



RUSSIA RISING

TRACKING THE BEAR IN BIBLE PROPHECY

MARK HITCHCOCK

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE END





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Russia Rising: Tracking the Bear in Bible Prophecy

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CHAPTER 1

THERE IS A BEAR IN THE WOODS

A BEAR WILL NOT ASK ANYONE FOR PERMISSION.

VLADIMIR PUTIN

During the 1984 presidential campaign, candidate Ronald Reagan used a television commercial that's become known for its compelling opening line—"There is a bear in the woods."

The ad featured a grizzly bear wandering menacingly through a forest while the narrator said, "There is a bear in the woods. For some people, the bear is easy to see. Others don't see it at all. Some people say the bear is tame. Others say it's vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear? If there is a bear."

A man appears in the closing scene, and the bear takes

a step back. The captivating ad concludes with a picture of Reagan and the tagline “President Reagan: Prepared for Peace.” Reagan took the Bear seriously, and in December 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, no longer dominating Eastern Europe.

Fast-forward almost thirty years, and no one doubts there’s a bear in the woods. Russia is back. The Russian bear has roared out of hibernation and into the headlines. The Bear is back—but what does that mean for our world?

The movie *The Revenant* depicts one of the most savage, vicious scenes in cinematic annals. Not far into the movie, frontiersman and fur trapper Hugh Glass (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) unwittingly gets between a mother grizzly bear and her cubs. Without warning, he’s slammed to the ground by the charging grizzly. It happens so quickly he doesn’t have time even to turn and raise his rifle. The ferocious mauling is so brutal and unrelenting, it’s difficult to watch. Glass’s broken, lacerated body is left near death. The lesson is clear: get between a mother grizzly and her cubs, and the result won’t be pretty.

BACK TO THE USSR

Since 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin and others of his ilk have felt like a mother bear robbed of her cubs, willing to maul anyone who stands in the way of restoring Soviet greatness. Putin, a former KGB lieutenant colonel, became Russian prime minister in August 1999

and president in May 2000. He was reelected in 2004, then bowed out for his pupil Dmitry Medvedev to assume the presidency. But Putin ran successfully again in 2012. There's no sign now that he will ever step down again. *Forbes* ranked Putin as the world's most powerful person for the fourth year in a row in 2016.¹

During his 2005 State of the Nation address to parliament, Putin lamented that the demise of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the century.² Ukrainian foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin wrote in the *Guardian*, “Reversing the breakup of the Soviet Union and restoring the Russian empire have now become an obsession for the Kremlin.”³

The obsession has gone so far that the Kremlin is commissioning new statues of Joseph Stalin, one of the twentieth century's worst mass murderers.⁴ This is certainly a chilling window into the current Russian psyche.

Putin seizes every opportunity to stoke smoldering resentment within Russia and to draw attention to the perceived threats against his nation in order to take more and more aggressive actions to reestablish the empire. With every passing day, the Bear gets more bellicose. Putin has launched a crusade to rebuild the empire that fell along with the Berlin Wall.

President Obama promised a Russian reset in 2009 when he took office, but the opposite has occurred. US-Russian relations have relapsed into a Cold War 2.0, and some say the current situation is even worse than the Cold War. Slowly and subtly Europe and the West have sleepwalked into a new era

of danger and instability. In just a little more than a decade, “the unthinkable has become a reality. Russia, seemingly finished after its defeat in the Cold War, now is emerging as a prospective great power challenging the West.”⁵

Russia is on the march. General Sir Richard Shirreff, the former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, said of Vladimir Putin, “[he] is calling the shots at the moment.”⁶

That the Russian bear is on the prowl is clearly evidenced by the steady stream of world headlines:

“Russia’s Rising Empire”

NATIONAL REVIEW, AUGUST 9, 2016

“The Russian Bear Is Rising”

HUFFINGTON POST, SEPTEMBER 2, 2016

“Beware: The Russian Bear Is Getting Bolder”

WASHINGTON POST, DECEMBER 1, 2016

“Russia’s Rising Role in the World”

FOREIGN POLICY NEWS, DECEMBER 30, 2016

Russian aggression has moved into a new phase that threatens international order and stability. General James Mattis, the US defense secretary, has called Russia the world’s top threat, and Senator John McCain agrees, calling Vladimir Putin “the premier and most important threat, more so than ISIS.”⁷ In all the Bear’s bluster, we sometimes

forget that Russia possesses the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, with more than seven thousand nuclear warheads.⁸

Putin's grand goals are to destroy the West by breaking up the European Union, dividing NATO, frustrating and unnerving the United States, and expanding Russia's global influence. On all fronts Russia seems to be succeeding.

The Bear is on the move, leaving its footprints across the globe. First, it was Georgia in 2008. Next, the Bear invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014 and supported separatists in eastern Ukraine. In 2015, Russia, working in tandem with Iran, sent armed forces and especially air power into Syria to prop up Bashar al-Assad's crumbling regime. We're facing a new "Red Dawn." Russia is pulling the strings in the Middle East. Putin is trying to break NATO. He yearns to bring Eastern Europe and the Baltic States back into the Russian orbit.

Despite that Russia is the world's largest nation,⁹ the Bear is hungry for more. Putin is busily canvassing the globe in search of weak prey and willing allies. And he's finding no shortage on either front. The Kremlin, with assistance from Iran, is arming the Taliban in Afghanistan. There are reports of Russian activity in Nicaragua. Putin's territory grab extends even to the Arctic Circle, which holds more than one-quarter of the world's undiscovered oil and gas. He visited the area in 2017, and plans are under way to construct a massive military base there. The top of the world is a top Russian priority.

FANCY BEAR AND COZY BEAR

While many Americans may not be fully aware of all that Russia is doing around the world, Russia has dominated US headlines in 2017 because of its meddling in the 2016 US presidential election. By now everyone is well aware Russia has perfected cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage. Global technological dependence has been weaponized.

The computer-hacking scheme and interference in the US elections has been directly tied to Russian spy agencies and was part of a larger strategy that included hacking computers of the Democratic National Committee. Nearly twenty thousand e-mails hacked by the Russians were dumped by WikiLeaks on July 22, 2016—just three days before the Democratic National Convention—and embarrassed many Democratic Party leaders.

The cyber-security firm CrowdStrike gave these Russian cyber-criminals names—“Fancy Bear” and “Cozy Bear”:

Traditionally, Cozy Bear targets potential victims with phishing attacks—email messages that appear to be from a legitimate, trusted friend or associate. Those messages may contain malicious software that scans a machine for antivirus software, then plants malware on the target machine that make it possible for attackers to monitor keystrokes, communications, documents and other sensitive material on target computers. Fancy Bear is known

for stealing targets' usernames and passwords by setting up dummy websites that appear real enough to convince users to input their email and password information.¹⁰

Russian attempts to influence American politics are nothing new. In the 1960s "Soviet intelligence officers spread a rumor that the U.S. government was involved in the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr." In the 1980s "they spread the rumor that American intelligence had 'created' the AIDS virus, at Fort Detrick, Maryland. They regularly lent support to leftist parties and insurgencies."¹¹ Russian intelligence services have been sifting through computer networks in the United States for more than a decade.

One of Russia's strategies is known as *dezinformatsiya*, "false information intended to discredit the official version of events, or the very notion of reliable truth."¹² We know this strategy better today as "fake news." Due to the increasing polarization in the American political landscape and the fractured media environment, Russia views the United States as a ripe target for this tactic.

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before the Senate regarding "an unprecedented Russian effort to interfere in the U.S. electoral process. The operation involved hacking Democrats' e-mails, publicizing the stolen contents through WikiLeaks, and manipulating social media to spread 'fake news.'"¹³ The e-mail hacks are part of a much larger strategy to damage American confidence

and undermine Western power and alliances. Again, Russia's meddling in other nations' elections is nothing new. Just ask the Europeans. Russia's "Red Web," as its espionage efforts have been called, has worked to exert influence on German and French elections as well.

The best term to describe Russia's strategy, according to historian Angus E. Goldberg, "is the Russian word 'bespredel,' which means 'absence of limits,' or 'anything goes.'"¹⁴ What we see today is "bespredel" on steroids—a dangerous new game of Russian roulette.

Russian meddling in US elections combined with Russia's growing international aggression has pushed US-Russian relations to a troubling low point. Sergey Rogov, academic director of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies in Moscow, says that hostility between the United States and Russia is deeper than it has been in years. He adds, "I spent many years in the trenches of the first Cold War, and I don't want to die in the trenches of the second. We are back to 1983. . . . It's frightening."¹⁵ The world has descended into a Putin-led Cold War 2.0. Consider these current headlines:

"Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War"

NEW YORKER, MARCH 6, 2017

"Cold War 2.0?"

MSNBC, SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

MARK HITCHCOCK

“Vladimir Putin’s Outlaw State”

NEW YORK TIMES, SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

“Russian Hacking and the 2016 Election”

CNN, DECEMBER 16, 2016

In addition to its cyber-espionage, Russia is constantly testing US patience and resolve with pinprick provocations. Russian bombers are flying off the coast of Alaska. Russian spy ships are loitering off the east coast of the United States. Russia’s acts appear to be carefully calculated and measured. Putin doesn’t want to cross the line and spark open confrontation with the United States, but he knows that micro-aggressions will be tolerated—to a point. Russia may also be testing the waters to see how far its intimidations can go without incurring a response from the US, or these may just be Putin’s attempts to constantly remind the world that Russia is relevant again. Whatever the Russian motivation for these actions may be, one thing is clear: the Bear is working on all fronts to let the US and the world know that there is a bear in the woods.

DESERT BEAR

As the Kremlin is combing the world for soft spots to exert its influence, the Middle East and North Africa are key targets. Putin is taking advantage of the unrest, instability, and chaos in these places to promote his expansionist agenda. The

disarray in the Middle East and North Africa has proved to be fertile soil for Putin's unbridled ambition to bring back the Russian empire. Russia is working to bring Libya, Sudan, Turkey, and Iran under its umbrella. But the linchpin in Russia's push into the Middle East is Syria, where the Kremlin has thrown in with the devil, supporting the diabolical tyrant Bashar al-Assad. Russian troops and aircraft poured into Syria in 2015. Russian air power combined with Iranian ground support is propping up the Assad regime. Russia is entrenched in Syria, even establishing a naval port in Tartus, giving Russia the warm-water port it has coveted.

The United States is already engaged in a proxy war with Russia in Syria that's been going on for several years with both powers supporting different sides in the Syrian civil war. After the US Tomahawk missile strike of a Syrian air base on April 6, 2017, Russia and Iran warned the US of crossing "red lines" and raised the prospect of war. Without a doubt, Syria is a dangerous flash point. With Russian and Iranian troops stationed there and the United States launching missile strikes, the potential for a serious misstep is ever present. Any wrong move there could push the world to the brink of disaster. The Russian-Iranian alliance in Syria has put troops from these two nations ominously on Israel's northern border. Russia's new allies would love nothing more than to drive the Jewish state into the sea.

All of this forces us to reckon with some serious questions. Is what we're witnessing just geopolitical coincidence, or could there be a hidden hand behind it all? Is it possible that the rise

of Russia and the alliances that the Bear is forming are part of something bigger? Could it be the buildup for the fulfillment of ancient prophecies from Scripture? Is this another prophetic signpost that the world is racing toward the end of days?

CODE RED

On January 26, 2017, the Science and Security Board for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the minute hand on the Doomsday Clock ahead thirty seconds, bringing it to two minutes and thirty seconds to midnight. This is “the closest the clock has been to midnight since 1953.”¹⁶ Among the reasons for the move were the rise of nationalism and the possibility of a renewed arms race between the United States and Russia.

People everywhere seem to sense that world events are moving toward an apocalyptic showdown. According to a recent poll, “41% of all U.S. adults, 54% of Protestants and 77% of Evangelicals believe the world is now living in the biblical end times.”¹⁷

A Pew Research poll found that

- 72 percent of Americans expect the world to face a major world energy crisis,
- 58 percent think it “definite or probable” that there will be another world war, and
- 41 percent believe Jesus Christ will return by the year 2050.¹⁸

Additionally, a 2004 *Time/CNN* poll found that 59 percent of Americans believe the prophecies of the book of Revelation will come to pass.¹⁹ Similar polls have revealed the following:

- 55 percent of Americans believe “that before the world ends the religiously faithful will be saved.”
- 46 percent of Americans agree with this statement: “The world will end in the Battle of Armageddon between Jesus and the Antichrist.”²⁰

Similarly, “research conducted by the Brookings Institute’s Center for Middle East Policy on Americans’ attitudes toward the Middle East and Israel found that 79 percent of Evangelicals say they believe ‘that the unfolding violence across the Middle East is a sign that the end times are nearer.’”²¹

Concerning the terrible civil war in Syria, “almost one in three Americans see Syria’s recent conflict as part of the Bible’s plan for the end times. One in four thinks that a U.S. military strike in Syria could lead to Armageddon. One in five believes the world will end in their lifetime.”²²

These statistics reveal that people everywhere have serious questions—searching questions—about how recent events, including the rise of Russia, relate to the ancient prophecies of the Bible.

And the Bible is certainly the best place to look for answers. The Bible is a book of prophecy. Almost 30 percent

of the Bible was prophecy at the time it was written. Scripture contains about one thousand prophecies, and about five hundred of them have been literally fulfilled with 100 percent accuracy. That's quite a track record, setting the Bible far apart from any other holy book. Unlike the predictions of astrologers, mystics, and mediums, the prophecies of the Bible aren't vague and general predictions that can be altered to accommodate any situation. The prophecies recorded in the Bible are detailed and intricately interwoven. The specificity of the Bible's prophecies and its stellar track record continue to draw people to its pages for insight into the future. Even the most skeptical person can put the prophecies of Scripture to the test. In light of current events, prophecies formerly brushed aside as incredible or speculative are now being carefully examined again.

We must never forget that while the prophecies of the Bible never change, world events are constantly in flux. The Bible, not cable news, is our prophetic plumb line, the standard by which we measure everything else. Nevertheless, today's headlines are increasingly aligning with ancient biblical prophecies that describe an end-times scenario not unlike what we see today.

FUTURE SHOCK

The Jewish prophet Ezekiel, writing more than 2,500 years ago, foretold a Russian-led invasion of Israel in the end times. Russia's allies in this predicted offensive are a group of Islamic

nations that are forming closer ties with the Bear as you're reading these words. Russia is rising right on schedule and is expanding its influence in the Middle East just as the Bible predicts. That's precisely what we should expect if the coming of Christ is drawing near.

When we track the Bear in biblical prophecy, we discover its footprints lead to the Middle East—and ultimately to the land of Israel. Israel is ground zero for the events of the end times.

But why Israel? As David Jeremiah comments, "Israel is one of the smallest nations on earth. It is one-nineteenth the size of California and roughly the size of New Jersey. Russia is 785 times larger than Israel. Israel measures approximately 290 miles at its longest, 85 miles at its widest, and 9 miles at its narrowest."²³ Charles Dyer and Mark Tobey offer some explanation:

From a human perspective Israel ought to occupy nothing more than a minor supporting part in any worldwide drama. In terms of geographical size, Israel ranks 148th among the nations of the world, nestled between Belize and El Salvador. Her standing improves slightly when ranked by population. At just over eight million, Israel breaks the top 100, coming in 98th between Switzerland and Honduras. And when comparing gross domestic product (GDP), Israel is ranked between 34th and 37th, depending on which organization is doing the measuring. Still, that puts Israel in with countries such as Malaysia,

Singapore, and Hong Kong with barely one-quarter the GDP of a country like Mexico.

God, however, uses a different standard of measurement. And in His eyes Israel ranks at the top of the list in terms of national significance.²⁴

God made unconditional promises to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that have not been fulfilled—promises involving the land of Israel. But before these promises are fulfilled, Scripture tells us that the people of Israel must go through a time of trouble and tribulation that will turn them to the Lord. Consistent with these ancient prophecies, the modern state of Israel exists, is under constant pressure by the international community, and is surrounded by a sea of enemies who will play a role in the tribulation Israel will endure. The tiny nation of Israel is at the center of world attention, just as we should expect if the end of the age is drawing near. At the same time, Russia is the new power broker in the Middle East. The convergence of these events and many more that we see in the headlines every day strikingly foreshadows the ancient prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39. What we see today in light of this passage in Ezekiel raises many questions:

- Is the rise of Russia in the end times *really* predicted in the Bible, or is this just “headline theology”?
- Who are Russia’s end-times allies?
- Does the Bible say anything about Russia’s ties with Iran?

RUSSIA RISING

- What events will precipitate the Russian invasion of Israel?
- Will Israel survive?
- How soon could the Bear make its final push to the south?
- Does the United States play any role in these events?
- What does it all mean?

We'll answer these questions, and many more, as we track the Bear through the pages of Bible prophecy. Our spiritual GPS for tracking the Bear is primarily found in the ancient prophecies of Ezekiel 38–39. You will find these chapters at the end of this book in appendix 1 (page 163). I recommend that you read these chapters from God's inspired Word now to prepare you for the rest of this book.

I, and many others, believe Russia's rising in current events reveals a trajectory that points toward the ultimate fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy . . . maybe very soon!