



★ American Gospel

Lin Enger

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A farmer turned religious leader prepares for the rapture in Lin Enger's novel *American Gospel*.

Amid the uncertainty and turmoil of President Nixon's resignation, Enoch knows one thing for certain: Jesus will return in fourteen days. As pilgrims and reporters descend on Enoch's Minnesota commune, he and those close to him prepare for Jesus's return in their own ways. Some anticipate a heavenly reward, others make peace with the past, and still others just hope they'll be able to salvage something when Enoch's prophecy fails to materialize.

The story follows three characters: Enoch, a self-styled prophet who isn't above a little scheming and hypocrisy to arrange things the way he wants them; his son Peter, a frustrated writer who rejects Enoch's idea of religious faith; and Melanie, an Oscar-winning actress with deep connections to both Peter and Enoch. Every character, devout or not, wrestles with the weight of their flaws, weaknesses, and mistakes in the face of the predicted rapture. Old hurts color their every interaction. Even the book's minor characters are crisp and unforgettable.

As the day approaches, the lives of Enoch and his loved ones spiral ever further out of control. Peter and Melanie both examine their motives and figure out what they want. But life is more complicated than anyone—from pious Enoch to cynical Peter—wants to acknowledge, and forgiveness, no matter how divine, is not easy to find. An unexpected development brings the anticipation to a devastating, crashing halt. The characters are left to catch their breath in the aftermath, and to confront a future they never dreamed possible in this stunning exploration of faith and faithlessness in all its forms.

American Gospel is a glorious novel about what people choose to believe—and, more importantly, why they choose to believe it.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2020)

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