

**COUNTDOWN**  
TO THE **APOCALYPSE**

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**WHY ISIS AND EBOLA ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING**

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## The Beginning of the End?

There's a sense possibly that the world is spinning so fast and nobody is able to control it." That's what President Obama said in October 2014 at a fund-raiser in New York City.<sup>1</sup> It's easy to see why. Check out some recent headlines:

Ebola Hits New York City

4 Jihad Attacks in 4 Days

Ukraine Could Explode in 48 Hours

ISIS Tortured Hostages Before Beheading Them

Muslim Terror Rivals Unite Under ISIS Banner

As Ebola Spreads, Asia Senses Vulnerability

Ebola Crisis "On Same Scale as AIDS Epidemic"

Houston Demands Pastors Turn Over Sermons

The Criminalization of Christianity Is Here

Then there was a column in the *New York Times* by veteran journalist Roger Cohen called "The Great Unraveling."<sup>2</sup> It begins this way: "It was the time of unraveling. Long afterward, in the ruins, people asked: How could it happen?"

The succeeding paragraphs each begin with the phrase “It was a time of . . .” followed by beheadings, aggression, break-ups, weakness, fever, and disorientation, each one recording the ways in which the world is unraveling before our eyes. Here is the closing paragraph: “It was a time of disorientation. Nobody connected the dots . . . Until it was too late and people could see the Great Unraveling for what it was and what it had wrought.”

It’s fairly amazing to read something like that in the *New York Times*, which specializes in “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” As the “newspaper of record” for America, that’s a sobering assessment of the state of the world at this moment in history. Most telling is the assertion that no one connected the dots. In a very deep sense, Roger Cohen is right.

We all see the problems in the world.

We understand that something has gone badly wrong.

We all wait to see what will happen next.

Never in my lifetime have I sensed so much unrest in the air. It seems that every day brings another set of unsettling headlines. Everywhere I go, I hear people saying that they expect “something” is about to happen but they don’t know what it is.

Will there be another 9/11-style attack on America?

Will ISIS create a Muslim Caliphate in the Middle East?

Will an Ebola epidemic or an outbreak of some other super virus spread across America?

Will Christians be jailed for their faith?

Will we ever trust our own government again?

Is the world itself unraveling before our eyes?

Author David Jeremiah frames the question this way:

*The Beginning of the End?*

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The events unfolding in today's world are ominously threatening to unsettle institutions, reorder national political alignments, change the balance of world power, and destabilize the equitable distribution of resources. People everywhere are beginning to live in a state of fear and anxiety. Serious people are asking, "If these things are happening today, what will the future be like for my children and grandchildren? Do current headlines give us any signs about what is coming next?"<sup>3</sup>

Two well-known Christian leaders recently addressed these questions. After recounting the story of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 19, psychologist and author Dr. James Dobson explained the connection to current events:

Why have I chosen to recount this biblical story from so long ago? Because I am convinced that America and other Western Nations are sliding in the same direction. We have not yet reached the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, but that appears to be where we are headed. Judge Robert Bork, the brilliant jurist who was shamefully denied a seat on the Supreme Court, wrote a book about this danger 18 years ago. It was titled, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. I think he had it right.<sup>4</sup>

In looking at a world in crisis, Billy Graham used words that sound very much like what President Obama said:

Today the world is being carried on a rushing torrent of history that is sweeping out of control. There is but one

power available to redeem the course of events, and that is the power of prayer by God-fearing, Christ-believing people.<sup>5</sup>

Then Reverend Graham added this analysis, which sounds very much like James Dobson's comments:

Even though America is just as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah ever were, and as deserving of the judgment of God, God would spare us if we were earnestly praying, with hearts that had been cleansed and washed by the blood of Christ.

If Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven (Genesis 19:23-29), what can we in America expect?

President Obama is right. The world does seem to be spinning out of control.

Dr. Dobson is right. We are in trouble morally and spiritually.

Billy Graham is right. As a nation, we desperately need to turn to God.

That's why I have written this book. I want to examine the world situation today in the light of Bible prophecy. If we understand where we are on God's calendar, then we will realize that we are closer to the "end of days" than we have ever been.

In the pages ahead, we will examine ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), Ebola, the Middle East crisis, the break-

down of the family, the redefinition of marriage, the loss of religious freedom, and the moral decline that has led to an avalanche of immorality in our day. I think you'll be amazed at how many things that are happening today were predicted in the Bible. I believe we are living in a specific period of time the Bible calls "the last days." Although I have no idea where we are on God's clock, the "countdown to the apocalypse" has begun.

### What Difference Does It Make?

I realize that many people react with skepticism whenever anyone mentions Bible prophecy. In one sense, it seems unrelated to modern life. Who cares about the Mark of the Beast when we still have bills to pay and meetings to attend, not to mention making sure the kids get to soccer practice on time? Life is already so full that we don't have any extra energy to study the meaning of some obscure vision in the Book of Revelation. It might be fascinating to ponder the strange statue in Daniel 2, but we're just too tired to think about it. Plus the headlines we see are frightening enough without wondering about the "last days."

What difference does it make?

Knowing the future ought to make a big difference in the way we live today. Consider what happens when the National Weather Service issues a tornado warning. That happens every year in Texas and Oklahoma. A warning means that severe weather is imminent and you must take cover immediately.

Every year people are injured or killed because they did not take the warning seriously. Sometimes they didn't get the message, but in many cases they ignored it. You disregard a tornado warning at your own peril.<sup>6</sup>

We can apply this principle to Bible prophecy. As we will see, Jesus gave us some very specific signs of the "last days." We ignore those signs at our own peril. Those who know what is to come can be prepared. I'm convinced that the Bible has given us information about the future that applies to the twenty-first-century world.

It helps to remember that Bible prophecy is a major part of the Bible. In Bible study there is a principle referred to as "The Law of Proportion." This law simply says that you can tell the importance of a certain subject in Scripture by how much space is devoted to it. Applying this principle to prophecy, we discover that more than one-fourth of the Bible is predictive prophecy. In the Old Testament there are over eighteen hundred references to the return of Christ. Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are more than three hundred references to the Lord's return—one out of every thirty verses. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books give prominence to this subject. For every prophecy in Scripture concerning the first coming of Christ, there are eight on Christ's Second Coming. Both the proportion and prominence of the prophetic theme in Scripture argue for its importance.<sup>7</sup>

Over the years I've heard people say things like, "The Bible isn't clear about the future" or "You can't understand what the Book of Revelation means" or "Lots of people have tried to set a date for the Second Coming and they've all been wrong." Too

many people who otherwise respect the Bible tune out when it comes to the whole topic of Bible prophecy. They think they've heard it all before.

### No One Knows the Date!

I realize that some so-called experts have misled people because they claimed to know the date of the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus warned us that "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36). This verse plainly says that no one will know the precise moment of Christ's return. No one can know the day or the hour. The best we can do is to read the signs of the time and conclude that we may be nearing the end of the age. But even then we can't be certain. If anyone tells you that they have pinpointed the year or the month or the day or the hour of Jesus's return, do not believe him. That person is either a false prophet or a seriously deluded Bible student. Jesus strictly forbids setting dates for His return.

People have been predicting the end of the world for thousands of years. Sometimes they arrived at these dates through calculating certain astronomic events (think Mayan Apocalypse) or because of a natural disaster (the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is a good example) or because they think they know what 666 means (I remember when people thought Henry Kissinger was the Antichrist because they thought his name equaled 666) or because of the "four blood moons" (a popular theory today) or because of intricate manipulation of certain Bible passages.

History is filled with those who have made false predictions about when the end of the world would occur:

- Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) thought the world would end in 1656: “There are but 155 years left...at which time...the world will come to an end,” Columbus prophesied.
- Martin Luther (1483–1546) didn’t think the world could exist past three hundred years from his time.
- The psychic Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) predicted the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in 2000.

Concerning that last one, it’s worth recalling that a man named Harold Camping made a widely reported prediction that the world was going to end on May 21, 2011. He arrived at that precise date through a series of arcane calculations that involved the Bible, certain dates in history, and a system of interpretation so complex that few people could easily understand it.<sup>8</sup> Because he had a daily radio program, he was able to garner widespread attention.

As the day approached, his followers erected billboards in major cities, warning that the world would end on May 21, 2011. They went “all in” on Camping’s prediction. They didn’t say (and many of us might have done) “The world is ending soon” (a prediction sufficiently vague that no one could prove it wrong) or even “We know when the world is ending but we’re not telling” (as if to tease the public). Harold Camping and his followers weren’t using the date as an excuse to sell something. They truly believed the world was coming to an end on a particular date, and they weren’t shy about saying so.

No one could doubt the sincerity of their convictions. A few

followers even went so far as to sell everything and spend their last few days spreading the word.

The idea that the world was coming to an end caught fire in the mainstream media. CNN and Fox News picked it up. *Time* magazine reported on the movement. The mainstream media gave it big play as “the day” approached. It hit social media in a big way. On the day before (May 20), Twitter reported that #iftheworldendssaturday was trending around the world. It was big in the United States but also in Brazil, South Africa, Germany, and even in India. It was as if for a brief moment people around the world stopped and wondered, “What if the world ends on May 21?”

### Why Study Bible Prophecy?

So, if it is impossible to know when major prophetic events will unfold, why bother to study Bible prophecy at all? The answer is, God has given us a clear indication of what to look for so that we will not be deceived by those false Christs that have appeared in every generation and would lead us in the wrong direction.

On that point, I need to make one thing very clear. I don't know when Christ is coming back. I'm convinced we are living in the “last days” according to the Bible, but I don't know exactly where we are on God's calendar. No one does. If anyone ever tries to set an actual date for the end of the world, that's a sign you need to run in the other direction! Please don't read this book thinking I will give you a “secret date.” God has not given me any special, inside information. I try to follow

Billy Graham's advice. I take the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

The newspaper tells me what is happening in the world.

The Bible tells me what it means.

This book is my attempt to apply the teaching of the Bible to current events. I believe that when we do that, we will discover a remarkable correspondence between the ancient words of Scripture and the alarming events happening in our world. Even though many things may frighten us (and there are good reasons to be frightened these days!), I take comfort in the Bible that this world is God's world and history really is His Story.

We live in amazing times when the ancient prophecies of the Bible are being fulfilled before our own eyes. In order to set the scene, we'll start with an overview of Bible prophecy so that we can get the big picture of God's plan for the future. Then we'll look at three specific "signs of the times," and in the last chapter I'll answer the question, "If we are living in the last days, what difference should it make in my life?"

After writing this book, I am more convinced than ever that we are living in the period of time the Bible calls "the last days." If that is true, then we may be the generation that sees the Second Coming of Christ. If that sounds exciting, turn the page and let's get started.