attorney specializing in publishing law and intellectual property in Los Angeles.

Structure of the book: The book is 352 pages long, divided in Epigraph – the 7 chapters and appendix – additional information: the Book of Revelation, notes, bibliography, glossary, and so on. I don't really know if the first chapter is a chapter or the introduction.

Overview: When you see a book that contains "famous" quotes at the start of each chapter, dedications and all sort of bragging, that should ring a bell. A good book needs no embellishment. From the first lines I knew this book is not good. And my instinct was not wrong. Kirsch attempts to do something glorious and fails miserably. I had the impression that I'm not reading a book, but notes of research put together without finishing touches. I don't know how much research was behind this book, but I do know that it simply does not "flow." He makes statements after statements and jumps from one thing to another without notice, uses exotic words without explaining them and sometimes he tries to allure the reader into reading further by saying "we will see." I personally understood what I've read because I have a strong background in apocalyptic research. But a novice in this field will have a hard time understanding what is the deal with the messianic emperor, New Jerusalem, the angelic pope or the millennial week. You can't understand much from a chapter that starts with the fears of the year 1000 and ends with Columbus and the discovery of America. There are so many things uncovered.

To be honest, the book has the wrong title. It is not about how the Book of Revelation changed the course of the Western Civilization, but rather how the Book of Revelation was perceived and interpreted in different periods of time. And there is a big difference between influence and perception. If you want to write about how the Book of Revelation changed to course of Western civilization then you write and insist on historical facts caused by apocalyptic beliefs: how Nero was believed to be the Antichrist, Islamophobia, the Protestant

Reformation, historicism, preterism, futurism, dispensationalism, how the Book of Revelation influenced Columbus to discover America or how American exceptionalism came to birth and so much more. Instead, he insists on aspects such as the language of the book, the context of its writings, when it was written, how it was written, who was the author of the book, what other modern and past authors said about the book and so on. And everything combined with his own speculations and interpretations; I don't know if I remember a book using so many times words like: might have been, possibly, are possible, would be, etc. And least but not least, I think that almost a fifth of the text is composed of quotations and verses from the Book of Revelation (and the Bible). And, to make matters worse, the author even includes in appendix the Book of Revelation in full, as if the text is hard to find or is not available to anyone anytime. In fact, the appendix is ridiculously long: aside from the Book of revelation, the author also included *Searchable Terms, Glossary, about the author, credits and glossary*. This is definitely not a good way to make your work larger.

Strong points: I believe the intent, or better said the idea from behind the book, is a strong point.

Weak points: Very hard to read, chaotic, boring; and I could add so much more.

★★★ Follow us on Goodreads

★★★ Visit our website www.reasonandreligion.org

Steven Williams says

This book attempts to explain why and how “The Book of Revelations” was written. It also covers how people have interpret it over time, including the process of canonization in the Bible. Unfortunately, I don't have much to add. I made no significant notes. I did enjoy the book to a degree. Jonathan Kirsch writes well and seems to know his topic. I could recommend this book to someone looking to learn more about Revelations than he or she would learn from in church.
