

# ONE NATION WITHOUT LAW

THE RISE OF LAWLESSNESS, THE END TIMES  
AND THE POWER OF HOPE

**PHIL HOTSENPILLER**



**Chosen**

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

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I dedicate this book to Tammy, my wife, my friend,  
mother of our children and colleague in ministry.  
Your devotion to God and His Kingdom is a daily  
inspiration to me. I love you and look forward  
to all that God has planned for us in the future.

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# Foreword

PHIL HOTSENPILLER HAS ACCOMPLISHED something rare in his new book, *One Nation without Law*. He shares a theological and hope-filled perspective on how to position our faith while trying to understand lawlessness and evil in the world around us. Theologically, we have lived in the dark ages regarding these subjects, but through the power of Phil's own personal experiences as well as his historical interpretation of both modern and ancient history, you will find yourself on an empowered journey.

I remember when I was wrapped up in one of the worst seasons of being affected by lawlessness I have ever experienced. Our house was broken into, some people working for us had been lying to us and slandering us, I had to deal with an identity-theft situation and some of our teams in foreign nations were robbed. It was a brutal perfect storm of corruption around us, and I began to ask all the hard questions: *Why are people so evil? When will God vindicate us? Why did this happen to me when I am trying to follow God?*

During that time I had to come to a place of conviction based on my biblical beliefs in the nature of God. I wish I had also had this book, because when you don't have understanding, your choices to

live in hope and strength of conviction are not as clear. I came to a great place, but it probably took me way longer than it needed to.

I believe many good Christians live in spiritual confusion about who God is in the midst of lawlessness. What is God's role when we are experiencing suffering at the hands of corruption or even evil? How do we evaluate our choices, and even how do we keep an open heart to hope in these times? How do we pray or look to God, and how do we position our faith? Why are there lawless people on the earth? Thank God for Phil, who expertly answers these questions and raises the bar in creating an easily accessible clarity over God's very nature in the midst of humanity's weakness and sin.

Phil's role as part historian, part theologian and all pastor will help ground you in a winning world and Bible-based view. You will be blessed, and you will grow from your time with this book. It is time for this biblical perspective to empower us so that we don't give the wrong message about who God is, instead focusing on how beautiful a life in God can be in the midst of a world filled with lawlessness.

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# Introduction

A PRODUCER FOR THE HISTORY CHANNEL asked me to participate in a program on the end of the world, featuring specialists whose expertise ranged from Bible prophecy to quantum physics. The producer and his film crew were genuinely interested in exploring the mystery of the future. After I had fielded questions for more than three hours, he approached me, off camera, and asked, “Phil, when you think about the future, what scares you?”

Without hesitation I responded, “Lawlessness.”

I am not sure what he expected my answer to be, but the shock on his face was evident. I went on to explain that my greatest fear about the future is when lawlessness becomes—and it is now becoming—a normal part of mainstream culture.

It is difficult to watch the news these days without some degree of frustration, fear and trepidation. The daily reports of lawless actions in the societies we live in appear not only more widespread but also more intense than ever.

Is nowhere safe? We have experienced terror—from without and within—in our schools, in our workplaces, in our theaters, at major sporting events and in our skies. Even churches are not immune to

the pervasive lawlessness that has so thoroughly infected the prevailing culture. If this is a prophetic spread of lawlessness—and it certainly appears to be—it is likely to get worse before it gets better.

How, then, are we to respond to such mounting lawlessness? Wring our hands? Panic? Run for the hills? Join the high-volume rhetoric on radio call-in shows?

A far better option for confronting our fears and frustrations is to learn to see the issue from God's perspective. In the chapters that follow, we will find that the problem is by no means a new one. God is well aware of what is taking place in the world (as He always has been), and He has a plan to restore perfect peace to His people. In the meantime, we will pull back the curtain and peer behind the rampant lawlessness surrounding us, and we will consider some appropriate ways to respond.

To start, we will take a look at the rise of lawlessness, tracing its roots and its spread through the centuries. Our examination will involve both history and geography, uncovering the influence of lawlessness in various places and how its influence is now making inroads even in the United States.

From there we will examine a variety of prophecies about lawlessness and its connection to the end times. We will consider how the timing of certain current world events makes some such prophecies especially relevant. They point to an even greater escalation of lawlessness on a worldwide scale. Seen from a human perspective, things may appear bleak indeed. But as we consider the spiritual perspective of those same events, we will see what purpose these struggles serve in God's plan.

Finally, we want to explore options we can take to respond appropriately to the rising tide of lawlessness around us. When we begin to see God's perspective on such events, we are better equipped to put our fears and anxieties into His capable hands and move on with our lives. As we renew the invitation He has made for us to put our

hope in Him, we become more empowered to take a stand when we need to and not be so quick either to cower or clumsily ram-page against the injustices we see. We continue to grow spiritually stronger, even in the lengthening shadows of lawlessness and evil.

Regardless of what we see on the news, God is still in control. His control is not limited to any region or country; He is the Lord, and He directs the paths of all mankind. And we can move forward with hopeful determination to make our world a better place.

## SECTION ONE

# THE RISE OF LAWLESSNESS

EVERY GENERATION SEEMS to imagine that the next one is shaping up to be worse: more self-centered, less spiritually aware, morally weaker and so forth. But lately the statistics are beginning to bear out the truth that our world is in a definite slide deeper and deeper into lawlessness. This section will define *lawlessness* as I am using the term and will lay out the increasing severity of the problem, both in the United States and worldwide. The disturbing truth, as we will see, is that the spirit of lawlessness may be both more prevalent and more personal than we might have considered.

# 1

## The Problem of Lawlessness

THE PEOPLE QUAKED in their sandals. Above them, the mountaintop was shrouded in a thick cloud, bringing thunder and lightning much too close for comfort. Simultaneously, the mountain began to spew impenetrable smoke and tremble violently. A trumpet reverberated from the heavens, growing louder and louder.

At the mountain's foot, the terrified people struggled to take in everything that was happening around them. They had been warned not to set foot on the mountain under penalty of death. Not a problem! But Moses was fearless, speaking in the midst of the turmoil, and the people heard God's voice in response.

It is not like they had not already witnessed miracles, one after another. Only weeks ago they had been slaves to one of the mightiest empires on earth—the Egyptians. Then this man Moses had appeared, promising that God would soon free them. Of course the Egyptians had resisted, and the Israelites saw judgment fall on their captors in the form of plagues as God persistently goaded Pharaoh to release the people.

Even after Pharaoh finally relented, he changed his mind and unleashed his army to retrieve his former slaves. God orchestrated their escape by parting the Red Sea, sending the Israelites through on dry land with walls of standing water on either side (and drowning the pursuing army in the process). God fed them in a barren land with bread from heaven and provided water in miraculous ways—one time out of solid rock! God's presence stood constantly before them in a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

It was enough to keep the adrenaline surging. But this . . . their extended stay at Mount Sinai . . . this was something beyond anything they had seen or imagined. What could possibly warrant such a solemn and portentous occasion?<sup>1</sup>

God called Moses to ascend the mountain into the cloud, the smoke, the thunder and the lightning for one purpose: to receive the Law. God had agreed to be the Israelites' God and protector, and through the Law He was letting them know what He expected of them in exchange. He would soon take them to the land He had promised Abraham and his descendants, and He was preparing them for a lifestyle quite different from that of the surrounding peoples.

Other nations had already created codes of law, so a new code was not especially significant. What was absolutely unprecedented on this day was God's reaching down to make a holy covenant with His people, through which He would codify His promises and expectations. Though most people at this time would have been familiar with a single individual as king or leader, they were unable to comprehend a single god who was sovereign over *everything*. The Egyptians, for example, acknowledged hundreds of gods connected with the sun, the sky, the earth, the dead, the desert and most aspects of life. In contrast, monotheism was a new concept that would stand against the beliefs of (and be challenged by) almost every other culture the Israelites would encounter.

For the thousands of people trembling at the foot of Mount Sinai, it could not have been more evident that their God was the author of their Law, and it was to be taken seriously.

### **What Is “Lawlessness”?**

Why am I starting this book with a history lesson? Because before we can begin to comprehend the mystery of lawlessness, we need to try to understand the extraordinary imparting of the Law. Most Christian denominations naturally tend to emphasize New Testament doctrines like grace and mercy over the Law, yet a fundamental understanding of the Law is what makes such tenets so meaningful.

Jewish communities of faith, on the other hand, are frequently noted for their devotion to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. At the time of this writing, a *USA Today* story is reporting about a rabbi in New Brunswick, New Jersey, who, in spite of his synagogue being engulfed in fire, ran inside to retrieve a cherished Torah. As he ran out with it, the ceiling collapsed behind him.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the real significance of the Law is not so much whether it is handwritten on a parchment scroll or typeset in a favorite Bible as much as whether it is written on one’s heart and mind. The Law represents a relationship with the Lawgiver. From time to time in Judeo-Christian history, its significance has waned and even essentially disappeared. Yet we would do well to remember that God initiated this covenant with humankind and gave us the Law, not as a series of hoops to jump through to please Him but as a blueprint for life so that we maximize our relationships with Him and with one another. Those who genuinely love God will automatically want to do what He says, strengthening their relationships with Him because they know He has their best interests at heart.

Some people innately resist being told what to do by anyone, including God (or, perhaps, especially by God). This is the essence of lawlessness. When we are aware of the holy solemnity that went into God's giving of the Law, we see what a terrible offense such defiance is to God.

When I speak of lawlessness, I am not talking about well-intentioned believers or seekers who are trying to be good disciples yet stumble occasionally (or even frequently) along the way. That is a part of everyone's personal spiritual growth. But lawlessness is intentional. It is an awareness that God has set specific parameters for our actions—whether we bother to determine what they are or not—and a callous disregard of His Law in order to follow our own desires and passions.

In fact, lawlessness existed long before the Law did, predating even human history. Adam and Eve had hardly set up house in the Garden of Eden before the serpent came along and led them to question God's precise instructions—and, more importantly, His motives (see Genesis 3:1–5). The consequences of their defiant actions were expulsion from the garden, a life made much more challenging and a subsequent awkward distance in the relationship between God and humans.

A few centuries later, Moses had not even made it down from Mount Sinai with the completed Law before the Israelites had given up on him and formed a golden calf to be their god. (Their fear of God, though real, was apparently very short lived.) The resulting consequences were not pretty. Even after Moses interceded for the people to prevent God from destroying them, many of them paid for their lawless, thoughtless behavior (Exodus 32:9–14, 25–28, 35).

God finally got His people to the Promised Land, but they went whining most of the way and ended up taking a forty-year “time out” before arriving. We will look at more recent and even more offensive examples of lawlessness in later chapters.

## Civil Law

Despite the significance of the Law in Judeo-Christian history, when most of us hear the word *law*, we do not think of Moses. Most likely we think of the local, state and national rules that govern society. It has long been understood that when people cluster together to form communities, cities or nations, they need a clear set of laws that all are expected to follow.

One of the best-known early sets of laws was the Code of Hammurabi, which dates back to the mid-1700s BC. Hammurabi was a Babylonian king who ruled more than forty years. His code contained 282 laws grouped logically (contract law, buying and selling, guidelines for relationships, etc.) and written so everyone could understand clearly what was expected. In essence, it served as an early constitution for Hammurabi's culture. An archaeologist discovered the code in 1901, inscribed in cuneiform script on a seven-and-a-half-foot stele shaped like an index finger. You can see it in the Louvre.

Wise leaders have since discovered that Hammurabi was on to something. When overseeing a group of people, large or small, it is easier to establish up front what rules will guide their behavior and interactions.

This was the pattern followed by leaders of the American colonies when it came time to establish the colonies as a nation. First, they composed a Declaration of Independence, explaining in detail why they were breaking ties with Great Britain. One of their first stated grievances was that the English king “has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”

The Colonial leaders followed up this bold declaration with a detailed Constitution, spelling out the rules of government and the rights of citizenship. It is no coincidence that, as you will see if you study the historical records, the founding fathers

were steadfastly devoted to the biblical laws that Moses received thousands of years earlier.

With the guidance of the Declaration of Independence and legal umbrella of the Constitution in place, numerous state and local laws have been established to oversee and guide the citizens of our nation. Americans tend to complain about the “red tape,” “loopholes” and such in the sheer number of laws and vast complexity of our legal system, but we should be thankful we have it. The law may be confusing at times, but it provides security. A lawless society (or world) is a scary one. When even a few people ignore the law of the land or treat it with contempt, it creates danger for everyone.

To give an example, we pass laws requiring drivers to stop at red lights. Most of us have an innate sense of the right thing to do, whether or not we choose to do it; but it is not good enough that 95 percent of drivers agree that it is the right thing to do and do so voluntarily. The other 5 percent would still do tremendous damage to themselves and others if allowed to disregard the restriction. To prevent this, citations are handed out for running a red light. The stakes are higher, of course, for more serious matters: robbery, assault, sexual offenses, murder and so on. Even when laws are established and enforced, intentional affronts to the law create tremendous problems for society as a whole.

Throughout this book I will use the term *lawlessness* to refer not to minor infractions or small segments of society that break the law. Rather, I will use a much broader sense of the term to indicate a time when the rule of law is no longer acknowledged as the basis for society.

If you get a speeding ticket, you have broken the law. Technically, that might make you a lawless person, but that is not the lawlessness I am speaking of. You may have been unintentionally careless, which is true of most of us at times. Perhaps your genuine concern

about some emergency at home caused you to subliminally press your foot on the accelerator a bit too hard in your haste.

If you saw the 55 mph sign, however, and then went barreling down the interstate at 80 mph because you just did not care what the authorities thought, or you thought it should be your right to drive as fast as you want to, then you might have the seeds of a lawless attitude that could become problematic if it carries over to other matters. It is this purposeful and intensifying flouting of the law on a wide-scale basis that will be the topic of this book.

### **What Mystery?**

Occasionally I refer to “the *mystery* of lawlessness.” I do not think many of us would question the *presence* of lawlessness these days, but I intend to delve deeper by addressing the source, the anticipation of and the predicted future for lawlessness. As such, it is indeed a mystery, though still not in the sense that most of us use the word.

We may think of a mystery as something for Sherlock Holmes to solve after he accumulates sufficient clues and puts the facts together in just the right manner. The biblical concept of mystery, however, does not quite fit that definition. Nor does it refer to weighty, secret information that only a devoted few can discern (this was the alluring promise of certain first-century sects developing at about the same time as Christianity).

A biblical mystery is a truth that is understood only after it is revealed by God. It remains unseen by the unenlightened but is clearly evident to those who have spiritual insight—those of whom Jesus frequently said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; and many others). Multitudes could hear the same teaching from Jesus’ mouth, and some would take home

deep spiritual truths while others missed the point altogether. A biblical mystery can either reveal truth or conceal truth—or both, as in 1 Corinthians 2:7–8. The apostle Paul referred to the Gospel itself as a mystery (see Colossians 1:24–27).

Biblical mysteries are outside the range of natural comprehension (see 1 Corinthians 2:13–16). Regardless of intelligence, experiences or desire, we are incapable of comprehending the things of God until His Spirit enlightens us. Paul refers back to Isaiah 64:4 when he reminds us,

As it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

1 Corinthians 2:9–10

Because God’s mysteries are understandable only through divine revelation, it can be surprising who “gets it” and who does not. In the first century, many of the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees were as educated in the things of God as anyone could be. They thought they had a good handle on the Law and the prophets and how the teachings of Scripture should be applied to everyday life. Yet Jesus was regularly at odds with them, even as they were befuddled by His teachings and miracles. He saw clearly their hypocrisy and called them on it, yet they were unable to see that He was clearly fulfilling the plan of God. They just could not figure out the mystery. As Jesus called people to come to Him and, in doing so, get closer to God the Father, He prayed, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes” (Matthew 11:25).

One more point about biblical mysteries: God reveals them at His appointed time. When Jesus began to teach using parables, His disciples asked Him why. Among other things, He told them,

Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. . . . But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Matthew 13:11, 16–17

At one point during the era of the biblical kings, the king of Israel was at war with the king of Syria. God gave Elisha the prophet remarkable insight into everything Syria planned, allowing him to warn the king of Israel and avoid serious trouble. Elisha's forewarnings were so accurate that before long the king of Syria thought he had a traitor in his midst; at the urging of his officers he determined to capture Elisha and bring him in, sending an impressive military force to encircle him.

Elisha's servant looked out the next morning and saw a multitude of Syrian horses and chariots. He was naturally fearful. But Elisha immediately assured him, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). He then prayed, "LORD . . . open his eyes that he may see" (verse 17). When the servant looked out again, he no longer noticed the Syrian forces but instead saw the area dense with horses and chariots *of fire*—God's forces.

The presence and power of God had been there all along, but the servant could not see it until God revealed it to him. But what a difference it made in his outlook on life! It is my prayer that, as we undergo this examination of lawlessness, God will open your eyes and ears so that truth is revealed and you arrive at a much better understanding that will improve your perspective.

## It Comes as No Surprise

God is neither shocked nor taken by surprise by the lawlessness He sees among humankind. Indeed, Jesus told us to expect it. He looked down the corridors of time, far beyond His own impending death and resurrection, and He told His disciples what to expect. Among numerous teachings about the end of the age, He told them,

Many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:10–14

The apostle Paul would soon confirm what Jesus was teaching. He, too, was aware of a grim time in the world's future when lawlessness would increase to unprecedented heights. He warned of a powerful and horrible “man of lawlessness” one day arising; in the meantime,

the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:7–8

Thus the “mystery of lawlessness” was already beginning to spread in the first century and continues to gain momentum; yet it is still being restrained by God. Lawlessness is progressive and will someday

reach its full power when God removes His restraint. Is that day coming soon? That is part of the mystery we will explore.

In later chapters we will examine these and other prophecies in much more detail. But for now let's not miss one key point to keep in mind as we go through this book. Without a doubt, biblical descriptions of things to come and events of the end times can create a sense of worry and foreboding. Sometimes they are taken out of context and used as scare tactics. But as you approach these wonderful and enlightening passages, never forget that they were provided for the *encouragement* of the faithful.

Take another look at Jesus' warning about the last days in Matthew 24. For some people, all that will register will be what He says about betrayal, hatred, deceit and lawlessness. While Jesus did indeed give us fair warning about these, He also spoke of endurance . . . of salvation . . . of the spread of the Gospel. He indicated that we have some choices as to how we will respond to the awful things we witness in our world.

October 2, 2006, began as a gorgeous Indian summer morning in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In the small Amish community of Nickel Mines, the children went as usual to their one-room schoolhouse. Meanwhile, a non-Amish, 32-year-old milk truck driver named Charlie Roberts got home from his shift, walked his children to catch the bus to their own school and kissed them good-bye. Shortly afterward he drove to the Amish school and, brandishing weapons, ordered the adults and all the boys to leave. He then tied the hands and feet of ten girls between the ages of six and thirteen and had them lie down facing the blackboard. Police arrived and tried to talk Roberts into surrendering, but he continued to threaten violence and eventually began shooting each victim in the back of the head, before shooting himself.

Two girls died at the schoolhouse, as did Roberts. Another young girl was pronounced dead by the time she got to the nearest

hospital, and two others were removed from life support and died the following morning. All the surviving girls were hospitalized with varying degrees of injury. One victim was left with serious brain injuries, unable to walk or talk. Speculation for Roberts's motive was that nine years previously a daughter of his own had died only twenty minutes after being born. He had agonized over her death and expressed anger toward God at times.

The incident received national attention, of course, but what followed really ensured that this day would not be quickly forgotten. The shooting took place at about 11:00 a.m., yet that very afternoon the Amish community, including close relatives of the victims, turned out to comfort Roberts's widow, parents and in-laws. Donald Kraybill, a local sociologist, said, "Several families, Amish families who had buried their own daughters just the day before were in attendance [at Roberts's burial service at the cemetery] and they hugged the widow, and hugged other members of the killer's family."<sup>3</sup> It was reported that there were more Amish than non-Amish at Roberts's funeral.

Even now that a decade has passed, certain scars remain from that terrible day. Victims continue to deal with physical challenges. The boys who escaped the tragedy have undergone survivors' guilt. Families still miss their loved ones. But the very next week after the shooting took place, a group of Amish men demolished the schoolhouse, leaving in its place a pasture. They rebuilt the school—renamed the New Hope School—and it opened six months after the incident. Although they could not undo all the damage that had taken place, they did what they could to remove the dark stain of lawlessness from their community.

Most of us will never expect to even approach the degree of forgiveness, grace and mercy offered by the Amish community in the wake of this almost indescribable act of lawlessness. We need to see, however, that evil need not have the last word. We do not

*have* to respond to terror around us with a knee-jerk reaction of cowering, flailing out in rage or plotting revenge. We do have options as to how we respond to lawlessness. We can make more of an effort to heed the rest of Jesus' warning about lawlessness—the part about endurance, salvation and the spread of the Gospel. Even if we have not yet reached the spiritual level to respond as we might wish, we should see that it is indeed possible.

As you read on from here, ask God to open your eyes and ears to reveal things you have never understood before. I pray that this book will be a helpful resource for you, yet it is not likely to do you much good unless you trust the Spirit of God to guide you to His truth. As we turn our attention to the evil all around, keep in mind that it is the same Spirit who can provide all you need to respond more effectively when the world around you is falling apart.