



**This is not the end of the world, according to Christians who study the end of the world**

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Picture above: A pedestrian crosses 13th Street NW in Washington during what would normally be rush hour on Tuesday.

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Chuck Pierce's son was worried, as were many other people looking at a world of looted groceries and canceling sports seasons and strange rows of people six feet away. So he asked his father, "Is this the end of the world?"

That's a question you can ask when you have a father who calls himself an apostolic prophet and leads a prophetic ministry. "No," said Pierce, who lives in Corinth, Tex. "The Lord showed me until 2026, so I know that's not the end of time."

The worldwide uprising caused by the rapidly spreading pandemic of new coronaviruses has many people taking their Bibles, and some are beginning to wonder: could this be a sign of the apocalypse?

Surely it can seem apocalyptic. But not if you ask Christian writers and pastors who have spent years focusing their message on the Book of Revelation-the final book of the New Testament. It presents a poetic and scandalous vision of the end times, in which many evangelical leaders interpret it to mean that Jesus will return to earth, believers will be raptured into heaven, and those left behind will suffer seven terrible years of calamity. Many of these prophets focused on Revelation do not see the coronavirus announcing the Second Coming and the end of life on earth as we know it.

"If a person has become completely ignorant of what the Bible says about the End Times, he may now think: That's it," said Jeff Kinley, a book writer about Bible prophecy living in Harrison, Arkansas.

Kinley said he understands why Americans can consider this time of rapidly spreading diseases, the isolation of loved ones, and the crashing of stock markets apocalyptic. Americans are prepared to believe that the end of the world could come any day. In 2010, 41 percent told the Pew Research Center that they expected Jesus to return by 2050.

Kinley pointed to Revelation 6:8, which predicts deaths around the world "by sword, famine, and plague," and Jesus' words about the events before the end of time in Luke 21:11: "There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, terrible events, and great signs from heaven.

"I think he's referring to a future time," said Kinley. "I don't think that's a real compliment to that."

The Bible is very specific about what will happen before the end of time, says Kinley, and these events have not yet been revealed. On the one hand, the ancient temple of Jerusalem must be rebuilt first.

Gary Ray, a writer of the Unsealed prophecy website, agreed: He and his fellow End Times evangelical writers are focused on what is happening to sacred sites in Israel, not to diseases. "The main focus we have in our minds is Israel. This is God's prophetic clock. As things progress in this country, we come closer to when the rapture of the church will occur and then the tribulation," he said.

Ray, who lives near Dallas, pointed out that there have been many pandemics in the history of the world, and none of them was a sign of an approaching apocalypse. But this may be different, he acknowledged - because of an astrological event in 2017 that Ray read as fulfilling a prophecy in Revelation. Jesus said that there would be pestilences and great signs in heaven. And surely, these two things are happening together.

In Ray's opinion, these omens should send non-Christians in haste towards the Bible, so that they can be converted while there is still time until Christians are raptured and all the rest have to endure the miserable seven years. "God is a very gracious god," he said. "He wants the most possible people to be saved. He is sign after sign after sign, and they are very clear.

Michael Brown, host of Charlotte-based Christian radio show The Line of Fire, also said the coronavirus is not a sign of the end times, but a good opportunity to reflect on what he believes will come. "I see it as a test to see how we react to the calamity and the difficulties," he said. "If we're shaken now, how are we gonna react when it really gets wild?"

A reason for all these relatively positive evaluations of people who could be doomsday prophets? It could be President Trump's attitude towards the virus; the president, who is very popular among evangelical Christians, for weeks minimized the seriousness of the threat of the disease. His tone, however, has become remarkably more worrisome this week.

James Beverley, a professor at the Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, said he discovered in researching his next book on Trump and Christian prophecy that charismatic and Pentecostal prophets, who usually think that the end of time is near, are less likely to foresee misfortune during the Trump government.

"Some are saying that Satan is the source of such evils as the virus, but the message of doom and gloom is missing. There is such a positive view of Trump and such strong desires for his reelection that there is a deep hope that the virus will disappear, a strong economy will

return and Trump will defeat the Democratic candidate," Beverley wrote in an email. "It's amazing how optimistic the charismatic prophets have been since Trump won in 2016."

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