

WHAT DOES THE  
BIBLE SAY ABOUT OUR  
TROUBLING TIMES—  
AND THOSE TO COME?

# THE PROPHECY COLLECTION

THREE WORKS IN ONE:  
*THE END TIMES SURVIVAL GUIDE*  
*THE COMING APOSTASY*  
*RUSSIA RISING*

MARK  
HITCHCOCK

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AND THOSE TO COME?

# MARK HITCHCOCK



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# CONTENTS

**THE END TIMES SURVIVAL GUIDE**

1

---

**THE COMING APOSTASY**  
**(with Jeff Kinley)**

191

---

**RUSSIA RISING**

367

---

---

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

553



# **THE END TIMES SURVIVAL GUIDE**

**MARK HITCHCOCK**



INTRODUCTION

# ULTIMATE SURVIVOR

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*The future, like everything else, is not what it used to be.*

PAUL VALÉRY

Survival is big business. Everywhere you look these days, someone is talking about survival. Entertainment outlets and the media have seized the survival craze.

The initial offering in the new survival genre, and reality TV, was the series *Survivor*, which premiered in the United States in 2000. The series features a group of strangers marooned at an isolated location where they have to scrounge for food, water, shelter, and fire. The show completed its thirty-fifth season in 2017. *Survivor* is the quintessential survivor in the media industry. Since *Survivor*, a steady stream of movies and series has focused on surviving in almost every possible predicament, including in a postapocalyptic world.

A spate of survival reality TV shows has also erupted. Consider these:

- > *Out of the Wild: The Alaska Experiment*
- > *Extreme Survival*
- > *Man vs. Wild*
- > *Survive This*
- > *Fat Guys in the Woods*
- > *Survivorman*
- > *Surviving Disaster*
- > *Dual Survival*
- > *The Wheel*

*Doomsday Preppers* is another offering that demonstrates how to survive various doomsday scenarios. The survival business is booming online with all kinds of products designed to enhance a person's ability to endure any conceivable disruption, from living off the grid to all-out apocalypse. You can learn survival tips and buy survival gear for any eventuality. Online you can find all kinds of survival gurus touting their tips for surviving everything from school shootings to nuclear holocaust.

What's behind the survival obsession? Why are these programs, products, and pointers so successful? Because the future has never been more uncertain. Never more unknown. Never more unpredictable. We live in a world that seems to be on the verge of coming apart.

In 2017, a Las Vegas shooting spree at an outdoor concert left dozens massacred, a terrorist plowed through innocent pedestrians in New York City, and a gunman opened fire on a church service in a small Texas town, all in a little over a month. Evil is intensifying.

Political rancor and polarization in American politics has shifted to another gear. Both sides are so entrenched that for someone to give any ground or to compromise in the least is viewed as total capitulation, making that person an outcast from all groups. Even

commonsense solutions seem unachievable. The anger and outright malice on cable news and social media is over the top. Increasingly, protests fill the streets. Violence and racial tension are boiling over. Anarchy threatens. The family is in dire trouble. Deadly diseases and viruses like Ebola and Zika erupt with frightening regularity and can spread globally very quickly. Cataclysmic weather events seem to be escalating in frequency and intensity.

Beyond these things, the once faraway threat of a terrorist attack has jumped into everyone's life—the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, a subway in London, a train in Spain, a convention in California, a tourist hot spot in France, a nightclub in Orlando, a Christmas market in Berlin. No one seems safe anywhere. Millions of displaced, devastated people are fleeing their homelands, potentially giving terrorists cover to blend into and infiltrate Western nations.

Rogue regimes such as North Korea already have the bomb, and other nations like Iran are on the threshold. Barbaric terrorists threaten our safety and very way of life. Even as the caliphate is crumbling and ISIS is on the run, fleeing ISIS fighters are exporting their savagery to more locations. ISIS-inspired killers are hiding among us. There seems to be a collective, growing sense that things can't go on this way much longer.

And then there's the world economy, which, while doing well on many fronts, seems increasingly fragile, susceptible at any time to a geopolitical crisis. The United States is twenty trillion dollars in debt, and that number is climbing. The debt bomb must explode at some point, triggering financial Armageddon.

In addition to all these things, there's an increasing indifference and malaise—and sometimes outright militancy—toward the central truths of the Christian faith and practice. Anti-Christian momentum is palpable. Hate and hostility toward Bible-believing Christians is

on the rise. Christians are taking fire. Believers who dare even to question the legitimacy of same-sex marriage and gender fluidity are labeled “haters” and “homophobes.” Believers in Jesus Christ now find themselves playing in enemy territory in American culture, and the crowd is getting more and more hostile.

Pornography is metastasizing like a deadly cancer and infecting an entire generation of young men and women. The young are swallowing a deadly cocktail of toxic ideas in the name of love and tolerance. We have front-row seats to a moral freefall. We’re waiting for the other shoe to drop. Time seems to be running out.

What can we do?

## **ARE WE LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS?**

Many of us have probably asked ourselves at some point whether we’re living in the last days. Maybe we’ve asked it more often in recent times. When we ask about living in the last days, what we’re really asking is “Are we living in the final days before the apocalypse? Is this the end of the age predicted in the Bible?”

In the New Testament, the term “last days” (or “last times”) refers most often to the last days of the church on earth or this current age (see 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:3).

All the way back in the first century, the apostle Peter said, “The end of the world is coming soon” (1 Peter 4:7). Even in New Testament times the apostles “sensed that they had moved dramatically closer to the consummation of God’s plan for this world.”<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament age had ended; they were now living in a brand-new era. For the apostles, the end of the age was already a present reality. The Scriptures indicate that the first coming of Jesus Christ inaugurated the “last days” for the church. According to the New Testament, we are living right now in these last days: “Now in these final [last]

days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe” (Hebrews 1:2).

The apostle John even calls this present age “the last hour”: “Dear children, the last hour is here. You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. From this we know that the last hour has come” (1 John 2:18). According to the New Testament, the last days commenced with Christ’s first advent and will close with the return of the Lord to catch his bride—the church—away to heaven. Therefore, the entire current age, commonly known as the church age, is known as the last days.

Labeling this age as the “last days” is a vivid reminder that Christ could come at any time. Every generation since the death and resurrection of Christ has lived with the hope that it might be the final generation and that Christ could return at any moment. There are no prophecies that must be fulfilled before Christ can come. We are living in the last days and may be living in the last days of the last days before Christ’s coming. As the end approaches, the enemy is ramping up the attacks in a final onslaught.

## **THE ULTIMATE SURVIVOR**

Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, and others warn of an unprecedented increase in demonic deception, moral corruption, doctrinal error, and spiritual lethargy in the last days. Believers today face unparalleled spiritual danger. These are treacherous times. As Erwin Lutzer notes, “The day of the casual Christian is over. No longer is it possible to drift along, hoping that no tough choices will have to be made. At this point in American history, any moral and spiritual progress will have to be won at great cost. The darker the night, the more important every candle becomes.”<sup>2</sup> We need to stand firm and shine brightly in the darkness.

In August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, triggering the Gulf War. When she heard of the invasion, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was in the United States. She described her initial thoughts in an interview with PBS's *Frontline*: "I went out for a walk, always lovely in the mountains, and got things worked out in my mind, but it was perfectly clear, aggression must be stopped. That is the lesson of this century. And if an aggressor gets away with it, others will want to get away with it too, so he must be stopped, and turned back. You cannot gain from your aggression."<sup>3</sup>

Toward the end of her tenure as prime minister, Thatcher helped spur President George H. W. Bush to intervene militarily in the Persian Gulf after the Iraqi invasion. Urging President Bush to join the fight against Saddam, Thatcher famously declared that "this is no time to go wobbly."<sup>4</sup> The same is true for us—this is no time to go wobbly.

But how can we stand strong in perilous times? How can we shine brightly in the darkness? How can we keep from "going wobbly" as the end of the age draws near?

## **GIVE ME THE TOOLS**

Winston Churchill was prime minister of Great Britain during the trying days of World War II. Despite his massive influence, he often downplayed his own part in winning the war. He gave credit to the people, saying after the war had ended that they "had the lion's heart," and he merely "had the luck to be called upon to give the roar." In February 1941, Churchill delivered one of his most lauded wartime speeches. He claimed that in wartime, what mattered was "deeds, not words." After walking listeners through what had already transpired in the war, he urged US President Franklin Roosevelt to get involved in the fight rather than sitting on the sidelines. He said, "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of

battle, nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools, and we will finish the job.”<sup>5</sup>

There’s no doubt the church of Jesus Christ is locked in a deadly spiritual war. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option. The war is multiplying on numerous fronts. The good news is that God has given us the tools, or maybe it would be better to call them the truths, that we need to finish the job as we await Christ’s coming. God has given us sufficient resources to effectively encounter and engage the world we’re facing.

Many have wondered in recent years why the apocalypse craze in movies and video games appeals to people so strongly. One answer is “because they show people returning to the fundamentals of existence.”<sup>6</sup> In the same way, I believe what’s happening in our world today is moving believers to return to the foundations of our spiritual existence. Believers everywhere must get back to what matters most. We must always remember that our battle “at the most basic level is spiritual, not political or even moral.”<sup>7</sup>

Some Christians today are carefully preparing *physically* for the apocalypse—hoarding cash, gold, weapons, and food. To one degree or another they’re the ultimate “doomsday preppers.”<sup>8</sup> There’s nothing wrong with reasonable preparation for disruptions in basic services that could occur in our complex world; however, the most important “prepping” for every believer should be *spiritual*. Whatever view we may hold concerning the apocalypse or the end times, our focus should be on spiritual survival. That’s the consistent focus of Scripture.

So, what are the spiritual tools, the spiritual truths, Scripture tells us we must understand and use as the end draws near? How can we be spiritually prepared for today and for what lies ahead?

In the pages that follow, you will discover ten spiritual tools the Bible relates directly to our spiritual preparation for the Lord’s

coming—ten biblical survival strategies to live out these last days so you and your family can prosper in an increasingly decaying, darkening world.

These strategies won't guarantee your physical or financial well-being, but they are guaranteed to bring life and vitality to your spiritual health and welfare as you cling to the immovable rock of God's Word. The truth is that even if you survive physically and prosper financially, your deepest need—and mine—is spiritual survival and stability. When life is whittled down to its essence, the real issue is our spiritual condition before God.

My prayer is that God can use these basic, biblical tools and strategies to help you survive and thrive as you await Christ's coming.

*Mark Hitchcock*

JANUARY 2018

## CHAPTER I

# USE THE 46 DEFENSE

---

*Most news . . . could carry a universal headline to get our attention:*

*YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED.*

GARY STOKES

One of the greatest defenses in NFL history was that of the 1985 Chicago Bears. They employed a defensive scheme known as the “46 defense,” developed in 1981 by defensive coordinator Buddy Ryan. Armed with this scheme and some great talent, they throttled and terrorized offenses across the league, reaching their zenith in 1985. The pressure they applied, led by middle linebacker Mike Singletary, was reckless and relentless. The ’85 Bears struck fear into the hearts of opposing quarterbacks, blazing a trail of devastation through the NFL. Their domination was so overwhelming that “during one three-game stretch, the Bears scored more points on defense than they allowed, and they’re the only team in history to post back-to-back shutouts in the playoffs.”<sup>1</sup>

The 46 defense is legendary. None has ever been better.

As our world becomes more volatile and uncertain, wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of spiritual defense against the mounting cares, stresses, and worries of life? Wouldn't it be comforting to have an impenetrable wall that holds back the fear and fretting that floods our minds with anxious thoughts?

The truth is that God *has* given his people a “46 defense” against the cares, worries, and anxieties we face. It's a 46 defense that's better known even than that of the '85 Bears. It's Philippians 4:6. (We'll look at another famous 46 defense—Psalm 46—in chapter 7.)

The “Philippians 4:6” defense is renowned. It shuts down opposing offenses. They have no chance against it. It's a fail-safe formula against worry and stress:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

In anxious times, with worry on the offensive, more and more people are using it. Amazon tracks information about the most highlighted passages in their e-books. This list of what people highlight or annotate sheds light on what people find interesting, important, or valuable. According to Amazon, the verse in the Bible that is most frequently highlighted is not a traditionally familiar one like Psalm 23, John 3:16, or the Lord's Prayer—it is Philippians 4:6-7.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, it has become “America's go-to passage of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup>

This shouldn't surprise us, because by all accounts, the United States is the most anxious nation in the world. Ironically, one of the world's wealthiest nations is also the most worried.

We live in a world of cascading crises. The world and its troubles and trials seem to be getting worse.

Jesus told us this would happen. In his famous sermon about the end times, just a few days before his death, Jesus outlined the signs of his coming and concluded by warning about the worries of life that can overwhelm us. Jesus said, “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by *the worries of this life*. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth” (Luke 21:34-35, emphasis added).

Jesus said that the “worries of this life” in the final days will get so strong and will dull our hearts to such an extent that we might lose our hope and expectation of his coming if we allow them to go unchecked.

The worries of this life produce anxious days and sleepless nights. They distract us. They threaten our spiritual survival in these last days. Jesus said they’re traps that dull our hearts and leave us unprepared for his coming. We can’t thrive spiritually at the same time our hearts are weighed down with worry. But let’s face it: maybe only a few of us worry none of the time, most of us worry some of the time, and some of us worry all the time.

Worry is a national addiction. You could even call it a plague. “Anxiety has become the number one mental health issue in North America. It’s estimated that one third of the North American adult population experiences anxiety unwellness issues.”<sup>4</sup>

Part of the explanation for the surge of worry is our constant connection to everything that’s going on all over the world. Through 24-7 cable news, the Internet, and smartphones, we instantly know about nuclear threats, child kidnappings, famines, disasters, riots, economic problems, and on and on and on. The daily load of bad news can overwhelm us. Before means of mass communication, people lived

mostly secluded lives. News traveled slowly, and sometimes not at all. How things have changed. Immediate access to world news threatens to crush us with stress and worry.

When Jesus spoke of the end times and the worries of this life, he knew that these worries would grow to the point that people are paralyzed and trapped. We all sense that anxiety is increasing and intensifying as the end draws near. We're anxious about all kinds of things:

- > World problems and politics
- > Our health
- > Our finances and the economy
- > Our children or grandchildren
- > Our marriages
- > Our choices
- > Retirement
- > Death
- > What has happened
- > What could happen

Sometimes we even get worried that we don't have anything to worry about.

We hear more and more about anxiety attacks, panic attacks, and people just generally being stressed out. Anti-anxiety drugs regularly appear on the top ten list of prescription medications in the United States. Many people have turned worry into a lifestyle, a full-time job. Life is consumed with worry and fear.

This reminds me of a story I heard about a woman who for many years had trouble sleeping because she worried about burglars. One night her husband heard a noise in the house, so he went downstairs to investigate. When he got there, he found a burglar and said, "I'm

pleased to see you. Will you please come upstairs? My wife has been waiting ten years to meet you.”

It's far too easy for worry to become a way of life and for us even to find ourselves worrying about the same things for years. But for God's people, life shouldn't be that way. A real burglar can steal from you once, but worry can steal from you night after night for years.

As the stresses of life multiply in these last days, how can we win over worry? How can we bury worry before worry buries us? What's the spiritual survival strategy?

We have to employ the Philippians 4:6 defense.

And this defense is strikingly simple. The antidote to anxiety is thankful prayer. To state it more fully: *we experience God's peace instead of worry when we pray with thankfulness.*

We can't worry and pray at the same time.

The three simple parts of this strategy come from the three key words in this passage.

- > The Problem: Worry
- > The Prescription: Prayer
- > The Promise: Peace

## THE PROBLEM: WORRY

Philippians 4:6 begins with four sweeping words: “Don't worry about anything,” or as some translations say, “Be anxious for nothing.”

It doesn't say,

- > “Be anxious for less”
- > “Be anxious for a few things”
- > “Be anxious for only one hour a day”
- > “Be anxious for only the big things”

It says, “Be anxious for *nothing*.” “Don’t worry about *anything*.” It’s categorical. God’s people are never to worry—period. About anything.

The word *worry* in the original Greek (*merimnao*) literally means “to be divided into parts.” To worry or be anxious is to have a distracted, divided mind—a mind torn down the middle and pulled in different directions. The worried mind is restless, filled with tension, and unsettled, like a flag twisting in the wind. It’s a mind fighting on two fronts. The English word *worry* comes from an old English word that means “to strangle.” This is a fitting image, because we all know how worry strangles and squeezes the peace and enjoyment out of life. Sometimes anxiety can get to the point that the worrier actually feels short of breath.

Worrying is having your mind torn between the real and the possible. Worry feeds on the what-ifs of life. It’s a stream of thoughts focused on fear of what might happen. I once heard someone say that worry pulls tomorrow’s cloud over today’s sunshine. The worrier lives in the past and the future, spending life crucified between two thieves that rob the present of its joy and vitality. Helmut Thielicke aptly describes worry as “*wandering in times not our own*.”

#### ANXIETY ATTACKED

Jesus confronted worry in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Interestingly, one-seventh of Jesus’ famous sermon is about worry. That’s fascinating and instructive. Here is the Master’s wisdom on worry:

That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or

store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

So don't worry about these things, saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

MATTHEW 6:25-34

There's a lot here to unpack, but we'll just look at this passage briefly. Jesus uses the word *worry* five times (verses 25, 27, 28, 31, 34). He tells us three simple things about worry. First, worry is *fruitless*. It doesn't do any good. As Jesus said, "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" We see the worthlessness of worry in that most of the things we worry about never happen. We expend countless hours exhausting our emotions on events that never materialize.

Sometimes people will say or think something like "I know worry works because when I worry about something, it doesn't happen." But that doesn't mean the worry worked. It simply proves that most

things we worry about never happen. Like Vance Havner once said, “Worry is like sitting in a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won’t get you anywhere.” It doesn’t produce a thing. Fretting is a lot of work for nothing.

A recent study discovered that “85 percent of what subjects worried about never happened, and with the 15 percent that did happen, 79 percent of subjects discovered either they could handle the difficulty better than expected, or the difficulty taught them a lesson worth learning. This means that 97 percent of what you worry over is not much more than a fearful mind punishing you with exaggerations and misperceptions.”<sup>5</sup>

Worry doesn’t do any good—and results in a great deal of bad.

Second, worry is *faithless*. Jesus put his finger on the core issue when he said, “Why do you have so little faith?” Worry brings our weak faith to the surface. Many of us believe God can take care of the “Sweet By and By,” but we have trouble trusting him with the “Nasty Now and Now.” We trust him for heaven but not for earth.

Worry is the opposite of trust. It’s a failure to trust God to take care of us. Worry has been described as the stepchild of unbelief. We can dress it up and disguise it however we want to, but worry is nothing but lack of trust in God to meet our needs in his perfect time.

Third, Jesus says worry is *fatherless*. When we worry, we act as if we have no Father who cares for our needs and yearns to meet them. Jesus says, “Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.” Worry diminishes our heavenly Father’s loving care for us. Think of how our worry must make God feel. When he sees us worried and afraid, we aren’t trusting him. He is our Father, but we choose to live like we’re orphans when we worry and fret.

We live under the canopy of God’s fatherly care. In Matthew 6:26-30, there’s an argument from the lesser to the greater. God

loves his children more than his pets. If God cares for birds, he will care for us.

We are his children through faith in Jesus Christ. God is our Father—and he’s a *perfect* father. We can trust him to care for us at all times, even during these dark days.

## WORRY WEARY

With worry comes a host of unwanted results. Robert J. Morgan vividly outlines some of the consequences of an anxious outlook: “When worry barges into our brains, it brings along a gang of accomplices—discouragement, fear, exhaustion, despair, anguish, hopelessness, pain, obsession, distraction, foreboding, irritation, impatience—none of which are friends of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

Anxiety saps your strength, leaving you spent and stressed out. Worry slowly drains our strength and focus. As the old saying goes, “Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but it empties today of its strength.”

It’s not wrong to think about the future and to make plans. The book of Proverbs tells us in various ways that planning is wise. I love to plan and think about the future. It’s fine and even faithful to *think* about tomorrow, as long as we submit our plans to the Lord, but it’s never right to *worry* about the future.

At one point during his presidency, the people around Abraham Lincoln were anxious about coming events. In response to their worries, Lincoln told this story:

Many years ago, when I was a young lawyer, and Illinois was little settled, except on her southern border, I, with other lawyers, used to ride the circuit; journeying with the judge from county-seat to county-seat in quest of business. Once, after a long spell of pouring rain, which had flooded

the whole country, transforming small creeks into rivers, we were often stopped by these swollen streams, which we with difficulty crossed. Still ahead of us was Fox River, larger than all the rest; and we could not help saying to each other, "If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over Fox River?" Darkness fell before we had reached that stream; and we all stopped at a log tavern, had our horses put out, and resolved to pass the night. Here we were right glad to fall in with the Methodist Presiding Elder of the circuit, who rode it in all weather, knew all its ways, and could tell us all about Fox River. So we all gathered around him, and asked him if he knew about the crossing of Fox River. "O yes," he replied, "I know all about Fox River. I have crossed it often, and understand it well; but I have one fixed rule with regard to Fox River: I never cross it till I reach it."<sup>7</sup>

Far too many believers are wearing themselves out crossing the Fox River long before they reach it. Wait until you get there.

### GOOD WORRY?

The Bible makes an important distinction between what we might call "good worry" and "bad worry."

Philippians 4:6 says, "Don't worry about anything." Clearly this is sinful worry. But in Philippians 2:20, the apostle Paul lauds his friend Timothy when he says, "I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare." The phrase "genuinely cares" translates the same Greek word used for "worry" in Philippians 4:6. So there is a kind of care that's applauded and appropriate that we could call "concern" and another inappropriate form we could call "anxiety."

There are many good things to be concerned about. Our marriages. Our children. Our aged parents. Our own spiritual lives. The

spiritual condition of our family and friends. The future and welfare of our nation. We all have genuine, legitimate concerns. There are many good things that should burden us—things we should care about. But genuine concern can quickly degenerate into godless worry or what Jesus called the “worries of this life.”

We all know what it feels like to be concerned about something and suddenly feel our mind being pulled in different directions. Our thoughts become restless and distracted, and sleep evades us. We’re tense and unsettled and feel like we’re being pulled apart. We can feel the surge of uneasiness. We’re moving from concern to worry—from “good” worry to “godless” worry.

The Bible is clear that we aren’t to worry about anything. But how do we shake the worries of life?

### **THE PRESCRIPTION: PRAYER**

In Philippians 4:6, the word “instead” (or “but” in some translations) appears right after the words “Don’t worry about anything,” drawing a sharp contrast. After the word “instead” we have God’s prescription for worry: “Pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” The antidote to anxiety is to pray about everything.

Three different Greek words for “prayer” are found in this verse. The first one is a general word for prayer in which we give adoration, worship, and devotion to God. The second term focuses on our needs and connotes the idea of dependence or a desperate cry arising from need. The third word refers to precise petitions or specific requests.

Jesus highlighted prayer as the antidote to anxiety in his sermon about the end times:

Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the *worries of this life*. Don’t let that

day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep alert at all times. And *pray* that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.

LUKE 21:34-36, EMPHASIS ADDED

Jesus says prayer is our defense against the worries of life.

Robert J. Morgan vividly highlights the connection between prayer and overcoming the trap of worry:

Prayer is the closet where we change clothes and replace a spirit of despair with a garment of praise. It's the bank where we present the promissory notes of God's promises and withdraw endless deposits of grace. It's the darkroom of the soul where negatives become positives. It's the transfer station where the pulse of fear is exchanged for the impulse of faith. It's a currency exchange where we trade in our liabilities for God's abundant life.<sup>8</sup>

Prayer is our defense against the worries of life, but not just any prayer—*thankful* prayer. Philippians 4:6 includes the all-important words “and thank him for all he has done.” Recalling God's blessings must accompany our prayers. When we give thanks, we're recognizing and remembering God's good gifts to us. This intentional recounting of God's blessings creates faith and trust. Grateful prayer builds our faith, pushing worry out of our hearts. Praying with an attitude of gratitude wipes out worry. Thankful prayer is the fail-safe formula that transfers our cares to God and taps into his peace.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, “No care but all prayer. No anxiety but much joyful communion with God. Carry your desires to

the Lord of your life, the guardian of your soul. Go to Him with two portions of prayer and one of fragrant praise. Do not pray doubtfully but thankfully.”<sup>9</sup>

As we plunge deeper into the end times, the worries of life will increase and intensify. We see it already. To survive and stand, we must run the 46 defense every day, every moment in our lives. You may have to use the 46 defense over and over again every day as worry tries to worm its way into your heart and mind. Every time worry knocks, immediately use the 46 defense. It will work every time.

## THE PROMISE: PEACE

Few promises in the Bible are more comforting than Philippians 4:7: “Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

Did you catch those words? “God’s peace.” This is stunning. When a believer humbly approaches the throne of God in thankful prayer, the serenity of the Trinity is unleashed in that believer’s heart. God has never experienced one worried moment. Nothing disturbs him. He’s never shaken. He’s perpetually at peace. There’s never panic in heaven. The Trinity never meets in emergency session. God has an infinite, measureless supply of peace, and he makes that peace available to us by means of prayer.

There are two beautiful things in Philippians 4:7 about God’s peace. First, it’s *unexplainable*. The peace of God infinitely surpasses the ability of the human mind to perceive or understand how it works. It “defies all attempts to describe, analyze, explain, or comprehend it.”<sup>10</sup> Charles Spurgeon says, “This shall bring you God’s own peace. You shall not be able to understand the peace which you shall enjoy. It will enfold you in its infinite embrace. Heart and

mind through Christ Jesus shall be steeped in a sea of rest. Come life or death, poverty, pain, slander, you shall dwell in Jesus above every rolling wind or darkening cloud.”<sup>11</sup> I hope you’ve experienced this peace.

Our first son, Justin, was born while Cheryl and I lived in Dallas during my first semester at Dallas Theological Seminary. Cheryl was in the hospital for a month before he was born. He was born very prematurely and had a cleft lip and palate. He spent his first six weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit at Baylor Hospital. During those dark days, I used the 46 defense over and over again. Every time, my cries to God were met with his supernatural calm. I still can’t explain it. God’s peace is unexplainable.

Second, the peace of God is *unassailable*. The word “guard” is a military term for a contingent of soldiers assigned to protect someone. The peace of God acts as a guard at the door of your heart and mind to provide security against the assaults of worry, confusion, tension, and uncertainty.

At the time Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippians, he was eight hundred miles away from them in Rome under house arrest, guarded 24-7 by the Roman Praetorian Guard, the most elite force in the Roman Empire. But as Steven J. Lawson points out, “He was also being guarded in a far more secure way—God was protecting his heart so that anxiety and fear would not enter it. Fear was being denied entrance into his heart. . . . anxiety cannot crack the divine defense.”<sup>12</sup> The believer who prays with thanksgiving is guarded against the assault of anxiety.

As we’re hurtling toward the end of days and the worries-of-life mushroom, God’s peace is like a spiritual “SEAL Team Six” stationed at the entrance of your thoughts and emotions to protect and keep you, giving you mental and emotional stability and tranquility.

Philippians 4:7 ends with the comforting words “in Christ Jesus.”

In Jesus we have nothing to fear; without him we have everything to fear. Jesus is our peace.

Joseph Scriven said it well in the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.*

Don't forfeit God's peace. Don't go on bearing needless pain. Carry everything to God in grateful prayer. Use the 46 defense. Claim God's fathomless, unshakable peace.

## **NO WORRIES**

An early Greek manuscript bears the name of a man called Titedios Amerimnos. The first name is a proper name—like the name Titus. The second name is like a nickname, and it is made up of the word that means “to worry” (*merimnos*) prefixed by the Greek letter alpha, which negates the meaning of the word. *Amerimnos* means “not to worry.” Based on this nickname, many believe this man was a Greek who constantly worried but who stopped worrying once he was saved. Thereafter he was known as Titedios Amerimnos—“Titedio, the man who never worries.”<sup>13</sup>

The question for us is, can we write our name and add to it, “The One Who Never Worries”? This will only be true if we learn the spiritual survival strategy of thankful prayer.

We must use the prescription in Philippians 4:6 and claim the promise in Philippians 4:7. There's no need to have any more anxious days and sleepless nights.

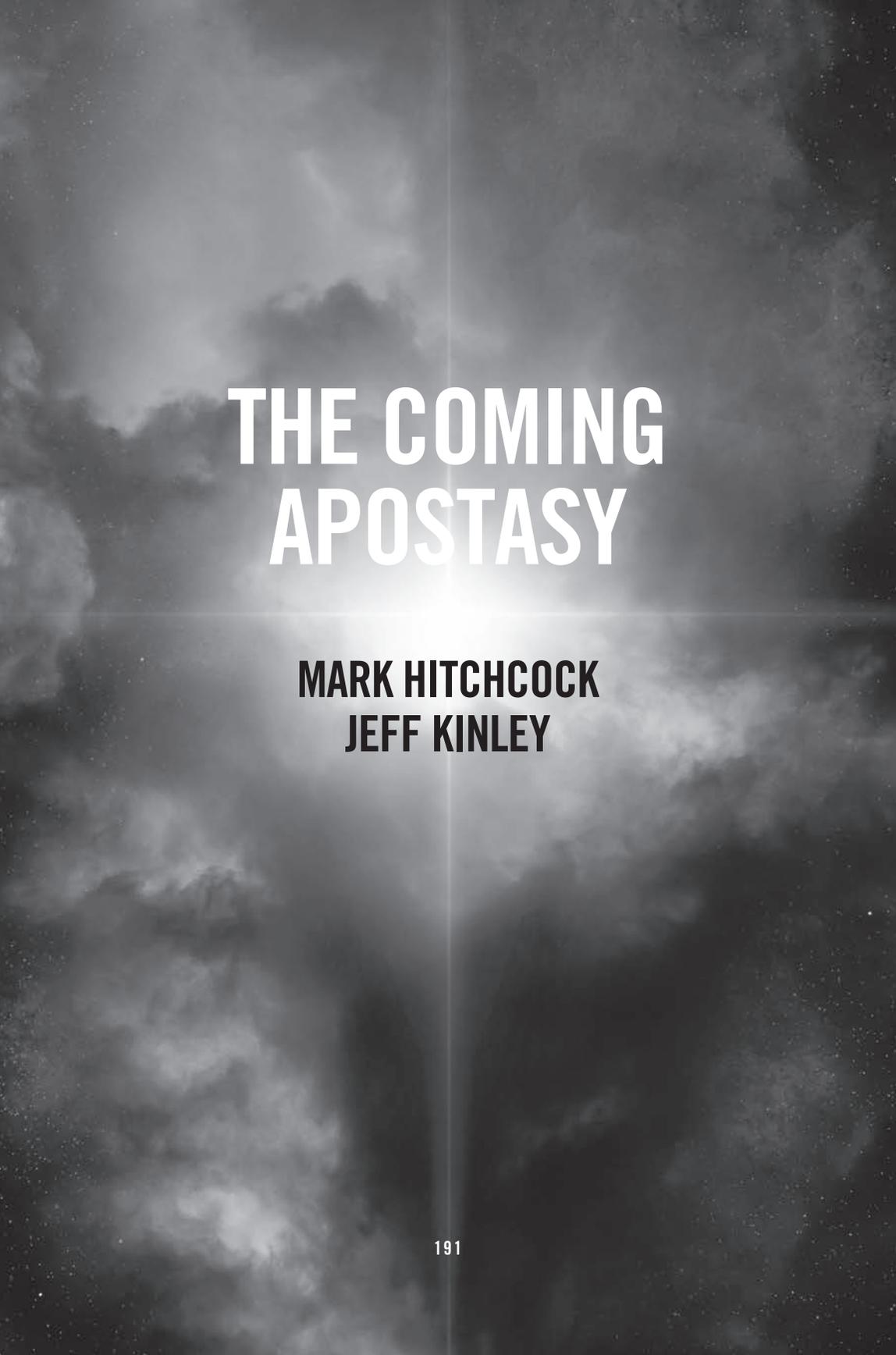
Some days and nights you may have to use the 46 defense over and over again. You may have to go to the Lord in thankful prayer again and again. But you can rest assured it will work every time. God's perpetual peace is available if we will humbly lift our hearts to him in grateful prayer. The only question is, will we obey this clear command? If we will, our days and nights of worry are over.

In my early twenties I spent two to three hours every Friday night studying the Bible with an elderly friend. He was a faithful, loving Bible teacher who helped me a great deal. He had several adages he liked to repeat, but there was one saying he repeated most often—"When in a fix, go to Philippians 4:6." I know it's a bit corny, but I've never forgotten it. I still apply it often today. I hope you will too.

"When in a fix, go to Philippians 4:6."

This world is not becoming a safer, more stable, or more secure place. As technology explodes and threats expand, the potential for worry widens. Stress surges. Jesus lovingly warned us about the prevalence and peril of the "worries of this life" that threaten our spiritual strength, stamina, and stability as this age draws to a close, and through the pen of the apostle Paul, he graciously gave us a fail-safe defense that will work every time—the 46 defense:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.



# **THE COMING APOSTASY**

**MARK HITCHCOCK  
JEFF KINLEY**



# INTRODUCTION

In nineteenth-century France, disgruntled workers developed a subversive tactic that involved throwing a shoe into factory machinery, causing it to grind to a halt, ruining all productivity. This act of aggression became known as *sabotage* (from *sabot*, the French word for shoe).<sup>1</sup> A single shoe thrown into the gears could wreak untold havoc on a well-oiled machine.

Today, we are witnessing the relentless sabotage of Christianity and the church from within. Subtle saboteurs are tossing one theological shoe after another into the machine, causing spiritual bewilderment and breakdowns.

Satan has always worked to sabotage the work of God through human false teachers. And although Satan has many shoes and strategies, his two main areas of sabotage are against the *written* Word of God (the Scriptures) and the *living* Word of God (the Savior, Jesus).<sup>2</sup> The devil's first recorded words in the Bible are spoken to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and they drip with doubt and denial: "Indeed, has God said . . . ?"<sup>3</sup> Since that time, the hiss of the serpent has echoed down through the ages, from generation to generation, as he questions, undermines, and sabotages the Bible. As David Jeremiah says,

[Satan] isn't just given to one approach. If he can't take the Word of God away from us by undermining its authority, he will take us away from the Word of God by giving us another basis of authority. Satan has developed just such a substitute, and it seems to have a great attraction for many people.

It's called *experience*.

People become so wrapped up in their spiritual experience that they no longer look to the Word of God for their authority. Their experience becomes the determining force in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Jeremiah closes with this powerful observation:

Two groups, then, are vying for our minds—but with the same end in view. [Liberal scholars] would take the Bible away from us, and those who hold to the experiential view would take us away from the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

We could not agree more. Sound doctrine is under siege. The Bible is being either reduced, outright rejected, or replaced by how people feel about whatever moral or theological topic is under consideration.

However, nothing we see should surprise us. The Bible predicted that this day would come. Scripture tells us that the tide of apostasy will crest as the end draws near. This portent of the end is referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as the falling away or the final great apostasy. That season may be arriving very soon. In light of this sobering reality, our main goal in this book is to unmask the current sabotage aimed at the authority and sufficiency of the Bible and targeting the exclusivity of Jesus as the only way to God. We also want to arm you with the truth, heighten your discernment, and recalibrate your

thinking and living in accordance with the plumb line of God's truth. These are serious issues for the church and for every believer. A great deal is at stake.

May the Lord be pleased to use this book in the life of every reader as He has graciously used it already in the lives of its authors.



CHAPTER I

# GOD AND GHOST SHIPS

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*Some have . . . suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

1 TIMOTHY 1:19

Captain David Morehouse was accustomed to the choppy waters of the North Atlantic, but he wasn't prepared for what caught his eye this winter's day. Sailing some four hundred miles east of the Azores Islands, Morehouse encountered a disturbing sight. It was a ship, which in itself is not unusual to spot on the open sea. What was odd was that this particular two-masted brig seemed to be in great distress. Its canvas sails tattered by a relentless wind, the ship drifted aimlessly in open water. From his vantage point aboard the *Dei Gratia*, Captain Morehouse was unable to see anyone on deck of the wayward vessel. And so, after calling out and receiving no reply, the British captain gave orders to come alongside the mystery ship. He sent a boarding party to inspect the ship, but his first mate and two crew members failed to find a single soul aboard.

Instead, what they discovered was a full cargo containing 1,701 barrels of crude alcohol, along with a six-month supply of food and water. What was missing was the ship's only lifeboat. Gone, too, were its captain, Benjamin S. Briggs, his wife, Sarah, and their two-year-old daughter, Sophia, along with eight crew members. However, they found closets of clothes left behind, suggesting a sudden departure. During the one-hour inspection, the *Dei Gratia's* boarding crew also observed a disassembled pump and three and a half feet of water sloshing around in the hull. But aside from these curiosities, the 108-foot-long vessel appeared to be seaworthy.

The creaking ship discovered by Captain Morehouse on December 5, 1872, turned out to be the *Mary Celeste*. Records later showed the ship had set sail on November 7 from New York headed for Genoa, Italy. But something happened along the way, and the *Mary Celeste* was now long overdue. And those now aboard the *Dei Gratia*, whose Latin name means "by the Grace of God," could only hope and pray that same grace would watch over the lost ship's passengers and crew.

The tragic tale of the *Mary Celeste* has become one of the most puzzling mysteries in maritime history. Many theories have been offered to make sense of this perplexing story and what happened—everything from pirates to storms and high seas, even sea monsters. Experts still scratch their heads as to why Captain Briggs would give orders to abandon a ship that showed no signs of imminent danger.

But nearly 150 years past that cold December day, and after speculation in articles, books, poems, and even movies, we are today no closer to knowing what led to the *Mary Celeste's* fate than Morehouse was. In the absence of captain or crew, the ship had drifted off course in the open sea for some two weeks before being discovered. Instead of reaching its intended destination, the *Mary Celeste* has gained the enduring infamy of being history's quintessential ghost ship.

## OUR CURRENT CONDITION

Unless you've spent the past few years cast away on a deserted island, you've no doubt come to the conclusion that ours is a planet in peril. We are a culture in chaos, a human race caught in the epicenter of a global storm. Like the *Mary Celeste*, we are adrift as a planet, lost in a turbulent sea of confusion and uncertainty. And it's no longer just the experts who recognize the imminent crises threatening our world. According to a nationwide poll, 41 percent of adults believe we are living in the "end times."<sup>1</sup> An acute awareness of our world's troubles has finally filtered down to the average person. And the reigning consensus is that planet Earth is showing all the signs of rapidly approaching disaster on multiple levels.

In other words, we're in deep, choppy waters here.

This moment in time is a markedly different one than our parents' or grandparents' generation knew. Though previous generations may have witnessed world war, economic recession, and political upheavals, this present dark hour carries a distinctly apocalyptic cargo. Upon first glance, the happenings in recent history may more closely resemble a bad dream or a sci-fi movie scenario. Despite some who naively imagine things getting better, an honest, open-eyed appraisal of humanity's situation reveals much more dystopia than utopia. This is reality, not some hopeful, future fantasy. Further, it's *your* reality. The world in which you live is becoming increasingly volatile, rising and falling like a ship's bow in a furious tempest, wildly tossed about. Instability, unrest, and uncertainty are constants in this contemporary global drama. The world is changing—and not for the better.

Of course, it's human to question and to wonder whether history's hurricane is about to make landfall. Having saturated ourselves in sin, we have to wonder, *Is Revelation finally setting sail toward our shores?*

Scan culture's horizon, and what do we see? Rage-filled citizens rioting in the streets, looting local businesses due to perceived injustice in their community. Immigrants and refugees embroiled in an unprecedented international crisis, the consequences of which are as yet unknown. Mass shootings, combined with an ongoing epidemic of violence and homicide, have almost anesthetized us to murder.<sup>2</sup> And the body count among the unborn continues to rise, nearing 1.5 billion butchered worldwide in the name of "reproductive rights."<sup>3</sup>

The ancient Canaanites got nothing on us.

But that's not all. Keep looking around, and you'll see state and federal authorities, along with Supreme Court justices, passing laws and declaring edicts sanctioning, legalizing, endorsing, promoting, and even wholeheartedly celebrating homosexual activity and same-sex marriage. Men who self-identify as women are allowed to use women's restrooms, exposing young girls to potential trauma, abuse, and attack. Our society's moral conscience has dulled to the point where we now proudly call evil "good" and good "evil." This sad commentary on our nation tragically parallels an earlier time in Israel's history when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."<sup>4</sup> Today, there's even a proposal within some psychiatric circles to destigmatize sexual offenses such as pedophilia, instead referring to people who commit these offenses as "minor-attracted persons."<sup>5</sup> In our contemporary moral climate, just about anything goes—except, of course, biblical morality. Our culture's collective decadence is eclipsed only by the individual depravity of those who define it. It's a critical breach in humanity's hull, letting in a flood of lunacy disguised as "enlightenment" and "progressive thought." And the water keeps pouring in.

Political correctness has become one of our new idols, and one that demands we pay regular veneration and worship. It dare not be ignored or angered lest we feel its wrath. To merely disagree, for example, with trendy, "richer" views of morality is to be charged with

hate speech or bigotry. Historical Judeo-Christian values are systematically being sandblasted from the walls of conscience with pagan, Mardi Gras morals chiseled in their place. To suggest there is still an absolute, objective morality regarding issues such as sexuality or marriage is to be instantly judged, cast into the public court of shame and ridicule, and summarily stoned to death by popular opinion and social media. As a result of this and other glaring evidences of moral decay, many believe we are witnessing in real time the systematic collapse of Western civilization. It's almost as if it were all part of a larger, sinister plan and strategy.

Yes, something is very wrong with *humanity*, something as a race we collectively refuse to acknowledge. In truth, the root causes of our evil obsessions go much deeper than social, psychological, or even moral causes. What lies under the surface of our universal insanity is a spiritual problem, a deadly virus, birthed in our first parents and passed down from generation to generation.

But keep looking, now internationally, and we see that global economic stability has never been so volatile, with multiple nations teetering toward default and financial collapse. According to the World Economic Forum, earth's economy is currently vulnerable on a number of fronts and more than ever at risk to suffer "global shocks." These economic tremors do not respect national borders and can potentially shake whole financial systems and societies to their foundations.<sup>6</sup> Like at no other time in recorded history, the international community has become linked together. What happens financially in one nation often dramatically impacts another, with one country's economic crisis sending concentric ripple effects to ten others, or more. This has led to an unprecedented interdependence in an ever-emerging one-world financial market.

In its Global Risks 2014 Report, the World Economic Forum states, "A fiscal crisis in any major economy could easily have cascading

global impacts.”<sup>7</sup> Put simply, this worldwide economic house of cards could collapse at any time, an unfolding scenario which seamlessly syncs with Revelation’s portrayal of future economic disaster.<sup>8</sup>

Look around, and you’ll see that our world is also facing a number of humanitarian crises, one of which is the more than 780 million hungry people in the world today.<sup>9</sup> Though the vast majority of these are from developing countries, they nevertheless represent one out of every eight people on the planet. Imagine the scale of impact when global famine eventually hits the world, as forecast in Revelation. Chances of thriving, both in third-world and developed countries, will rapidly go from unlikely to virtually impossible. Additionally, human trafficking, sex trafficking, and sex slavery together globally form a \$32 billion industry involving some 21 million victims worldwide.<sup>10</sup>

What on earth have we become?

From a geopolitical perspective, the Middle East remains a delicate minefield, easily set off by a single misstep. Add to this ticking time bomb Iran’s stealthy efforts to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. Iran’s stated desire is to remove the Jewish nation as the cancerous “tumor” in the body of the Islamic world, wiping Israel from the face of the earth.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Israel has its own problems as ongoing conflict with Syrian-based Hamas threatens to erupt like a powder keg at any given moment. Recurring missile strikes from both sides are now a regular part of life in the Middle East.

According to Bible prophecy, Russia is poised to be an end-times player and continues to reinforce its reputation as a world bully, having previously established its presence on Israel’s border. Drunk on its own power, Russia’s next move remains unknown, but this nation could very well be positioning itself for the apocalyptic war Ezekiel predicted.<sup>12</sup>

But there’s more.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is the latest unwelcome arrival on the world terrorist scene. Even so, it has managed to have a massive, devastating impact in a relatively short span of time. Begun as a splinter group from al-Qaeda, this barbaric death cult has become well known for military campaigns, invasions, brutal torture, and public executions, including crucifixion. It is apocalyptic Islam on steroids, a brand of jihadist ideology that believes the coming of their Mahdi (messiah) can be hastened as the world is engulfed in chaos and carnage.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, their favorite method of execution is beheading. Reviving an ancient form of bloody barbarism, ISIS has branded itself as a group of modern-day human butchers. Beheadings have now happened right here in the United States, even in rural communities.<sup>14</sup> And these wicked warriors do not discriminate, as they brutally slaughter hundreds of women and small children. The masked monsters of ISIS also produce their own “snuff videos,” featuring selected beheadings and executions, posting them online in an attempt to bolster their cause and terrorize peace-loving people worldwide.

This growing terrorist body is well financed and organized. Its short-term goal is to create a “caliphate” (Islamic State) in Syria and Iraq. Forcing over a million Iraqis from their homes, many of them Christians, ISIS has also taken control of oil fields and seized cities in that region. But their gruesome aspirations are not confined to the Middle East. A US Army Intelligence bulletin has warned of potential attacks in America by ISIS supporters and sympathizers targeting US military personnel and their families, threatening to “show up [at their homes] and slaughter them.”<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the terrorist roots of this radicalism can be traced back to a several-thousand-year-old hatred of Jews. Now, like a deadly virus, this evil enmity has mutated, branching out with the goal of destroying other equally despised infidels (Christians, friends

of Israel, or anyone unwilling to submit to the oppressive religious demands of these sadistic serial murderers).

As if this weren't enough, on American soil, lone-wolf terrorist attacks (sometimes erroneously labeled "workplace violence") have burst the bubble of our assumed protective insulation from this threat. A new tentacle of terrorism has developed as individuals now self-radicalize with bloody vendettas targeting non-Muslims. Unfortunately, there is no guaranteed and effective preventative measure against such rampages.

Negotiation has proved impossible with an ideology whose adherents believe they've been given a "holy mandate" to subjugate or kill outsiders. They do not debate, argue, barter, or waver in fulfilling their mission but are wholly committed to their unholy cause. And there is every indication this brand of terrorism will continue gaining momentum as sleeper cells infiltrate free societies in order to conquer and destroy them. Who would have ever dreamed words like *jihad* and *terrorism* would earn permanent places in our national vocabulary? The imminent threat of another terrorist attack, whether on a local or large scale, is not a matter of *if* but rather *when*, as our military and intelligence leaders believe these jihadists are already on American soil.<sup>16</sup> We do know there are currently some thirty-five Islamic terrorist training camps scattered all across America.<sup>17</sup> These Muslim extremists have also pledged to one day "raise the flag of Allah in the White House."<sup>18</sup>

We have officially passed through the looking glass and into another reality altogether. And there is every indication our world is drifting toward destruction.

But this is what happens when mutiny ensues and humanity defiantly casts God overboard. These are the consequences to resisting and rejecting Him, ripple effects from refusing to acknowledge the Creator's existence and regal right to rule His own creation. God

turns us over to ourselves. Billions of people, bound by an enslaving depravity.

However, if our eyes are fixed only on humanity and world events, we could easily be overcome with fear and uncertainty, and often this fear leads to unhealthy isolation and reclusiveness as we withdraw from engaging culture and being Christ's witnesses in the world. Weathering this current sin-storm, Christ's disciples can also default to self-reliance instead of dependence on our Lord, as what's wrong with our world can have a debilitating effect on our faith in God. Looking at the chaos surrounding us, we may even wonder if He is still at the helm. Is God really guiding history? Is He still in charge? Or has He abandoned us altogether?

Were it not for the reality of a sovereign God who superintends both history and humanity, we would surely despair. Thankfully, Scripture assures us the God of heaven is still in control. The real question is, Do we believe that? Daniel 4:35 proclaims, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

In light of the darkness around us, the prophet Isaiah delivers much-needed perspective in Isaiah 40:6-31. Open your Bible and read it for yourself, allowing his words to marinate in your mind.

### **MEANWHILE, AT HOME . . .**

All across the world, abandoned ships rust on shores and beaches. Some are half sunken while others lie fully submerged under oceans and lakes. These are vessels that suffered shipwreck due to neglect, abandonment, or mutiny. Some were left to drift, sailing aimlessly at the unpredictable whim of the wind and the waves. Many met their fate at the hands of pirates. Forcibly boarding unsuspecting ships,

these sea terrorists seized cargo, killing passengers and crew before either scuttling the vessel or leaving it to the ocean's mercy. Still other ships found themselves wandering upon the waters or resting on the ocean floor because of war, storms, fire, disease, a damaged rudder, or running out of fuel or food. Bad winds or no winds easily contribute to the demise of once-worthy ships. Even so, the common denominator for these ghost ships is that they are all *lost*, adrift in the ocean's vast expanse, without help or hope, and with no helmsman to guide them toward safe harbor.

Sadly, what is true of ships can also be true of people. The same perilous danger that threatens seagoing vessels also endangers those who call themselves Christians. It's why the apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"<sup>19</sup>

Peter, writing to the scattered believers living in a decadent society under the rule of a pagan government, urged, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."<sup>20</sup>

In a world racing toward Revelation, Jesus' church today finds herself sailing through turbulent waters of her own. She's perilously taking on water while some of her more naive passengers seem perfectly content, satisfying themselves at the weekly Sunday buffet. Mirroring the churches Christ chastised in Revelation 2–3, the collective state of Christendom today faces an internal threat far more deadly than a terrorist attack. As we will discover, the bride of Christ is not exactly "shipshape." In places, she has suffered a hull breach, lost her rudder, failed to catch wind, and gone adrift from the course God has charted for her.

What lies dead ahead is the hidden reef of apostasy, and no one understood this more than Paul, as the much-traveled apostle suffered literal shipwreck himself three times!<sup>21</sup> Using this as a powerful metaphor, he puts on display examples of *spiritual* shipwreck, even calling out individuals by name:

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and *suffered shipwreck* in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.<sup>22</sup>

There are several important observations and principles we can draw from Paul's words:

1. Losing or abandoning faith is equivalent to apostasy, or suffering "shipwreck."
2. The two men Paul mentions weren't the only ones to abandon the faith.
3. There are tangible, painful consequences to deserting the faith.

Granted, all Christ-followers encounter storms and suffer through occasional seasons of sin. This is a normal part of the challenge and messiness of temptation and sanctification. But there is a vast difference between getting water in your boat and your boat actually sinking, and there is a big distinction between temporarily sailing off course and suffering a fatal shipwreck. The good news is that God has promised to faithfully discipline His children when they, by either

active or passive choices, veer off course and straight into sin.<sup>23</sup> At times we may wander, sailing too close to the rocky shore and becoming stuck on those hidden reefs, yet without actually capsizing and permanently going under.

However, for others, there is no rescue from the angry sea or salvage from below. These once-professing believers may have set out on their Christian pilgrimage with good intentions and noble motives. They may have even had a correct course heading, been under great teaching, or participated in a healthy faith community. But as important as those things are, by themselves they are not enough. Thus these self-proclaimed God-followers eventually become spiritual “ghost ships” themselves. It’s not an issue of losing their salvation but rather of demonstrating their true identity. They flirted with the idea of being disciples of Jesus at some point in their lives, but their eventual falling away revealed them to be counterfeit Christians. As Jesus bluntly warned, *professing* Him, no matter how confidently, doesn’t necessarily mean *possessing* Him.<sup>24</sup> This is why the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”<sup>25</sup>

Bottom line: people drift, falter, and sink. So do churches and even whole denominations. Having merely parroted faith in Jesus, they can, and often do, deviate off course. Some succumb to doctrinal error or, like the church at Ephesus, lose the wind in their sails, manifested in the absence of a passionate love for Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

This “falling away from the faith” (known as *apostasy*) can be a nebulous concept, perhaps because it’s seldom studied, preached, or understood by a generation of churchgoers who measure their spiritual temperature by how much they “enjoyed” the church service and evaluate their spiritual progress by conformity to rules and religiosity. But our Christian faith goes much deeper than this. Part of maturing

as believers means addressing some of the weightier issues of God's Word. As we grow, we discover that, along with all the benefits God offers (His presence; peace; provision; and steadfast, unconditional love), there are also some major concerns He has for His church, specifically, her tendency to drift, both doctrinally and personally. These dangers exist because of the world in which we live, the enemy bent on destroying us, and our own hearts that are so prone to wander.<sup>27</sup> But the closer we get to God's heart, the more our hearts become sensitive and open to the deeper issues God's Word addresses. We begin to want what He wants. That's part of what it means to "seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness."<sup>28</sup> At times we may think the really important truths and issues concerning the church are meant only for pastors and leaders. But individual Christians also have a responsibility to preserve the unity and purity of the church.<sup>29</sup> We are *all* meant to understand and "handle the truth." If not, much of Paul's epistles would be irrelevant to the average believer, something we know is not true, as "*all* Scripture is inspired by God and profitable" for us.<sup>30</sup>

As this book will explain, the coming apostasy is a serious sign of the end times and one of Scripture's weightier truths. Understanding it is essential if we are to navigate the waters of today's confusing culture.

## THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

Apostasy represents an abandonment of faith, and it can happen over time without a person realizing it. In fact, just the opposite may occur, as pride mixed with false doctrine leads to an attitude of superiority, complacency, and self-righteousness. Nevertheless, it's there. Lying just beneath the surface, it is poised to penetrate the very thing keeping us afloat—our faith. Perhaps you've known those who set out seeking safe harbor in Christ only to end up splintered

on the jagged rocks of unbelief. Without being moored by the biblical anchor of authentic faith, they drift in an age of unprecedented pseudo-Christian thought. At times they are driven by the winds of progressive theology, postmodern thought, or godless philosophies and values. Perhaps they are emotionally driven by political correctness and even a reimagining of God Himself. In an era of endless information, where self-appointed truth-proclaimers peddle phony faith formulas to innocent, untrained church members, it's no surprise that many become lost in the disorienting fog. This is why every professing believer in Jesus desperately needs a magnetic compass, a map, an anchor, a lighthouse with a clear beacon—an unfailing GPS guiding them every step of the way.

It's also why we need a Captain.

Jesus promised *He* would build His church, “and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”<sup>31</sup> And He has made, and will make, good on that promise. Even so, it's not enough to merely quote verses, claiming immunity from the enemy's attacks. Obviously, because of Christ's efficacious payment for sin, every believer will make it safely to heaven. But that doesn't guarantee a life exempt from sporadic episodes of apathy, self-absorption, moral failure, doctrinal deviance, or even being temporarily misled by false teachers. There is no automatic guarantee of continuous safe spiritual passage. But even in the midst of our messiness and meandering, God is still committed to us—much more committed to us than we are to Him.<sup>32</sup> Yes, Christ will build His church. He has established her and preserved her through both history *and* heresy. And death will not defeat or permanently derail her. But that doesn't mean she isn't vulnerable to rough seas in these last days in which we live. There are clear and present dangers threatening her—threatening *you*, too. There are issues some may consider minor or nonessential but that still cause us to deviate from faith's map. And the longer we continue

traveling off course, even if only by a few degrees, the farther from our intended destination we drift.

Pilots who miscalculate flight plans by even one degree could miss their target destinations by hundreds of miles, or worse, run straight into a mountain. Pharmacists who make just one error combining chemicals while filling a prescription could potentially poison their patients.

The same is true for us, which is why we must always strive to stay on target with God and His Word. While Christians may disagree about certain peripheral areas of doctrine, that does not in any way diminish the importance of doctrine itself. And we cannot flippantly dismiss any part of God's Word, because what we believe really does matter.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

On Jesus' final night with His disciples, they had dinner together, after which he took them on a walk to a place that was very familiar to them.<sup>33</sup> Located just outside Jerusalem's walls, this garden of olive trees proved to be a favorite gathering spot for Jesus and the Twelve. The word *Gethsemane* comes from two Hebrew words that when combined mean "a place for pressing oil." In ancient culture, heavy slabs of stone were used to crush olives until all the oil had been extracted. The oil was then poured into clay jars for household use. Jesus was well aware of this common practice. He also knew what that word prefigured for Him. Arriving in the garden that night, Christ experienced a sense of dread as He contemplated being crushed by the Father's fierce wrath due to our sin. And so, securing a solitary spot, Jesus fell on His face, pouring out His heart to the Father in prayer.

In that most intimate and passionate prayer, the Son of God explicitly asks the Father *not* to take His followers out of the world

but rather to “keep them from the evil one.” The reason for this, He says, is that His disciples do not belong to the domain of this world—or of its god.<sup>34</sup> But exactly how would Christ’s current and future disciples remain well insulated from Satan’s deceptive and destructive influence? The answer is found in the very next verse. They need only for the Father to “sanctify them in the truth,” Jesus prays. He then affirms, “Your word is truth.”<sup>35</sup>

The life-changing, lasting influence of God’s Word in our lives is a primary countermeasure to Satan’s attacks. As Jesus’ followers, we must keep this in mind when confronting the godless world in which we live. But we also must realize there are other threats too, some coming from within the church itself.

The unfortunate reality today is that the world and the church are often indistinguishable. As worldly philosophies and values infiltrate the body of Christ, moral values adjust and new theologies emerge. This creates a fatal breach, allowing other compromising half-truths and deceptive false teachings into the body. And why would this be such a major concern? Why is it such a big deal? Few things made Paul’s blood boil more than false teachers deceiving and misleading God’s people.<sup>36</sup> More about this later.

The principle we draw from Jesus’ prayer is that we are purified and protected by engaging, believing, and living out God’s truth. Put simply, when we think *biblically*, we are less likely to drift aimlessly. But failing to seal our minds from unbiblical thinking, beliefs, and doctrine causes us to sail perilously close to catastrophe. By adjusting Scripture to fit our own thinking (instead of vice versa), we stray from God’s heart and mind. And we miss His best for us.

We’ve written this book for several important reasons: (1) to help you understand what apostasy is; (2) to help you understand that it’s surging all around us and is a serious sign of the end times; (3) to guard you from spiritual shipwreck and the danger of sinking; and

(4) to help you understand the truth so that you stay on course as you await Christ's return.

Many people today pray for a great revival, and though it may happen, no such revival is prophesied. On the contrary, according to Scripture, a great apostasy is coming.

But how close are we?



# **RUSSIA RISING**

**MARK HITCHCOCK**



CHAPTER I

# THERE IS A BEAR IN THE WOODS

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*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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.”<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.’”<sup>13</sup> 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.’”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> 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

**“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 microaggressions 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."<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, a 2004 *Time/CNN* poll found that 59 percent of Americans believe the prophecies of the book of Revelation will come to pass.<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup>

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.’”<sup>21</sup>

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.”<sup>22</sup>

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."<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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?
- > 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 503). 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!