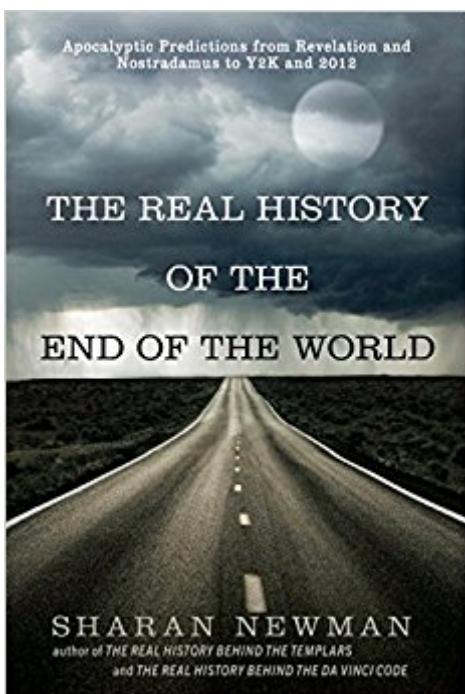


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The Real History Of The End Of The World: Apocalyptic Predictions From Revelation And Nostradamus To Y2K And 2012



Synopsis

From the author of *The Real History Behind the Templars*--the origins and stories behind end-of-the-world predictions throughout history, from Revelations to 2012. In entertaining and sharp prose, historian Sharan Newman explores theories of world destruction from ancient times up to the present day- theories which reveal as much about human nature as they do about the predominant historical, scientific, and religious beliefs of the time. Readers will find answers to the following end-of-times questions: ?Did the Mayans really say the world will end in December 2012? ?How have the signs in the New Testament Book of Revelations been interpreted over the years? ?How did ancient Egyptians, Norse, and Chinese think the world would end? ?When did Nostradamus predict that the last days would come? ?Does the I Ching reference 2012? ?Why didn't the world end in Y2K? ?Are meteors, global warming, super-volcanoes, and the threat of nuclear war signs that the end is near?

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Customer Reviews

In this cogent history, novelist and medieval historian Newman (*The Witch in the Well*, *The Real History Behind the DaVinci Code*) takes a cheerfully skeptical view of end-of-times prophesies beginning with the many flood stories of pre-historical Mesopotamia (including Noah's Ark), and ending with modern apocalyptic visions like the Branch Davidians cult, the contemporary Christian idea of rapture, and the (secular) Y2K scare. In between these bookends, Newman dips into the apocalyptic beliefs of early Christians (such as the vision of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse),

Chinese Daoism, the fictional 12th century magician Merlin ("associated with prophecy" throughout Europe for more than 800 years), and the increasingly infamous Mayan calendar that supposedly "ends" on December 21, 2012, a false prophesy Newman attributes to commentators who don't understand the writing, religion or archaeoastronomy of the ancient civilization: "the Mayans, like the Egyptians, were more concerned with keeping the world going than with when it was going to end." Entertaining and well-footnoted, this guide to the ends of the Earth will inform skeptics but is unlikely to sway believers. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In this jaunty trip through the Apocalypse, Newman looks at the many, many theories about civilization's end that began springing up close to civilization's beginning. The story of the Flood, which appears in numerous cultures, suggested the earth had almost been destroyed once. That global memory must have led to the realization it could happen again. Let the predictions begin! In Western culture, many are familiar not only with biblical prophecy but also with the writings of Nostradamus, both convoluted in their own ways. Now that 2012 is near, the musings of the Maya have taken center stage. But along the way, there has also been the Chinese millennial movements, the agendas spouted by various messiahs, and •let us not forget• the "disappointing" Y2K. Newman, who has done her research (and notes that her book could have been a thousand pages longer), doesn't seem too worried, although she lists numerous phenomena that could possibly end existence, like solar flares or an asteroid hitting the earth. Better keep some drinking water on hand, just in case. --Ilene Cooper

This is rather a difficult book to classify, as I haven't read it as a history as such, but rather an interesting overview of how we human beings apparently have, throughout time, been patiently (or impatiently as the case may be) waiting for the end of time. I confess to being a keen devourer of apocalypse and post-apocalypse fiction, so it has been very interesting to read how different societies have considered that perhaps all that we have will soon enough come to an end, usually based upon the cumulative evils of loose living and disrespect for one's deity. Indeed, much has been said in recent times of our modern world's moral and economic collapse, and some people genuinely believe that we are living in "end times". If you believe this and think that this will give you further insight, this is NOT the book for you. Sharan Newman has a rather wicked sense of humour, which I appreciate immensely (for example when discussing horned beasts which are prevalent in many texts she comments that there must be a nest somewhere, probably in the bottomless pit), but

I can see that this might not be the case for all. She does not labour on the beliefs of any particular faith, though The Bible is regularly mentioned as it is so well studied; and she does address the beliefs of the monotheist religions, as well as those brave individual souls who have, over time, announced that the world will end on such and such a date, only to be disappointed and forced to recalculate their stance. Even Nostadamus gets a chapter, as does the hype and hysteria that surrounds the Y2K bug. This is a really unusual, interesting and entertaining book, and which offers one final interesting insight - people who strongly believe that the end of the world is nigh, usually believe that they will be saved. I think this quite a telling point.

7.5/10 Medieval Historian turned novelist Sharan Newman takes us in a long journey that goes from the beginning of times to the modern era on an apocalyptic quest. Written just before the end of the year 2012, the book replies to questions that were specially relevant that year: How have humanity, different cultures and civilisations dealt with the impending end of times? Which things do they have in common? Which elements are particular to each culture or religious group? Do all cultures have or had an Armageddon myth? This a book on popular History, simply written, but with a good reference system and serious research work. A wicked witty sense of humour pervades the entire book, so it is very enjoyable to read and will give you some laughing moments. However, this is a reliable book. The introduction and conclusion are simple and focused. Newman explains how she has approached the study, why some things are included and not others, as well as the common denominators or themes in all apocalyptic groups. There have been "gazillion" doomsday groups throughout History, so Newman has chosen the most significant historically, others that intrigued her, and others that are representative of patterns of behaviour and ideas among these movements. Then, we are presented with a straightforward chronological study that covers all major religions and areas but heavily sided on the Western Word and Christianity. However there is plenty of information about Muslim and Jews groups as well. Beyond Western Europe and the USA we are given some details about the Middle East, China, Nigeria, India, the Mayans, and some Indigenous people (the Cherokees and Hopi nations in the USA and the Natives of Guinea and Papua-New Guinea). Once we enter in the modern era, each chapter has details about specific religious movements and groups, the leading figures and their specific views on the end of the world. The period and field covered is vast, so the research work involved is remarkable. Although primary sources are used, most of the book is based on secondary sources, something that is always questionable from a historical point of view especially if you are a doctorate. Yet, this book is addressed to the general public not to the Academia, and Newman does a great job at giving an

overall view of the subject and is honest enough to mention some of the shortcomings of her own research when necessary. The reference notes system is good. I really enjoyed Newman's explanations on the Mayan Calendar, the Cargo Cults, the somewhat esoteric nerdy computation of a date for the end of times that obsessed scientists of the 18th and 19th century (Newton included), how the creation of the State of Israel was supported by fundamentalist Christian groups that did want the Jews to disappear, or the utopian happy and peaceful (rare!) end of time envisioned by Joachim de Fiore and Joseph Priestly, who are the exception to too many Armageddon nightmares. You certainly will find your favourite doomsday group and moment. One of the things I like the most about Newman is that she contextualises all the movements she discusses, and tries to explain them using the parameters of the cultural and religious humus they fed upon. I also loved the tables at the end of the book with a short summary of the dates, type, and brief description of the apocalyptic movements mentioned in the book.

THE WEAKEST LINK

The main downside of this book, to me, is that it is a bit one-dimensional as, from the very beginning, Newman discards going beyond the facts or even considering psychological or sociological theories to give some sort of explanation to the pervading "doomsdayness" of the history of the human race. The juice is always in the "why?", as the "why?" is what gives us historical understanding. Therefore, questions that were in my mind when I purchased this book are replied with lack of seriousness, for example why do humans need of this apocalyptic Armageddon in the modern world? She replies: "among nonreligious people is the same as that with ghosts, mutant ants, vampires, and invasions from space. Most of us don't really believe in them, but it's fun to let ourselves be scared for a while" (location 4496)": Other questions are not even posed. For example, which social or psychological function do they have, if any? Why dreams and visions are so important in millenarian beliefs? Why charisma and not integrity are associated with fundamentalist messianic movements? Why non-religious doomsday beliefs are so widespread in the age of technology beyond being "cool"? What is the Antichrist, specifically? At times the chapters stretch unnecessarily with details I found superfluous as there is not much information about the beliefs of a given group beyond them being millenarian. Besides, I missed more focus on other areas of the world. India is passed in a few pages, and I missed more details about Indigenous populations that did mythologies that do not fit in the major religions: Australian Aborigines, the Inuit, Sub-saharian pre-colonial societies. They are not even mentioned. Perhaps they never had any belief about the end of the world, but I would have loved being told so, if that is the case! There are too many "perhaps", "it is said", "my guess", "probably", "some say" and other vague language that is not always reference-based for my liking.

WHAT WHAT WHAT?!

I found this statement about Joachim

de Fiore and my jaw dropped to the floor: "He was born in 1135 in the Italian town of Calabria" (Kindle's location 1455). Since when is Calabria a town? She means in a town in Calabria. Which town? Her biography of Nostradamus, footnote number three, states: "This biography is based on the work of Edgar Leroy in 1972. This book is almost impossible to find, showing that accuracy is not always rewarded. I have compiled this from quotes of his work in other sources. Not my favorite way of doing research". Isn't that what degree students do (and the sort of excuse they present) in end of the year essays? BAD KINDLE EDITION I am tired of purchasing books on Kindle, being charged full price and finding that they are badly rendered in e-book format, out of care, respect and consideration for the e-book reader. Like here. Look at the mess of the notes system in this book. The book uses endnotes as far as chapter 17, they are not numbered, but correlative, starting from a to z, then aa, ab, ac, and so on. Then, you get to chapter 18 and the notes start to be numbered, but they are endnotes at the end of each chapter not at the end of the book as the first, and they are not correlative between chapters. The final index is not paginated or linked, so partially useful. You can check for a specific word, and see if it is there, but if it is there, you won't know where. Ridiculous! And some misspelling and typos have not been corrected, like Giralamo instead of Girolamo.. IN SHORT Light, entertaining and informative with a good deal of research and written with a great sense of humour, this History of the End of the World sheds light on the myriad forms that the fear of the end of times has taken among humans from different parts of the world, Christians especially. Yet, the great work is somewhat wasted by a lack of depth in a study that rarely goes beyond the merely factual.

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