

# Apocalypse

Author:

Camille Flammarion, extract from *La Fin du monde* (The End of the World)

Page 6:

**Hieronymus Bosch**

*The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (triptych, central panel)

1505-1506

Oil on panel

Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

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Through me the way into the suffering city,  
Through me the way to the eternal pain,  
Through me the way that runs among the lost.  
Justice urged on my high artificer;  
My maker was divine authority,  
The highest wisdom, and the primal love.  
Before me nothing but eternal things were made,  
And I endure eternally.  
Abandon every hope, ye who enter here.

– Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*  
Inscription on the Gate to Hell, Canto III



# Selected Dates of Apocalyptic Predictions

c. 34 CE	The first Christian church awaits the return of Jesus Christ, basing their expectation on Jesus' own words: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."
31 December 999	At the end of the first millennium a wave of panic and apocalyptic gloom swept through the Christian West. Pope Sylvester II supposedly celebrated a fearful mass on the eve of the New Year, fully expecting the world to end.
1000	Taking the year 0 as the beginning of God's millennial kingdom, apocalypticists expected the year 1000 to bring the return of Satan and his last rebellion. Again, Europe was swept by mass hysteria and panic.
1033	Monk and chronicler Rodulfus Glaber of Burgundy modified the calculations of previous apocalypticists, using the year of Jesus' death as the beginning of God's kingdom on earth and wrote about the coming end-times. His expectation was strongly fuelled by his observations of society: a drought plagued Europe and the result was something that many saw as a "decline of civilisation". This era saw many reports about cannibalism, heretical activities, and satanic worship.
1186	In 1184, a strange letter made its rounds through intellectual circles, announcing that the world would be severely depopulated two years later due to natural catastrophes caused by a specific constellation of planets. Variants of the so-called "Toledo Letter" were still circulated, even centuries later.
1666	The obvious numerical connection of this date to the number of the beast leads many believers once more to assume that the apocalypse would finally begin. In the front row of these believers was Christopher Columbus, who thought that his last voyage would carry him to paradise. A severe drought in England and the Great Fire of London added to the apocalyptic mood of 1666.
1874	The Jehovah's Witnesses, who had recently emerged from the Bible Student Movement, starts a long series of apocalypse predictions with announcing the end for 1874. Before the central council distanced itself from any kind of prediction, several more years were marked for Armageddon and rapture: 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1941, 1974, 1981 and 1999.





- 18 May 1910      The reappearance of Halley's Comet, which was rumoured to destroy humanity by releasing cyanide gas into earth's atmosphere, causes panic once more. A few con-men used this fully unfounded fear to sell "comet pills" to unassuming people with the promise that they would protect them from the poisonous gas.
- 1969      Infamous hippy-sectarian Charles Manson was obsessed by the idea that the world was determined to end in a full-scale race war. Not only did he prophesise these events, but he actively attempted to make them come to pass by commanding his disciples to commit high-profile murders and blame African Americans for the crimes. Manson is currently serving a life-sentence in a Californian jail.
- 1999-2000      Similarly to the years 999 and 1000, the years before the third millennium brought a flood of apocalyptic forecasts and revisions of old predictions. Meteors hitting earth, natural catastrophes destroying large parts of the world, the usual religiously inspired raptures or aliens visiting/invading the planet – these are just some of the possible scenarios that were named. Well-known prophets of doom were Nostradamus, Isaac Newton and fashion designer Paco Rabanne.
- 21 March 2011      Radio-preacher Harold Camping, after having failed with his apocalypse-prediction for 1994, announces rapture again for 21 May 2011. Although this announcement was met with general derision, his followers quit their jobs and donated large sums of money to help finance an awareness-campaign for the coming Judgement Day.
- 21/23 December 2012      According to the counting-system of the Mayan calendar, 21 or 23 December 2012 sees the reappearance of a specific date that also marks the first day of creation. Many esoteric and pseudo-scientific interpretations assume this to be an indicator of yet another apocalypse. These theories were made popular by the catastrophe movie 2012.
- 2076      The writings of Bede Venerabilis, a Northumbrian monk, foretell that the 6000<sup>th</sup> year since the biblical creation will be the year 2076. Believing that God created the world only to last 6000 years, he assumed this to be the final year on earth. Correspondingly, 2076 also marks the year 1500 in the Islamic calendar which holds an apocalyptic relevance for some Sufi-groups.



## Beliefs about the end of the world through the ages

Here we will explore the curious phenomenon of the fear of the end of the world which has repeatedly appeared throughout the ages. All over the world and in every language, there has never been a more widely discussed subject.



### The Angel of the Abyss and Locusts

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Magius, c. 950

From the Morgan Beatus manuscript  
of the Commentary on the Apocalypse  
Manuscript on parchment, 38.1 x 28.2 cm  
The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York



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As to the dogma “Credo Resurrectionem Carnis”, the addresses of the fathers of the Church before the council assembled in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, were, on the whole, in accord with the opinion expressed by the cardinal archbishop of Paris. The clause “et vitam seternam” was tacitly ignored in view of the possible discoveries in



### The Four Horsemen Appear at the Opening of the First Four Seals

Attributed to Stephanus Garsia Placidus, c. 1060  
Illustration from the Beatus of Saint-Sever manuscript  
Illumination on parchment  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris







astronomy and psychology. As it were, these addresses epitomised the history of the doctrine of the end of the world as held by the Christian Church throughout the centuries.

This history is interesting, for it is also the history of the human mind face to face with its own destiny, and we believe it of sufficient importance to devote ample attention to it.



## Page from the Psalter of Blanche of Castile

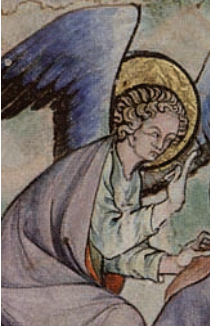
c. 1230

Illuminated manuscript, 28 x 22 cm

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris







The existence of a profound and tenacious faith is as old as the centuries, and it is a notable fact that all religions, irrespective of Christian dogma, have opened the same door from this mortal life upon the unknown which lies beyond, it is the door in the *Divine Comedy* by Dante, although the conceptions of paradise,



### John on Patmos Woken by the Angel

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Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
Illumination

University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford







hell, and purgatory peculiar to the Christian Church, are not universal.

Zoroaster and the Zend-Avesta taught that the world would perish by fire. The same idea is found in the Epistle of St Peter. It seems that the traditions of Noah and of Deucalion, according to which the first great disaster to humanity came by flood, indicated that the second great disaster would be



### The Angel Proclaims “Who is worthy?” – John Consolated by the Ancient

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Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
Illumination

University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford







of an exactly opposite character. Among the Romans, Lucretius, Cicero, Virgil, and Ovid all also announce the future destruction of Earth by fire.

According to Jesus, the generation which he addressed would not die before the previously mentioned disaster occurred. St Paul, the real founder of Christianity, believed deeply in the



### The Second Seal – The Red Horse

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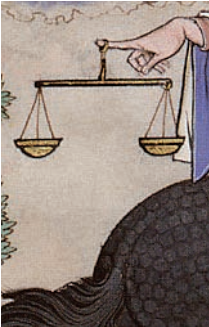
Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
 Illumination  
 University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford





resurrection and the coming end of the world, making it a fundamental dogma of the new church. He referenced it eight or nine times in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Unfortunately for the prophecy, Jesus' disciples, whom he had assured would not die before his accession, died one after the other under the common law. St Paul, who did not know



### The Third Seal – The Black Horse

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Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
Illumination

University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford







Jesus personally, but was a staunch supporter of the fledgling Christian church, was believed to have lived until the Great Commission (Jesus' appearance to his eleven disciples on Galilee). Naturally, however, they all died, and thus the end of the world, as predicted by the definitive coming of the Messiah, did not happen.



### The Third Trumpet – A Burning Star Falls from the Heavens

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Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
Illumination  
University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford





Belief in the end of the world did not simply disappear, however. Believers decided to stop taking the prediction literally, seeking instead new interpretations. However, belief in the Gospel suffered as a result. We devoutly buried the dead, laid out in coffins with reverence rather than being burned by fire, and it was written on their tombs that they would rest there until the resurrection.

The Angel of the Sixth Seal  
and The Four Angels  
at the Four Corners of the Earth

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Cimabue  
Fresco

Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi, Assisi







Jesus would “soon” return to judge “the living and the dead”. The Christian word of recognition was *Maran atha*, “the Lord will come”.

The apostles Peter and Paul most likely died in the year 64 CE, during the horrible slaughter ordered by Nero after the burning of Rome, set on fire at his command and whose destruction he attributed to the Christians so that he might have



### The Locusts Riding

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Illustration from “The Douce Apocalypse”, c. 1270  
 Illumination  
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