

As many of you know, my next trade book is tentatively titled: Expecting Armageddon: The book of Revelation and the Imminent End of the World, to be published by Simon & Schuster. I would like some help from interested lay folk in the reading public with a certain aspect of it, and would love to hear your suggestions.

First let me say that I have not begun any serious research for it yet. My plan is to get going in a hard-hitting, all-out kind of way in the early summer, depending on how quickly the book I'm working on now (the scholarly monograph on otherworldly journeys) gets written. I simply have too many things on my research-plate just now. Plus, that was the schedule I had originally planned: start on Armageddon in the summer and crunch as hard and for as long as I can and need to before getting down to writing it. Usually it takes me about a year to do the research on these things.

BUT, what I always like to do - and this is why I like to get an advanced contract on my trade books - is to think about it, well in advance of when I actually start doing the research. That way, when I can start plowing in, I know exactly where I want to start and what I anticipate the hot spots to be to go to first. My ideas always develop (and change) in the course of doing the serious reading and thinking, of course. But I never, ever want to jump in feet first without putting a lot of thought into it even before starting.

The original idea for the book was to explain why in some conservative religious circles now, and for well over a century, there has been an avid expectation that the world was going to end soon in fulfilment of biblical prophecies, especially as found in the book of Revelation. I myself was deeply committed to this view as a late-teenager and into my twenties.

I eventually came to realize that this was a complete misinterpretation of Revelation and the Bible as a whole. I also came to reflect on the fact that just about every generation of Christians since the time of Paul till today has had stalwart interpreters of the Bible who were convinced, and could prove (!), that the prophecies were all coming true in their own day and were soon to be fulfilled. The end is near. The Final Battle approaches. Armageddon is about to strike.

And so I had to ask myself: were all the millions of people thinking this in every generation demonstrably wrong, but we in our generation just happen to be right? Well, aren't we grand?!

In any event, the book was going to trace the history of the interpretation of Revelation that took it to be a prediction of the end coming soon (in the lifetime of the interpreter), and then show how this view has been debunked by scholars of Revelation, who for a long time have known that actually that's not what the book is about.

That strikes me as unusually interesting. And it strikes a lot of religious people as interesting. And it strikes a lot of used-to-be-religious people as interesting. But I'm not sure that it strikes *most* of the human beings in the universe as particularly interesting. Maybe marginally interesting? But not, well, really interesting.

And so then as I was thinking about it I suddenly thought back - duh - to ...

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