

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT IT?

On April 8, 2024, North America was in the “path of totality” of a total solar eclipse. Accompanying the moon covering the sun (and resulting darkness) was a slew of alarmist predictions that the end of the world was at hand: judgment, terror, nuclear disasters, and Christ’s coming would ensue. Either the predictions were wrong, we missed something, or we’re still waiting for the end times.

Despite incorrect doomsday predictions, life as we know it *will* end. Humans have predicted this outcome for thousands of years. Whether in religious texts or modern scientific analysis, we have long known that we (as a people, society, even planet) have an expiration date. For humans, there are any number of ways it ends for us: Artificial Intelligence deciding we are not worth the hassle, our ongoing and increasing climate catastrophe, or a few world leaders deciding to launch nuclear weapons in a bid to mutually assure one another’s destruction. If somehow we avoid those self-inflicted outcomes, nature may very well do the work for us with a supervolcano, an asteroid, or the inescapable lifecycle of our sun.

Christians have one more end-times scenario to add: the return of Jesus Christ, and his coming judgment on the world. There are a lot of theories about how that might happen, from raptures to cosmic battles. Most stem from pretty ambiguous (or ambitious) and particular “prophetic” readings of scripture. But nearly all Christian doctrine agrees: Christ will come back to redeem us.

END TIMES

Reading **Revelation** (Wrong?) The **Return** of Christ and **Planting Trees**

a Brewed Theology
conversation starter*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Have you thought much about the end of the world, or the end of humanity? Does it matter that there is an end? Do you worry about the end? As a Christian, do you long for Christ to return in your lifetime? Do you even think about it that often? Have you encountered Christians who preach about the rapture or apocalyptic prophecies? How do you feel when you hear their warnings and threats? If you knew the world would end next year, what difference would that make in your life? How would you live your life differently? How would the world react?

BIBLE BASICS

The Bible is full of promises and prophecies that say God has a plan for the end of our world. Many of the writers of the New Testament assumed that Christ would return and usher in the end of the world in their lifetime. As you read these passages, imagine how these words would have sounded differently to a marginal society living under violent and oppressive regimes like the Roman Empire.

- **Matthew 24** – Jesus warns of coming judgment. Who does he say knows when it is coming?
- **Revelation 21** – After cosmic violence ending creation, Revelation offers hope of new creation (on earth).
- **1 Peter 4:7-19** – Peter predicts that the end is near. Instead of giving up hope, or isolating in wait, Peter says to lean into loving and serving your neighbor until the day comes.

ESSENTIAL READING & LISTENING

(click the **headings** for links to knowledge)

NOTE: There's a lot. Pace yourself. Especially if you get anxious.

Doomsday Clock - 90 Seconds to Midnight (5 minute read)

Founded by scientists who developed the first atomic weapons, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists made a Doomsday Clock conveying threats to humanity and earth. It says we have 90 seconds left out of 24 hours. Why? When you're done reading, **watch this 5-minute video by Vox explaining the Doomsday Clock.**

Why Americans Love Apocalyptic Predictions (6 minute read - soft paywall)

A strange marriage exists between religion and science in American culture: an obsession with the Apocalypse.

It's the End of the World (But Not as We Know It) – Christian Century

Andrea L. Robinson recounts (multiple) end times predictions, and how we read Revelation (wrong).

Living Lutheran - End Times (5 minute read)

The Rev. Dr. Barbara R. Rossing, professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, clears up some misconceptions about the end times and what Jesus actually said about the things to come.

NPR - Book of Revelation (23 minute read or 37 minute listen)

Listen to (or read) this interview with Princeton religion scholar, Elaine Pagels, discussing the book of Revelation, the Bible's main source of information about the end of the world. Or is it just anti-Roman propaganda?

Nuclear War - "The Brink" NYT (15 minute read - Gift Article)

You may not think about total nuclear annihilation as much as you should, relative to other catastrophic global threats. Read this opinion piece from the New York Times about the threat of nuclear war and how to prevent it.

Rapture Anxiety - CNN (5 minute read)

The psychological costs of growing up with the threat of rapture: being unexpectedly taken up to heaven, anytime.

Living Lutheran - Busting Myths about Martin Luther (2 minute read)

In this article, Luther scholar, Timothy Wengert, busts myths about Martin Luther. Skip to the heading "**Luther once said, "Even if I knew the world was going to end tomorrow, I would plant a tree today."** Luther probably didn't say this famous quote, but it still reveals important insights about his theology of the end times.

Pew Research: About Four-in-Ten US Adults Believe Humanity is Living in the End Times

Do you think Jesus will come back in your lifetime? In the US, many of your neighbors do.

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