

## Islam in prophecy – the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets of Revelation

A brief commentary by Daniel Treiyer, MD

Current attempts to establish and expand an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East by militant groups like ISIS have led many to wonder about the role of Muslims in biblical prophecy. In sifting through the books of Daniel and Revelation, Adventist pioneers (as many Protestants before them), came across two particular trumpets of Revelation that seemed to describe what they were witnessing take place in Europe in the mid 1800's. Did the Bible portray Islam as the power symbolized in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets? Their diligent studies and the backing of the Spirit of Prophecy indeed led them to conclude that Islam's peak prominence during the Middle Ages and progressive decline during their era was predicted by prophecy. But how did they arrive at this conclusion and can we now be sure they were on the right track?

The key to interpreting the trumpets of Revelation is to first define their purpose. As we will see, their purpose is to reveal God's covenantal protection of His remnant from those who "do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev 9:4). In detailing the covenant with Abraham, God promised to make him a great nation, blessing those who blessed him and cursing those who cursed him (Gen 12:1-3). This promise was confirmed to his offspring many times (Ex 2:24; Deut 28:7, 30:7). In New Testament times, God's people were suffering under the rule of Rome, the last empire prophesied in Daniel. How would God honor the covenant and protect the remnant prior to the second coming of Jesus? This is what the seven trumpets fill in.

Throughout biblical times God raised up deliverers, even foreign nations, to free His people from oppressors. This is why we see the use of trumpets as a call to war (Num 10:9; Judg 7:16-22). They are also a divine response to the cry of God's oppressed people (Judg 6:6; 1 Sam 9:16; 2 Chr 32:20), symbolizing deliverance (Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:51-52; Rev 11:15-19). Lastly, they reveal God's wrath – the first few mixed with *mercy*, the next few intensified with *woes*, and in the seventh the *completion* of wrath with the seven last plagues (Rev 11:18, 15:1; see also Jer 51:57). According to the books of Daniel and Revelation, Rome would cause the tribulation of God's people throughout the Christian era. This is why many Christians saw the trumpets as God's wrath against Rome. In fact, the trumpets begin with the prayers of the saints rising to God (Rev 8:3; refer to Rev 6:10), and are God's answer to the cry of martyrs during Rome's three phases: Pagan Empire of the Caesars (1<sup>st</sup> four trumpets), Holy Roman (papal) and Eastern Roman Empire (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets), and global "Babylon" in the time of the end (7<sup>th</sup> trumpet).

Throughout the Christian era most Protestants saw the trumpets as seven consecutive blows to curtail the tyrannical power of Rome, symbolized as Babylon later in Revelation. They saw them as literal armies used by God, the Arbiter of all destinies, to prevent the extinction of the remnant. In the context of the Great Controversy, these powers would wreak havoc on apostate Rome for its suppression of the Word of God. Historicists saw that the most significant wars that restrained Rome were the Barbarian invasions of the first five centuries and the Islamic invasions from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The seventh trumpet would then announce the time of the end and Christ's imminent return (Rev 10:7; 11:15-19; see Isa 58:1).

In reviewing the symbolism of Rev 9, many interpreters since Beatus of Liebiana in the 8<sup>th</sup> century recognized the desert imagery with words such as scorpions, serpents, locusts, and the smoke from a

pit, abyss, or great furnace (symbol of infernal heat). They also recognized the locust symbol, used in Near East artwork to portray countless invading soldiers (see also Judg 6:5, 7:12; Jer 51:27; Joel 1-2). More importantly, while they were aware that a fallen star represented Lucifer, they determined to know via which specific earthly agents this rebellious angel was operating (as via the king of Babylon in Isa 14, and pagan Rome in Rev 13). The fact that the descendants of Ishmael settled in the desert lands of the Near East (Gen 25:6, 12-18) and along with others became known as the *people of the East* (Gen 29:1; Judg 6:3, 7:12; 1 King 4:30; Jer 49:28; Eze 25:4,10), and also *Arabians* (2 Chr 21:16, 26:7), offered them up as the likely “locusts” described in Rev 9. Early figurative descriptions of the *people of the East* as locusts (see again Judg 6:5, 7:12) added to the evidence.

This historicist legacy from Protestantism was adopted by our pioneers soon after the Great Disappointment of 1844 and formally discussed in the General Conference proceedings of Nov 1883 by a nominated committee. After reviewing a different proposition, this committee concluded not to change the church’s interpretation as to do so would “unsettle some of *the most important and fundamental points of our faith*” (*Review and Herald*, vol 60, no 47, p. 741). Ellen White was aware of this decision and confirmed it a few years later in 1888, adopting the prophetic dates of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets in her book the *Great Controversy*. She branded the witnessed events of August 11, 1840 yet “another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy” (p. 334-335), and detailed them more emphatically in the 1911 edition of the book. Modern scholars have since painstakingly confirmed the significant events of that date as marking the death knell for the Ottoman Turks, the Islamic superpower of the time. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, consensus was lost given several critiques that did not receive comprehensive answers until more recently. For those interested in learning more about these discussions please refer to Jón Stefánsson’s June 2013 thesis at Andrews University: *From clear fulfillment to complex prophecy: the history of the Adventist interpretation of Revelation 9, from 1833 to 1957*.<sup>1</sup>

As we now turn to the verses of the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet, we will see how it is closely knit together in prophecy with the 6<sup>th</sup>, assuring us we live in the time of the 7<sup>th</sup> with Christ’s soon return!

**Rev 9:1-3.** In these verses the *already fallen* star seems a reference to Lucifer, but as stated earlier the earthly agent must also be recognized. Because stars appear from the east, and a *falling* star is mentioned in the 3rd trumpet, some were led to see the agents of torment as appearing from the east. The word “key” is a reference to the use of an agent, with both angels and humans known to receive and use them (Isa 22:20-22; Matt 16:19). The “abyss” is as a symbol of a desolate and/or demonic place (Gen 1:2; Luke 8:30, 31) out of which the torments come. A bottomless pit with smoke is used elsewhere as a symbol of infernal heat (Gen 19:28; Jude 7; Rev 14:11). The locusts are curses that come out of the abyss and translate into invading armies as we described previously (Jer 51:27). History documents that Mohammed’s inflammatory speeches gave rise to the Islamic invasions of the Middle Ages. These came out of desolate regions and succeeded the Barbarian invasions, taking place in the most unexpected and subtle manner, as in “out of the Abyss.”

**Rev 9:4-6.** The 5th trumpet falls on “the inhabitants of the earth” who “do not have the seal of God” (Rev 8:13, 9:4). The “inhabitants of the earth” are those who cause the suffering of the martyrs of the

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<sup>1</sup> See also books by my father, Dr. Alberto R. Treiyer: *Seals and Trumpets* (2005), *The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Trumpets Unraveled* (2012), *The Apocalyptic Times of the Sanctuary* (2014) chapter 8, and articles at [www.distinctivemessages.com](http://www.distinctivemessages.com).

fifth seal (Rev 6:9-10) and submit to the authority of the antichrist for 1260 days/years (Rev 13:3-5,8; 17:8). Because the seal of God is His law (Isa 8:16), the 5th trumpet's judgment was to especially fall upon those who knew the law yet opposed it (see James 4:17; John 9:41). It is amazing that several Sunday laws, backed by legends of divine curses against the defiant, were being issued as the Islamic hordes advanced their military expansion towards the west.<sup>2</sup> Numerous history books also note that the invading Arabs were commanded by the first caliph not to harm the trees or vegetation during their raids.

The 5 prophetic months are repeated twice in this trumpet, and have been linked to the two waves of Islamic invasions. The first can be seen from both a religious and a militaristic perspective. The religious one begins with Mohammed's first speech in 612, and goes until the founding of Baghdad ("House of Peace") as the capital of the Abbasid Empire in 762, marking exactly 150 years following the day/year principle. From the militaristic perspective, the first Islamic expansion ordered by Abu Bakr took place in 632 and lasted until 782 when Harun al-Rashid arrived to Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and instead of warring against it decided to sign a peace treaty.

The second military wave of 150 years took place under the Ottoman Turks. In 1299 the capital of the empire was founded in Söğüt, and the first battle against the Byzantines took place in Bapheus on July 27, 1299.<sup>3</sup> In 1449, the last Roman emperor was crowned by authorization of the Turkish sultan. Given the interconnectedness of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets, the Millerites and our pioneers added to this Ottoman expansion the 391 prophetic days from the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet and arrived at August 11, 1840. On that very day three remarkable events took place: the Turkish sultan submitted to the authority of the European powers, the convoy with European threats arrived at Alexandria, and another military float arrived at Beirut ordering the ruling authority to leave. The power thus shifted to the European/Western countries and has remained that way ever since. Other historicists connect the 391 prophetic days with the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the law of apostasy of 1844 when Turkey promised to no longer kill those apostatizing from Islam (see Rev 9:15: "released to kill").

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<sup>2</sup> A. R. Treiyer, *Seals and Trumpets*, 290-292.

<sup>3</sup> Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 370. Of note in more modern times there has been controversy surrounding the dating of this battle, as some modern historians have attempted to mesh the Ottoman and Byzantine chronologies with the battle of Bapheus as a reference point, dating this important event instead in the year 1302. However, according to Dr. Rudi Pau Lindner (in *Explorations of Ottoman Prehistory* (2010), 103, note 3), this attempt is now considered methodologically flawed. Also, recent numismatic evidence found in the Middle East is adding to the evidence of the year 1299 as marking the beginning of the Ottoman Empire. Another issue in dating the battle of Bapheus that modern authors need to account for is the role of the Alans in that battle, which has historically been dated towards the end of the year 1299. However, renewed research by present-day Adventist historicists on the Alans has pointed to their presence in the Byzantine Empire in the first half of the year 1299, well before Gibbon's dating of July 27, 1299. All this evidence will soon be published by Dr. K. Matthew and Steve Emse.

**Rev 9:7-10.** Illustrations of Arabian Saracen hordes that came from the barren sands of the desert strikingly resemble the descriptions of the 5th and 6th trumpets (see also Joel 2:3-5). Islamic soldiers used helmets seeking to resemble the golden domes of mosques. Their armor was made of iron. Precise colors in reference to their robes are mentioned in the 6th trumpet and confirmed by history. Many also see the use of gunpowder in those verses, not yet available in the time of the 5th trumpet. The scorpion reference attached to horses' tails accurately depicts the style of war that has always characterized Islamic soldiers: one of ambush with unexpected, swift attacks causing anguish (Neh 4:7,11; see also Eze 2:6). In the 6th trumpet a serpent is used instead with similar connotations of strategic, unpredicted attacks. The lions' teeth reference describes their ferocity (see Joel 1:6). Serpents and scorpions are also symbols of evil or wilderness (Luke 10:17-19; Deut 8:15; Gen 3:1-5).



Islamic warrior holding scorpion. Source: D. Nicolle, *Arms and Armour*, 243.

**Rev 9:11-12.** Historians agree that the rise of Islam should be considered a destructive force, well befitting the term Destroyer. These invasions of “locusts” in two waves of five prophetic months destroyed the Eastern Roman Empire by the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet and terrorized the Holy Roman Empire in the West that was martyring God’s remnant.

**Conclusion.** The official interpretation of the trumpets has recently been challenged. However, modern comprehensive studies of both Biblical exegesis and history confirm the trumpets as military invasions against Rome in its different phases. They are God’s answer to the outcry of His people suffering under this foretold power. They assure us God will honor the covenant and remains in control of world events. They also indicate that His appearance is at hand!

“In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196).