At first glance, "science" and "apocalypse" do not seem to fit together. The term "apocalypse" comes from ancient Judaism and usually invokes religious prophecies of dire events and perhaps even the end of our world caused by divine wrath. Science, considered as calm and rational, has little to do with God or prophetic invocations of heavenly anger. But in recent decades, "science" became involved in apocalyptic predictions and even has begun to make them itself.

While end-times predictions have been around a long time, indeed, they are older than Christianity, modern apocalypticism got its start in the 1830s with John Darby. He was an Anglo-Irish preacher who developed a new twist on the dispensationalist theologies of his time.

Darby devised the interpretation that prior to the onslaught of the millennium, the true believers would be raptured. That is, they would be taken up to heaven to escape all the horrible events and persecutions of human society's last convulsions. His system, known as "pre-millennial dispensationalism," has been the dominant end-times theology among evangelicals since that time. And why not? The bad guys get punished and the good guys rise to heaven to avoid the punishment.

Apocalyptic predictions began to draw heavily on science following World War II, usually in the form of technology. In the 1950s, these ideas even made it onto the popular music scene, with songs like "Jesus hits like an Atom Bomb" and "[Are you ready for] The Great Atomic Power."

By 1970, Hal Lindsey put together the various ideas of technological pre-millennialism in his "The Late Great Planet Earth," which sold more than 10 million copies. In it, Lindsey argues that the biblical "fiery destruction" refers to the explosions of nuclear weapons and its "plagues of locusts" actually foreshadows swarms of military helicopters delivering hoards of soldiers and weapons.

Technology quickly became the driving force of non-religious predictions of major cataclysms that would end life as we know it. In addition to a nuclear holocaust brought about by unbridled nuclear war, there was also the pseudo-scientific warnings about global cooling in the 1970s caused by too much burning of fossil fuels. The more agitated of these included warnings of a coming ice-age.

And don't forget the Y2K forecasts. Based on the worry that old computer software was programmed with too few digits, there were predictions of planes falling from the sky, computer-controlled electricity grids shutting down, and billing software requesting large (incorrect) payments. In America, this almost became a bigger news story than the millennium itself.

During this same period, the second half of the 20th century, it became increasingly fashionable among scientists and others to call attention their work and conclusions by predicting a catastrophic apocalypse if "something is not done" to fix it. Biologist Paul Ehrlich, in his 1968 book, "The Population Bomb," predicted world-wide famines if population growth was not significantly slowed. He encouraged mass sterilization as a solution.

Interestingly, those who promote a religious apocalypse have either ignored these non-religious scenarios or incorporated them as additional evidence of the immanence of their own theology. But there is one scientific prediction of coming doom that has dispensationalists rising up in arms. This is the scientific prediction of global climate change caused by the build-up of human-made, greenhouse gases. Most believers in religious apocalypse have scoffed loudly at the data indicating climate change over the last few years. When the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that the evidence left no room for doubt that climate was occurring, these evangelicals simply shifted their argument from "no climate change" to "no human-made climate change."

Why have dispensationalists so fervently denied climate change doomsday scenarios rather than incorporating them as evidence of their own theology? I'm not sure. Is it possible believers sense competition in them, competition because the scientific data actually supports the climate change conclusions? To them, this might suggest it is science rather than religion that points to a believable coming catastrophe. Or perhaps all end-times scenarios are over-hyped ways of attracting attention to issues that would otherwise go unnoticed.