

# The End Is Near (or Not)

2012 is upon us, and with it an uptick in discussion of whether an apocalypse is due, brought about by the end of the Mayan calendar. What are the mythologies that have inspired humanity to predict the end of the world?

By Arturo Mora



The year 2012 is here, and with it comes a host of dire predictions.

Perhaps the most popular is that December 21, coinciding with the ancient Mayan calendar date 4 Ahau 3 Kankin, will mark the end of a great cycle of time. To some, this will usher in great destruction, a Hollywood end of days. Others, such as *Fractal Time* author Gregg Braden, see this as a time of spiritual transition and potential transformation. (To read interpretations on the 2012 controversy from voices within the Unity movement, see sidebars on page 12.)

Futurist author John Michael Greer, in his new book *Apocalypse Not: Everything You Know About 2012, Nostradamus and the Rapture Is Wrong*, said such fervor is nothing new.

“It’s a constant theme in apocalyptic belief that this time is different from all the other times,” Greer said in an interview. “The 2012 furor is no more intense than any of a hundred other large apocalyptic movements; it’s simply grabbed the headlines here and now.”

The concept of an apocalypse has a varied religious history. Many Hindus believe Kalki, the final avatar of Vishnu, the sustainer of life, will end the present dark ages, the Kali Yuga. In Islamic eschatology, the false messiah al-Masih ad-Dajjal will be vanquished. Jews search for their Messiah, and many Christians look to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Around 1500-1200 BCE the Zoroastrian prophet Zarathustra had visions of a final epic moral struggle. Greer traces “the apocalyptic meme” back to this oracle, who foretold a “making wonderful” of all suffering by the messiah Ahura Mazda. The dead would be reborn and

believers would find eternal bliss. Adapted and edited by other faiths, this basic story has changed very little.

Over time, this meme was passed on to Judaism, then Christianity. Jewish culture reacted to frequent defeats by latching on to such messianic hope. The Book of Daniel, for one, is replete with end days prophesies. Jesus was born at a time when, fed by resentment over Roman occupation, such visions grew to a fever pitch.

Did this environment make Jesus himself an apocalyptic prophet? And what did he really say about the end of times? Two Jesus scholars on different sides of that sometimes contentious debate are John Dominic Crossan and Bart Ehrman.

Crossan maintains that even if Jesus initially bought into that fervor, he grew beyond it. To him, Jesus is apocalyptic only in that he challenged the current way of

doing things. He taught that change would come through a new kind of community embodying the Kingdom of God, not by waiting for God's intervention.

Ehrman characterizes Jesus as clearly apocalyptic. Jesus predicted a powerful, divinely led change coming sooner rather than later. In Mark 9:1 Jesus declares to his disciples that "there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Unity scholar and teacher Rev. Tom Thorpe said, "I lean toward Crossan's view of Jesus as one who believed that God would bring about a total transformation of society, an apocalyptic change. I believe Jesus' ministry, for example, his healing work and his miracles of abundance, were his way of demonstrating that 'the Kingdom of God is at hand.'"

## 2012 WILL BE WHAT WE MAKE OF IT By Rev. Joan Gattuso

I often tell my students that we either believe the Principles of Truth or we don't. We either believe God is good or we don't. We either believe all things work together for good for those who love God or we don't. But fear looms sometimes, even in the metaphysical world.

The metaphysical arena has its own prophets of doom who have risen to fame with their espousing of dire predictions for 2012. As a truth student you decide daily what you are to believe, where you are to place your faith. Albert Einstein wisely stated: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

For us to believe that Biblical writers were making predictions about our time is the ego mind at work. To believe that the ancient Mayans were predicting the future of civilization to come is not a very enlightened thought. The ego mind can play many games and tricks with us, and all too easily many get caught in its web. What if the predictions were off by a year? Certainly many horrendous events occurred in 2011: the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan that was followed by major aftershocks and near nuclear disaster resulting in tens of thousands of deaths; monster tornados across the United States; ferocious hurricanes pummeling the coasts. People died by the hundreds of thousands in the Middle East and in Africa. Maybe 2011 was THE year!

The point is that the world is a fragile and often vulnerable place. The world is not about to end in a huge conflagration. My observation is that God has manifested celestial order throughout all time in our world.

Human consciousness and the human spirit can only wander so far off Divine course. Then we individually and collectively wake up a bit more and remember God. There are countless stories of renewal, rebirth and resurrection in the wake of a disaster. If you need to be drawn further out of fear, look them up.

So throughout the new year why not allow this Buddhist blessing to be the prayer of your heart:

May you be filled with loving-kindness. May you be well. May you be peaceful and at ease. May you be happy.

Pray this prayer of goodness for yourself and all others, and do remember to have a Happy New Year.

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Rev. Joan Gattuso is the founding minister of Unity of Greater Cleveland. A columnist for *Unity Magazine*, she has written numerous books on spirituality including her latest, *The Lotus Still Blooms*.



Many Christians, including fundamentalists, disagree strongly with such interpretations. They focus on the Mark 13 vision, in which Jesus speaks of signs of coming destruction and warns of “false Christs and false prophets.” He foretells “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory ... (to) gather together His Elect.” (Mark 13: 1-27) This is popularly known as the Rapture, with Jesus reaping the good and leaving behind the unfaithful. These Christians cite as evidence how Jesus often called himself “the Son of Man,” accepting the mantle of Messiah. But Crossan and Ehrman both maintain that Jesus was not referring to himself. To Crossan, he was referring to all humanity, while Ehrman believes Jesus may have been predicting a coming divine judge.

Rapture believers have also combined Jesus’ own words with the Book of Revelation, using it to flesh out

their end times story.

“Fundamentalists have ... forced an extremely arbitrary set of interpretations on poor John of Patmos (the writer of Revelation),” Greer said. He said it’s been ignored that Revelation is possibly preterist, meaning it has already successfully predicted history, by foretelling the ultimate fall of Rome.

To Ehrman, Mark 13 is clear, and Jesus was possibly a failed Jewish apocalyptic prophet who made unfulfilled predictions. Crossan prefers to see him as using symbology to bring forth a powerful message to awaken people’s better angels.

Greer said that is plausible. “Parables, allegories and symbolism were very common literary devices at the time, so it’s quite reasonable to explore the texts in those terms,” he said.

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## WHAT ABOUT NOW? By Rev. Ogun Holder



**A**s the fervor increases as we approach 2012, I have to admit that I am pretty removed from the growing excitement. I would get excited, if I only knew what to get excited about!

Because of one possible interpretation (some would say misinterpretation) of an ancient Mayan calendar, we think something will happen in 2012, specifically December 21.

The possibilities include, but are not limited to, the following: massive and potentially crippling solar flares; a shift in the earth’s magnetic poles; a religious apocalypse, as in the “end times”; an alien visitation or worse ... an invasion; a flu pandemic; the point of no return for global warming; a global shift of consciousness ushering in a new age of enlightenment; and my personal favorite: the Singularity or the rise of true Artificial Intelligence (did I mention that I’m a geek?)

I don’t mean to sound cynical or imply that there may not be any truth to this. I am neither astrologer nor futurist; luminary nor prophet.

My perspective is simply this: We have more than enough to distract us right now. Our focus needs to be on right now, because now is all we have. If we do not take care of the now, there may not be a future for us to worry about!

I believe there is only one question we need ask to prepare us for this now moment and any future

eventuality: “What is mine to do to express my indwelling Christ consciousness?”

I believe that by living in and from that question we will be divinely inspired to respond—no, transcend—any current or future issues we might face. It is the question that will guide us to live from love for each other and the planet; to end needless wars, hunger and suffering; to write the future of our highest imagination.

Unfortunately, not enough of us are asking ourselves this question today. If I’m going to get excited about anything in 2012, it’s the conviction that more people across the planet will be introduced to Unity principles, and that I get to play a part in that. I hope you’ll join me.

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Rev. Ogun Holder is a newly ordained Unity minister, graduating from Unity Institute® and Seminary in 2011. He is the senior minister and executive director of the alternative ministry Unity For All. Originally from Barbados, Ogun now lives in North Carolina with his wife, Rev. Jennifer Holder, and daughter Joy.

The breadth of Jesus's teachings, of course, go far beyond Mark 13, and Thorpe sees degrees of success and failure in Jesus's fuller vision.

"Did Jesus' apocalyptic vision fail?" Thorpe asks. "Yes and no. Yes, because the number of people who can see the unfolding Kingdom is still small. (His) followers have invested too much of their energy in doctrinal disputes and not enough in bringing the Kingdom into manifestation. And no, because, although it's often been ignored and even abused, Jesus' vision ... has never completely died."

Greer, likewise, urges us to stay on message with the core of spiritual teachings instead of focusing on false hopes of a better life with the flick of a divine switch.

The enduring popularity of apocalyptic predictions is attributable to "a combination of dissatisfaction with life as it is, on the one hand, and an unwillingness to tackle the hard work of changing it, on the other," said Greer. "The great spiritual teachers of all times have taught that the world will become a better place when we each get off our backsides and get to work making it a better place, but that's a daunting prospect. It's much easier to believe that God will hand us a shiny new world and all we have to do is wait for him to get around to it." ■

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# YOUR OWN PERSONAL APOCALYPSE

By Arturo Mora

**W**hat does all this apocalypse talk mean to our own lives? Can it teach us anything useful, if we are not literal believers in the Rapture or Revelation?

Rev. Richard Levy, senior minister at Unity of Wilmington, North Carolina, has given a series of talks about the Apocalypse and Revelation (some of which are viewable on YouTube), and he believes the prophecies can teach us about dealing with the



Rev. Richard Levy

"apocalyptic moments" that come daily into our lives.

"We're going into a transitional phase where some ways of doing things are falling apart," he said. "And they need to, so that something new can take its place. Apocalypse is about beginnings and not just endings. It's about awakening to a new consciousness."

Levy notes that every breath is itself an apocalyptic renewal. "The breath ended, the breath begins," he said. "We are never the same anyway. Something ended; we constantly change."

He characterizes apocalypse as a positive experience when linked with a personal rebirth into revelation. Apocalypse can move to revelation in an instant, he said. He gives a personal example from when he was 5 years old. At a time when his family was struggling,

he came to what he thought was his family's apartment, but found it empty. He panicked that his parents and family had just left him behind.

Suddenly he heard, through the floor, a sweet voice singing the words of a popular song, "Sugar Pie Honey Bunch." He realized with joy that it was his sister, and that he had gotten off the elevator at the wrong floor.

Such moments in life, he said, "are a change of perception from what something seems to be to seeing what really is."

Walking through such challenges, whether big or small, Levy said, ushers in revelation, a lifting of the veil. What is then revealed is "the beauty and the glory, the wonder and presence and joy, of what you truly are," he said. "You awaken that true nature. You can live a fuller life when that is revealed. You are less fearful; you have a new energy."

Levy also places particular symbolic importance in the four horses (white, red, black and ashen) of Revelation. The whole chapter, in fact, uses imagery about horses again and again. "Horses are meant to be ridden, worked with, pulled back on the reins," he said. "Each of the four horses represents a certain power and separation that we experience. We are conquering outside instead of conquering inside. By taking Revelation into our heart, we find that internal source of power instead of the external sources of power."