

The fire next time

By [David Williams](#)

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I and a small group of intrepid members of my congregation have been heaving our way through the book of Revelation for the last half-dozen weeks, and it ain't easy going. The convoluted mind of John of Patmos and the circuitous, repetitive pattern of his visions are notoriously unforgiving.

Even if you understand the symbolism and the Matrix-stutter narrative arc of that wild and hallucinatory book, it's still a hard one to crank through. John's faith is bright and feverish, often seeming devoid of both logic and compassion. Love your enemies? Hah. Love watching them burn, more like. There's not a whole bunch of *agape* going down in Revelation. But hey, what would you expect from visions brought by [an angel who identifies himself](#) as the [Morning Star](#)?

Well played, my wealthy, tasteful friend. Well played.

Silliness aside, one of the charges leveled against the apocalyptic mindset is the degree to which it can disengage us from the here and now. Why care about the mess we're making of our little planet, if that mess is all part of the end of things? Why worry about the wars and injustices that we human beings inflict on each other, if they're just leading up to the final destruction of something that *deserves* to be wiped out?

"It's all going to be destroyed anyway," the refrain goes. "Why should I care about saving it?"

For folks who'd really rather see things turn for the better, that attitude of willful resignation is seriously problematic, because it contributes to things getting worse.

Here's the rub, though. Even if you think John of Patmos wouldn't have known the Jesus of the Gospels if you'd whacked him upside the head with them, he was right in this one thing: The earth is going to be completely destroyed. Wiped clean, and

cast into a lake of fire.

Of this, there is little doubt. I'm sure of it, in fact, so sure that I'm right now going to pitch out a timeframe for that destruction, with at least as much confidence as Harold Camping.

If we're lucky, [we've got just about 2.8 billion years.](#)

Well, less than that, actually. But it all wraps up then, as our sun exhausts itself and swells outward into its red-giant phase, devouring the inner planets in a wash of fading fusion fire. Life will become impossible. The earth—everything that it is, everything that it will be—is unquestionably doomed.

So why should we care? I mean, really, why should we? What's our motivation? We know with certainty that even if we make every conceivable effort and turn our little garden world into a perfect utopia, it's going to be obliterated.

The motivation comes from our integrity in the present, and our stewardship over the time we have been given. It's the same motivation that drives us to care for our bodies, even though we know we're going to eventually die. It's the same motivation that moves us to love our children, even though we know the same thing will ultimately happen to them.

In this time, with this awareness we've been given, our task is to live out the justice and compassion of God's reign. Period. And sure, it's all going to end. That might be 2.8 billion years away. Or tomorrow, when an errant round fired by a K'tall singularity cannon during the battle for the [p Eridani](#) system comes tearing in at point seven five of lightspeed.

No matter what, our task is to be good and just stewards, living lives that reflect the integrity of our purpose.

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