

The End is near - or maybe not - but books about the End are

By Richard Ostling
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"What the Bible Scholars Have Missed," shouts the cover line on a book whose title reveals the alleged knowledge: "World's End: 2009."

To prove we have only five years left, writer Peter Lorie blends biblical bits indiscriminately with the forecasts of seers, including Nostradamus, whose words were enigmatic, and Edgar Cayce, who predicted that much of the United States would be under water by now.

A Barna Research survey

conducted last November showed 45 percent of Americans believe the world will end through "supernatural intervention." Penguin, the same conglomerate that published Lorie's book, targets that audience with another book, by televangelist Paul Crouch, which improbably combines evangelicalism with the "Bible code" craze.

Lorie's version: Nostradamus thought the papacy would disappear around now, as did St. Malachy; the Buddha marked this era for chaos and new consciousness, astrology agrees; and the Vatican might have lied in reveal-

ing the Virgin Mary's secret message at Fatima, and it actually foretold the Apocalypse.

The Bible fixes the year, Lorie claims. Apocalyptic authors often say Israel's founding in 1948 is the key. But Lorie says that didn't count because the 1967 Six-Day War assured national survival and 42 months of travail (in Revelation 11:2-3) most likely signifies 42 years after 1967, yielding 2009.

Or maybe it's "42 weeks of years," taking it to 2261, but that wouldn't sell many books.

As the cover of "World's End" proudly proclaims, no Bible

scholar buys this. Nor will evangelicals in the "Dispensationalist" camp whose End-Times theology undergirds those "Left Behind" novels and Crouch's book, "The Shadow of the Apocalypse: When All Hell Breaks Loose." "Shadow" recycles routine Dispensationalist theology except for Crouch's Bible code fascination, alongside Hal Lindsey, whose 1970 best seller "The Late Great Planet Earth" launched pop Dispensationalism. ("Late Great" said the Bible predicted Russia, Africans and Arabs would soon attack Israel and launch the End.)

Confused? For a mainstream view, see "In God's Time: The Bible and the Future" (Eerdmans) by Craig Hill of Wesley Theological Seminary.

Bible coders, originally Orthodox Jews and atheists, claim that predictions of modern-day horrors like Sept. 11 were hidden in ancient times and can be discovered by computers using "equidistant letter sequences." The Bible's Hebrew letters are manipulated into lines of various lengths. Coders then count, say, every 10th or every 4,772nd letter, scouting for adjacent words of significance.

Conservative Christians believe God inspired the ideas, or the very words, when the ancients wrote Scripture, but Crouch thinks God "dictated each individual letter."

The code theory collapses unless the exact sequence of letters from thousands of years ago was preserved intact.

Apparently, Crouch and Lindsey never pondered that we have no original manuscripts, and that surviving texts include many tiny variations. Spelling became standardized and not perfectly only after printing developed in the 15th century.

Church says upkeep costly for bluesman's gravesite

By Sheila Hardwell
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENWOOD, Miss. (AP) The pastor of Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church says it is both a blessing and a curse that one of the world's most popular blues musicians is buried in his church's cemetery.

Pastor MacArthur McKinley said hundreds of people cross in front of the white, wood-frame church to enter the cemetery each year. Most make the trip to see the headstone of bluesman Robert Johnson.

With the traffic comes trash and upkeep costs for the 141-year-old Little Zion.

Fans leave everything from pennies to drugs at the grave, said Sylvester Hoover, a dea-

con at Little Zion. Last week, beer cans and liquor bottles were strewn across the area.

McKinley said the church, which has about 90 members, pays \$1,000 each month in cleaning costs for the graveyard.

"We're kind of low in funds," said McKinley, whose church meets once a month. "We plan on going out there sometime in March and April and have a big spring cleaning."

Johnson died in 1938. It is widely believed that he was poisoned by the husband of a woman with whom he was having an affair.

Johnson was interred in the church's cemetery because at the time that was the only place a black person could be buried in Greenwood, Hoover

said.

The grave was unmarked for decades until March 2000, when Rose Eskridge, whose husband helped dig Johnson's grave, verified that Johnson was buried there.

Steve LaVere, who produced the complete recordings of Robert Johnson and released the compilation in 1990, paid for a tombstone in 2001.

Hoover placed a mailbox in the cemetery, asking visitors to leave an offering. Hoover said the church subsequently received a letter from LaVere's attorney ordering them to remove the mailbox.

"That's tacky. I made them take it down," said LaVere, a California native who now operates the Greenwood Blues Heritage Museum and Gallery in downtown Green-

wood.

LaVere sold the rights to Robert Johnson's recordings to Music and Media International Inc. in 2002.

LaVere said he's not obligated to contribute to the church's expense fund because he's not a member. He said a few years ago, he donated \$250 to the church after it was vandalized in June 1999.


LaVere said he's willing to help Little Zion raise money if members provide him with the church's history.

"I'll write and article and get donations for the church," LaVere said.

Johnson died penniless. Today, his music generates millions of dollars and has inspired such artists as Eric Clapton and The Rolling Stones.

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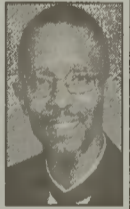
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