

# Apocalypse

Author:

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

Layout:

Baseline Co. Ltd  
61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
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Vietnam

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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

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# 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.



**Hieronymus Bosch**

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

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1505-1506

Oil on panel

Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

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 Beda 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.



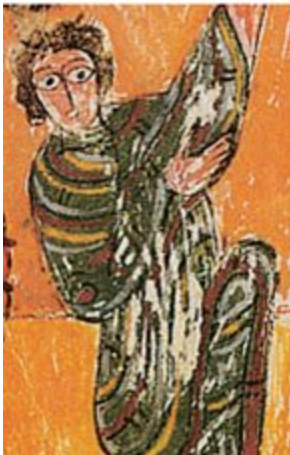
## **Beliefs about the end of the world through the ages**

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





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 setemam” was tacitly ignored in view of the possible discoveries in astronomy and psychology.



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

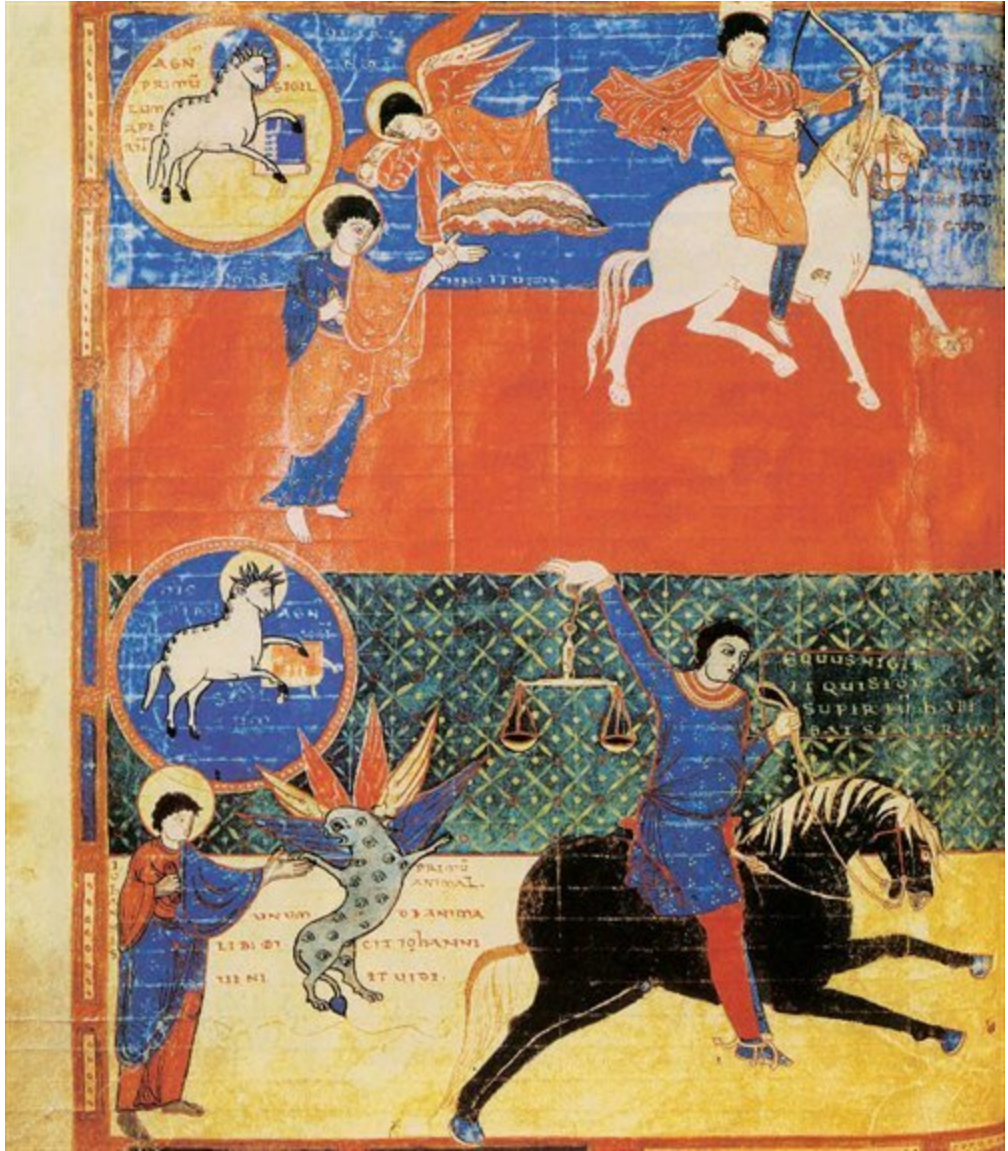
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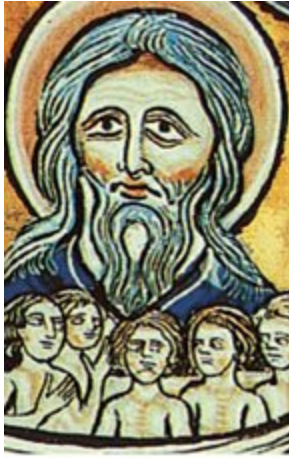
Attributed to Stephanus Garsia  
Placidus, c. 1060

Illustration from the Beatus of  
Saint-Sever manuscript

Illumination on parchment  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France,  
Paris







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

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c. 1230

Illuminated manuscript,  
28 x 22 cm

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris