

2012: Doomsday All Over Again

Progress or Regress

It is the end of the world again. The world was predicted to end at least eight times in the past 30 years, from the Jupiter Effect in 1982 to what became a common punch line, “88 reasons why the rapture will happen in 1988.” Then there was the granddaddy of all false apocalyptic prophecies: the millennium bug of 2000, when it was widely held that all computers would fail at the turn of the millennium. Let’s not forget the two failed predictions of the end in 2011. Now the world faces yet another prediction of the end with the Mayan calendar prophecy of 2012. In an age of super-science, computers, space travel and accelerating progress, why are people fascinated with the end of the world?

We have all heard the phrase “What goes up must come down.” This captures the popular attitude towards progress and regress. Americans believe strongly in human perfectibility and the inevitability of technological progress. This idea states that as technology moves society from its primitive state to an advanced condition it will eventually improve, bringing a better tomorrow. The world is getting better and better. Faith in progress provides the engine for all the accelerating technological changes from space exploration, media, computers, to science and medicine. Historian Robert Nisbet noted the essential role of progress in our belief system when he said that progress does not represent one aspect of modern life, but in fact provides the keystone idea and context for the entire modern worldview, including democracy, equality, social justice and, of course, science and technology.^{1} The modern world does not exist without the belief in progress. Technological improvement makes no sense without the larger *telos*, or purpose of history, guiding it. Simply put, all of this innovation leads to a utopian future.

So we are left with the question, If America is so progressive why is it so obsessed with the end of the world or *apocalypticism*, a belief that is not progressive, but regressive? This view of history does not move toward a utopian society of universal peace, ease and convenience, but rather toward calamity. Progress and regress share the same view of history. Any belief in progress necessarily has a regressive interpretation. They each look at the same circumstances and data and draw complementary conclusions. One sees the dawn of a great society, the other sees the end of the world. They represent complementary ideas in the same way life and death complement each other. What lives eventually dies, so what progresses will also necessarily regress.

All people intuitively know that they will die one day; so then society, the collective "person," knows it too must one day die. If progress takes place we know that its opposite, regress, will also happen. Regressive thought states that the progress we take for granted potentially has a downside and in fact will result in something catastrophic. Our society will one day come to an end. It cannot live forever any more than an individual can live forever in a mortal body. We know that what goes up must come down. The current obsession over the end of the world in movies, such as *2012*, *Melancholia* and *Contagion* or wildly popular novels such as the *Left Behind* series, the predictions of popular preachers or the Mayan prophecy all cater to our regressive and pessimistic side. This is not as bad as it first sounds. Death creates the foundation of all religion, philosophy and culture as attempts to provide answers for our questions and solace in times of doubt and need. The reality of death causes people to look for the meaning of life. Christians need to harness the regressive side of culture because it warns of imminent danger and offers the opportunity to introduce people to Jesus Christ. Regressive thinking, like the knowledge of our own death, makes us all aware of our need for God and the Savior. Believers must take advantage of this primal consciousness of

the end to tell people about what the Bible says concerning the end of the world and the return of Christ. But in order to do this successfully we must first establish guidelines on how to identify false prophecy.

What the Bible Says

Today people are searching for the meaning of life in the wrong places, such as the prophecies of Nostradamus, astrology and, again, the Mayan prophecy of 2012. It is a sign of the end times when there are many false prophets talking about the end of the world (Matthew 24:11). The false prophet shows that people are aware that the end is near.

There are two rules in Scripture that will help believers identify false prophets, which should be followed without exception. First, prophecy *must never set a date regarding when the world will end*. Jesus spoke clearly about the signs of His return and the end of the world when He said, “But of the day and the hour no one knows” (Matthew 24:36). Anyone who comes to you with a firm date as to when the world will end such as December 21, 2012 should be avoided. Cultists continually violate this cardinal rule. For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have predicted the end of the world eight times between 1914 and 1975. Popular radio preacher Harold Camping predicted the end in 1994 and twice in 2011. The speculation surrounding the year 2000 was much like it is today over 2012. Scientific evidence was proffered predicting that all computers would fail at the turn of the last millennium. This warning was taken very seriously by most people who made preparations for the potential disaster, demonstrating the pervasive sentiment of impending doom.

However, many Bible-believing Christians also fall prey to the error of date-setting, even if this practice is often veiled in vague language and logic. For example, when prophecy experts identify leading political figures as the Antichrist, such as Hitler, Mussolini or Saddam Hussein, they engage in

false prophecy. This approach will invariably get us into trouble because it starts the clock ticking. If Saddam Hussein were the Antichrist, then logically Christ should have returned before the end of his life, since the Antichrist is the precursor to the coming of Christ (Rev. 6:2; 2 Thess. 2:3). However, we know that did not happen. In this way, identification of the Antichrist with any leading figure becomes false prophecy.

How much better it would have been to say Hussein was *like* the Antichrist or prefigured the Antichrist, rather than identify him as the Antichrist. This simple switch in focus spares us the humiliation of false prophecy, but retains all the power of moral denunciation that apocalyptic thinking offers.

This leads to the second rule of indentifying false prophecy: *all prophecy must have a moral imperative*. This means people should not engage in speculation and prognostication for the fun of it. A biblical approach to prophecy gives a warning about future judgment and a chance to repent: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3; see also 2 Thess. 2:1, 5-10). Prophecy engages in denouncing moral outrage, which is why it couches things in the strongest possible language. To say that the world is coming to an end or that someone is the Antichrist gets a lot of attention, but requires a moral cause to justify its claims.

If the prophecy gives a date and it lacks the moral imperative, then the prophecy reveals itself to be false and sensationalistic. The Mayan 2012 prophecy fails on both counts. Although it causes us to contemplate the end, it sets a date and offers no reason for why the world should end. It is simply doomsday all over again!

Notes

1. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 9, 171.

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See Also:

- [2012: Is the Sky Really Falling?](#)

2012: Is The Sky Really Falling?

Probe's former intern Dave Sterrett and Steve Lee of Prestonwood Christian Academy (Plano TX) planned to publish a book about the 2012 buzz. After interviewing a number of Ph.D.s who are experts in Maya studies, astronomy, astrobiology, theology and New Testament, they concluded that the hype is "much ado about nothing."

The ancient Mesoamerican culture of the Maya had a meticulous calendar that abruptly ends on December 21, 2012. Many so-called scholars and believers think that either the world is going to end, as the recently released movie *2012* depicts, or humanity will move into a new age of enlightenment that will elevate us into a higher state of being or consciousness. The prediction of this "end of the world" or "end of the age" phenomenon has morphed into a multifaceted issue ranging from Maya studies, astronomy, New Age, to biblical studies.

The Hype:

Lawrence E. Joseph, author of *Apocalypse 2012: An Investigation Into Civilization's End*, has stated that "The year 2012 will be pivotal, perhaps catastrophic, possibly revelatory, to a degree unmatched in human history." Many people have been concerned about the connection between the Maya prediction and astronomy. Some New Age advocates believe the 2012 event will bring about a higher level of consciousness. Sol Luckman, author of *Conscious Healing*, has written, "Are you aware that a Shift in human consciousness is occurring even as you read these words that employs celestial triggers such as supernovas and Earth's alignment with Galactic Center in the years leading up to 2012 to trigger the evolution of our species?"

The Reality:

We interviewed Dr. Robert Sitler, Director of the Latin American Studies program at Stetson University.

Steve and Dave: What is the Maya long calendar and what is its significance?

Dr. Sitler: The Long Count Calendar is multifaceted, It is primarily a way of establishing a specific day in lineal time, much like our own yearly calendar, The calendar surely had powerful symbolic dimensions but our current understanding of them is limited.

S&D: Does the Maya Calendar give any indication of an apocalypse, end of the world, or a great transformation that could be cataclysmic?

Dr. Sitler: The calendar itself does not indicate such things, It tells you what day it is, There is only one reference to the Dec. 21, 2012 date in the ancient hieroglyphs, Monument 6 from Tortuguero, and unfortunately, the text says very little.

S&D: Why do you think many websites and books claim that Maya

predicted the end of the earth?

Dr. Sitler: Very few of these websites have substantive ties to the Maya world, and as a result, they are often extremely misinformed.

S&D: Do you see any detriment or loss to Maya studies because of the 2012 predictions?

Dr. Sitler: It's great for Maya studies in terms of drawing attention to the Maya themselves and hopefully more serious scholarship. The 2012 hype bases itself on extremes of misinformation.[*{1}*](#)

The Hype:

While Maya scholars such as Dr. Sitler see no legitimacy to the end of the world scenarios coming from Maya culture or calendars, many doomsday predictions have turned to astronomical studies to confirm their prophecies of a coming apocalypse. Theories such as a pole shift are propounded as likely events that will bring earth to destruction. Patrick Geryl, co-author of *The Orion Prophecy: Will the World be Destroyed in 2012? Prophecies from the Maya and the Old Egyptians*, predicts that "In 2012 the next polar reversal will take place on earth. This means that the North Pole will be changed into the South Pole. Scientifically this can only be explained by the fact that the earth will start rotating in the opposite direction, together with a huge disaster of unknown proportions. In my books I reveal the immense cataclysm that is going to torment the earth in the near future."[*{2}*](#)

The Reality:

Again, we went to the experts in the fields of astronomy and astrophysics. The claim that doomsday advocates are making turns out to be a bait and switch. David Morrison, the senior

scientist at the NASA Astrobiology Institute, clarifies, “A reversal in the rotation of Earth is impossible. It has never happened and never will.”[\[3\]](#)

In reality there is one thing that can be predicted with great accuracy according to Dr. Gene Byrd, professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Alabama. He told us, “The only thing that is predictable is that some folks will be predicting the end of the world a few years from now and making new predictions of the end after this date [i.e., 2012] has passed.”

Notes

1. Interview on July 17, 2009.
2. Patrick Geryl, “Pole Shift & Pole Reversal in 2012” survive2012.com/index.php/geryl-pole-shift.html, accessed August 29, 2009.
3. astrobiology.nasa.gov/ask-an-astrobiologist/intro/nibiru-and-doomsday-2012-questions-and-answers, accessed September 6, 2009.

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See Also:

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