

Unlocking Revelation

Omens of the End, Part II

In Part I of our study of Revelation's seven trumpets, we arrived at some conclusions as to their basic nature:

1. Throughout the Bible trumpets are blown to announce war and call people to repentance.
2. The wars of the Old Testament are repeatedly called *judgments of God*, not because He personally or arbitrarily causes war, but because He is the ultimate sovereign over all human affairs. In His infinite wisdom He allows military conflict for the purpose of giving men the painful results of the evil course they pursue, with the hope that some will turn from darkness to light.
3. The seven trumpets of Revelation represent specific judgments of God in the form of military conflicts that demonstrate the destructive nature of sin and prepare the way for the reign of God's righteous kingdom.

In this present study we will interpret the meaning of each individual trumpet and discover the underlying spiritual issue with which the trumpets are concerned.

The Underlying Spiritual Issue

The trumpets vision opens with a revelation of Christ ministering as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. He stands before the golden altar of incense mingling His righteousness (symbolized by the incense) with the prayers of the saints (see Revelation 8:1-3). Our prayers arise seeking forgiveness for our sins, confessing our wrongs, pleading for acceptance with God. The incense that Jesus mingles with our prayers represents His personal righteousness. Incense is intended to mask disagreeable odors. In this case the incense of Christ's righteousness covers the foul aroma of our sinful lives. He continually applies the worthy merits of His own sinless life to the bankrupt accounts of His people. We are wholly dependent on Him for right standing with God. Our salvation is secure by virtue of His grace alone. God saves us because *He* is good, not because *we* are good.

In contrast to the reality of our total dependence on the righteousness of Christ for salvation, the trumpets bring to view the rise and fall of false systems of worship that lead people to place their dependence on themselves—their own merit, their own works, their own righteousness—for acceptance with God.

The first trumpet symbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies as God's judgment against Judaism. The Jewish nation was called into existence by the Lord Himself to herald the gospel of God's free grace to all the world. As a nation they were to bear the name, "the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 33:16), as a testimony of their humble dependence on God. Instead, they exalted themselves and sought to claim God's favor by virtue of their own righteousness. By the time Christ appeared on the distorted scene, they had perfected their works-oriented approach to God into an elaborate system of human ceremonies and rules. They fully believed God would save them because they were good people. But Jesus denounced their entire religious system as a self-righteous delusion (see Matthew chapters 5-7, 23).

The second trumpet shifts our attention to the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The underlying cause of the fall was essentially the same as what ruined Judaism. Rome had ascribed to pagan concepts of God that endeavored to place fallen man in a position to earn salvation by means of virtuous deeds. The second trumpet announces the failure of that system.

The third and fourth trumpets symbolize the devastating influence of Roman Catholicism as it infiltrated Christianity with the very same philosophy that ruined Judaism and the Western Roman Empire. The papal church perfected self-righteousness into a colossal religious system of counterfeit Christianity. Never has the world seen such a masterpiece of human effort to gain heaven by good works.

As the second, third, and fourth trumpets reveal the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the rise of the papacy in its place, so the fifth and sixth trumpets bring to view the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the rise of Islam in its place.

As Christianity rose to prominence and paganism lost much of its influence, Satan worked to create two false systems of religion that would keep the world enveloped in the darkness of self-righteousness. Catholicism in the West and Islam in the East would serve his purpose. The differences between the two religions are obvious. The similarities are not so obvious, but are of great consequence. Both Catholicism and Islam share the one fatal misconception that man can atone for his sins by his personal goodness. While faith in the righteousness of Christ is fallen man's only hope of salvation, dependence on one's own righteousness is the essence of every false religion.

The seventh trumpet announces the reign of Christ and the finishing of His plan of salvation in the hearts of His true follow-

The Sixth Trumpet

"One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt" (Revelation 9:12-19).

Loose the Four Angels

We have learned that the Lord God of heaven is also the sovereign of earth. He rules behind the scenes in the affairs of men. Now, under the sixth trumpet, He wills the complete overthrow of what remained of the Roman Empire. A voice from the heavenly altar says, "Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates." For 150 years the Eastern Empire, right up to the gates of Constantinople, was tormented by the Muslim armies. Now the conquest is to be complete. The four angels from the Euphrates may refer to the four Muslim provinces of Aleppo, Iconium, Damascus, and Baghdad.

An Hour, Day, Month, and Year

At the conclusion of the 150 years of torment in 1449, another time period would mark the conquest of the Turks against the eastern Empire. One "year" is equal to 360 years in Bible prophecy. One "month" is thirty years. One "day" is one year. One "hour" is fifteen days. That gives us a total of 391 years and fifteen days.

In exact fulfillment of this prophecy, the Emperor of Constantinople yielded the Empire's independence to the Turks at the conclusion of the 150 years of torment in 1449. Then, the Ottoman Muslim Empire continued its reign for 391 years. Bible students of the 1800's figured the prophecy from Gibbon's beginning date of the 150-year period of July 27, 1299. Moving forward 150 years they came to July 27, 1449. Moving forward in time another 391 years and 15 days brought them to August 11, 1840. It is here that they expected to witness the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Just as they had figured, after a 391-year rule, on August 11, 1840, the Muslim Empire surrendered its independence to the European nations, just as the Eastern Roman Empire surrendered to its power 391 years earlier.

Fire, Smoke and Sulphur

The army of horsemen brought to view in the sixth trumpet conduct their warfare with fire and smoke and brimstone, which is sulphur. The Muslim armies were the first to use gunpowder and firearms in war. It is likely that this is what John was trying to describe from what he saw in vision.

The Seventh Trumpet

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (Revelation 10:7).

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail" (Revelation 11:15-19).

When the seventh trumpet sounds, the mystery of God's will is accomplished. According to John, the nature of this mystery was declared to the prophets of old.

As a golden thread of hope, the prophets foretold a time when the glory of God's character would illuminate the earth:

"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Numbers 14:21).

"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

"Afterward He brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with His glory" (Ezekiel 43:1-2).

John echoed the same hope:

"And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory" (Revelation 18:1).

The glory of God is His beautiful character of love, holding in perfect balance justice and mercy. It is the misrepresentations of God's character that has filled the world with darkness and pain. The Savior came to this dark world to reveal God's true character, to manifest His glory. After He demonstrated God's love He ascended to heaven and committed to His church on earth the sacred mission of spreading the light of God's love throughout the world. This is why Paul calls "the mystery" of God "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27).

When the people of Christ understand the gospel and experience His love as a reality in their hearts, the glory of His character will shine forth to the world in clear rays that will bring salvation within the reach of all earth's inhabitants.

Then it will be closing time for this present evil world. Christ will take possession of the kingdom and establish His eternal reign of peace and love.



ers. Every other system has proven itself powerless. All human attempts at righteousness have ended in utter failure. Christ alone, His righteousness alone, His kingdom alone has succeeded to restore fallen humanity.

Now we will look in greater detail at each of the seven trumpets.

The First Trumpet

“The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up” (Revelation 8:7).

As we already learned in our previous study of the trumpets, *hail and fire* symbolize war. The fact that John saw the hail and fire mingled with blood is additional reinforcement of this interpretation.

What about the trees and the green grass? Throughout Scripture we find that trees are used to symbolize leaders among the people. In Daniel chapter 4, King Nebuchadnezzar is represented by a tree (see Daniel 4:20-22). In Judges 9 we read a parable of trees. The people are symbolized by trees who anointed a king over them, who is symbolized by an olive tree (see Judges 9:8). The green grass is symbolic of people in general (see Isaiah 40:6, 7; 1 Peter 1:24, 25).

Under the first trumpet we see a third of the trees and all of the grass being burned up. This indicates a substantial loss of life, both of leaders and common people, but not entire annihilation.

Here is announced the destruction of Jerusalem foretold by Jesus Himself. Just as He predicted, that beautiful city was utterly destroyed in 70 A.D., as the Roman armies starved, crucified, burned and pierced through with the sword hundreds of thousands of Jews (see Matthew 24:1, 2). So sounded the first trumpet in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Second Trumpet

“And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed” (Revelation 8:8, 9).

The second trumpet brings to view the fall of the Western Roman Empire represented by the great mountain. The prophet Jeremiah used a burning mountain cast into the sea to symbolize the destruction of Babylon (see Jeremiah 51:25, 42). The second trumpet employs the same symbolism to depict the fall of Rome.

Unlike other nations that were conquered by a single rival power, Rome was conquered over an extended period of time by numerous invasions by barbarian tribes.

Under the leadership of Aleric, the Visigoths obliterated an entire Roman army at Adrianople in 378 A.D., including the Roman Emperor Valens. In 408 Aleric invaded Italy, moving steadily from north to south, pillaging city after city. He met no resistance. Finally he descended upon Rome itself and demanded unconditional surrender. The Senate yielded without a struggle. Then, without notice, Rome was awakened one night in 410 to the vicious ravages of Aleric’s frenzied barbarian army. The city was tormented. Fire and mass bloodshed filled the people with terror for six days. This was the first time any army had invaded Rome in 800 years. It would be comparable to a third world nation taking control of Washington, D.C., and burning the White House.

In June of 455 A.D. the ruthless Gaiseric led the Vandals against Rome. The ancient city was again overrun with barbarians. For fourteen days and nights the people of Rome were literally *vandalized*. Gaiseric and his men transported by wagon everything of value, both private and public wealth, to his ships at the mouth

of the Tiber. Thousands of Romans were taken as slaves. The previous attack by the Goths was terrible, but the onslaught of the Vandals was far worse.

Other tribes that played a part in demolishing Rome were the Huns under Attila and the Heruli under Odoacer.

The year 476 marks the complete fall of the Western Roman Empire, and begins the period known as the Middle Ages. With the fall of the pagan empire, arose the papal empire.

The Third Trumpet

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter” (Revelation 8:10, 11).

The third trumpet shifts our attention from the mere earthly warfare visible through military conflict to the more serious and significant warfare that rages between good and evil in the spiritual realm. This shift in focus is evident in the flow of history as the pagan Roman Empire falls only to give place to the papal Roman Empire, whose chief purpose was to wage war against the people of Christ while professing to follow Him as Lord. The shift in focus is also clear in the language of the third and fourth trumpets.

The Wormwood Star

When the third trumpet is sounded a great star falls from heaven to earth whose name is *wormwood*. Wormwood is an extremely bitter herb. The waters are defiled by it. In the Bible angels are sometimes called stars (see Job 38:7; Revelation 12:4). Jesus said that Satan, the rebel angel, fell from heaven (see Luke 10:18). In Revelation 12, Christ, who is there called Michael, is shown casting Satan out of heaven (see Revelation 12:7-9). Rivers and fountains of waters are symbolic of the pure gospel of Christ (see John 4:14; 7:37; Isaiah 12:3; Jeremiah 2:13). Through these symbols the third trumpet announces the terrible spiritual warfare of Satan against the faithful followers of Christ through the papal church. False teachings were exalted in the place of the pure gospel of Christ. This is the meaning of the wormwood star corrupting the water.

As the pagan Roman Empire crumbled, the papal church built itself upon its ruins (see 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). The year 538 marks the beginning of her long, dark reign. The number of lives slaughtered in the wars of the first and second trumpets was nothing in comparison to the millions that perished by the sword of the church in the Middle Ages.

But more cruel than her sword was her doctrine. She has been named “The Masterpiece of Deception.” The teachings of that false system have done more to misrepresent Christ and His gospel in the eyes of the world than any other factor in human history. Never has Satan had such an effective channel of error and corruption as in the papal church. Indeed, wormwood or bitter heresy, flood the spiritual waters of the world through this artful counterfeit of Christianity.

Chief among her wormwood doctrines is that sinners may be saved by virtue of good works. The whole concept of a loving heavenly Father who delights in mercy and saves by His free grace alone has been entirely obliterated from the minds of countless millions. Stern, vengeful, and exacting was the God of the papacy.

The Fourth Trumpet

“And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars;

so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise” (Revelation 8:12, 13).

Under the fourth trumpet the darkness of the papal night envelops the world.

In Revelation 12:1, the church of Christ is symbolized by “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” In Daniel 12:3, God’s people are likened to *stars* that shine in heaven. And as far back as Genesis we have God’s people symbolized by the sun, the moon and the stars (see Genesis 37:5-11).

The darkening of a third of the sun, moon and stars brought to view under the fourth trumpet is likely a representation of the extensive persecution that occurred during the Middle Ages. But while over 50 million people lost their lives, the symbolic *third part* indicates that God’s people would not be totally wiped out.

The Fifth Trumpet

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

“And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

“One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter” (Revelation 9:1-12).

A Fallen Star

As we have already learned in our study of the third trumpet, a fallen star represents the special activity of Satan, the fallen angel. The work of Satan in the church was described by the apostle Paul as a “falling away” (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Under the fourth trumpet this falling away from the truth of God’s Word brought persecution against those who remained true to the gospel. Under the fifth trumpet this falling away gave cause for the rise of a power which would make war against the apostasy and idolatry now entering the Church.

The Bottomless Pit

The Greek word translated here as “bottomless pit” is *abyssos*, from which we get our English word *abyss*. The intent of the word seems to be to describe desolation. No better word could have been chosen by John to describe the Arabian deserts from which the power of Islam arose. One modern Muslim writer describes

Arabia as “The Abyss of Darkness” (Abul A’La Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation, Quran House, 1973; page 41).

Locusts Emerged From the Smoke

As we noticed in Part I of this study, the prophet Joel employed locust as a symbol of approaching armies (see Joel 2). We are not to take the locust in Revelation as literal. It was purely symbolic of the numbers and destructive power they had.

The Bible says the locust were “like unto horses prepared unto battle.” As we have already established, the trumpets John saw reveal warfare. In this case he is describing the armies of Islam. They were armies that largely attacked on horseback, as John indicated. He extends the detail of his pen-picture by telling us that the riders on the horses had *crowns like gold*, *the faces of men*, and *the hair of women*. Here is an accurate portrayal of the Muslim soldiers. They wore turbans like crowns on their heads and had long hair like women.

Harm Not Those With the Seal of God

The history written by Ibn El Atheer entitled *El Kamal Fe El Tariq* (Islam in Africa and the Near East) tells of a command given by Abu-Bekr that fulfills the prophecy. In this historical account it says that when their ranks were complete, he gave his particular instruction or command to Osama, son of Abu Sufiyan, whom he had appointed General of the Forces. It said: “To avoid injustice and oppression to soldiers; to deserve the love and confidence of the troops; to acquit themselves like men fighting the battles of the Lord; to spare fruit trees, cattle and cornfields; to stand to their engagements and never to stain their victory with the blood of women and children. As you go on, you will find some religious persons that live retired in monasteries who purposed to themselves to serve God in that way. Let them alone, and neither kill them nor destroy their buildings. And you will find another sort of people that belong to the synagogue of Satan, who have shaven crowns. Be sure you cleave their skulls, and give them no quarter till they either turn Muslim or pay tribute.”

So the apostasy of papal Rome gave birth to the Muslim power in the East as it did to Protestantism in the West. Protestant leaders recognized the advantages to be gained from Ottoman imperialism. The Turks repeatedly drew the attention of the Papal persecution away from their thrust towards the faithful and at times protected them. Thus, the spread and consolidation of Protestantism must be to some degree attributed to the Moslem Turks.

Five Months of Torment

The five-month time period brought to view in the fifth trumpet demonstrates the accuracy of our application to the Muslim forces. Five months are equal to 150 days, each month being thirty days in Bible times. In Bible prophecy a *day* is symbolic of a *year* (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). The five months are, therefore, 150 literal years. According to this prophecy, the Muslim armies, swarming like locusts, would war against the Eastern Roman Empire for a 150-year period without total conquest, for they would be given power to “torment,” but not to “kill.”

Bible students have been astonished at the accuracy of this prophecy. Just as predicted, Othman, the first king of the Muslims, made his initial attack against the Eastern Roman Empire in 1299 A.D., July 27 of that year (see Edward Gibbons, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5, chapter 64). From that date the Ottoman Turks did “torment” the Eastern Roman Empire for 150 years without complete victory until 1449.