

Revelation 9:1-11. The Fifth Trumpet



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

Mohammed And The Saracens, A.D. 612-755.

[1] ¶ 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.

[2] 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.

[3] 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.

[4] 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.

[5] 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.

[6] And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

[7] 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.

[8] And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

[9] 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.

[10] And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

[11] 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. (Rev 9:1-11)

WE HAVE ALREADY, in the preceding lecture, remarked the geographical propriety of the selection of the various symbols of Scripture prophecy, serving, as it does, in a great measure to designate the particular country to which the vision points us. Sometimes the imagery is of that general character which belongs alike to every part of the world, but at other times a slight attention to the emblem will convince us that the same Divine mind

that has given to different lands their characteristic objects, has expressly designed the introduction of those objects into the figurative descriptions of the prophecy in order to confine the application to its true locality. It is on these grounds that we are able at once to infer, from the passage before us, the identical country whence this woe was to have its rise, the agents and their commission to destroy, and the particular individual also who was to constitute their prophet and leader.

I. The Country and People.

First as to the peculiar country and people whence it was to originate. The locust, the groundwork of the symbol, is wholly Arabic. It was the "east wind which brought the locusts" on Egypt (Ex. 10:13) – a statement distinctly pointing to Arabia as to the land upon the east of Egypt. The Syrians, we are told by Volney, "have remarked that locusts come constantly from the deserts of Arabia." The terms Arab and locust are in Hebrew almost the same. The symbol is elsewhere in Scripture used with like appropriateness; "They (the Midianite Arabs) came as grasshoppers," meaning locusts. (Judges 6:5)

Great peculiarity attached to these monsters in the vision before us; they were half beast, half man. Their coming, locust-like, in destructive swarms is in accordance with the figure, but their shape was like horses. The horse was peculiarly Arabian, and seems to indicate hordes of cavalry; they were, it is said, "prepared for battle." They had teeth like lions, – savage destroyers of life; and they resembled scorpions in their poison stings, implying that they would be the tormentors of those whose lives they spared.² The scorpion is of the same native locality: witness the words of Moses when reminding the Israelites of God's goodness to them throughout their forty years' wanderings, "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions." (Deut. 8:15) Thus the zoology is all Arabian.

Next, as to the human appearance of these locusts – their faces like men, their hair as the hair of women. What people could be thus pictured? Neither to the Greeks and Romans, nor yet to their Gothic invaders, will the whole of the test apply, the former having had repugnance in John's time to the feminine appearance of long hair in men, (1 Cor. 11:14) while the latter were remarkable, as is noticed by Jerome, for the unmanlike shaven smoothness of their faces. There was, however, a nation to which the whole of the descriptive symbol was literally applicable. Pliny, St. John's contemporary, speaks of the Arabs as wearing the turban, having the hair long and uncut, and with the mustache too on their upper lip – that "venerable sign of manhood," as Gibbon calls it. In the Arabian poem "Antar," written about Mohammed's time, we find the beard and the moustache, the long flowing hair and turban, all specified as characterizing the appearance of the Arab. And the turban of the Arab was often noted as a crown. So Ezekiel spoke of "Sabeans (Arabs) from the desert with beautiful crowns upon their heads." (Ezek. 23:42) One of their national proverbs also tells that turbans were given by God to them instead of diadems.

The breastplates of iron worn by these creatures are also noted in the vision. The Saracen policy was the wearing defensive armor, their coats of

mail being repeatedly mentioned by historians.

Thus, on the whole, these concurrent symbols point to Arabia as the country whence the woe was to originate. And if we turn from prophecy to history we find, at the opening of the seventh century, a fact notoriously verifying the prediction. A mighty Saracen or Arab invasion is the chief event which it records.

II. The Abyss.

But what of the abyss out of which these locusts are said to have issued? The word is often used in Scripture with reference to hell, or the place of the departed wicked. And in the New Testament it is likewise introduced as "the deep," into which the devils entreated of our Lord that they might not be sent; and in the Revelation as "the bottomless pit," where "that old serpent, the devil," is bound. Moreover, as the natural light of the sun is a fit emblem of the spiritual illumination that comes down from the God and Father of lights, so may we infer that whatever is described as darkening the atmosphere, even as smoke from a pit, must be meant in the opposite sense of a moral or spiritual pollution. This smoke, then, in the Apocalyptic vision, we consider to be an emanation from Satan issuing from the pit of hell, i.e., some system of false religion which should obscure truth or dim the light of heaven.

And was it even so? Did it so happen, at this particular juncture, that such a system of pestilent error rose up? And if so, did it take its rise from Arabia?

To these inquiries we reply, Who has not heard of Mohammed, that false prophet, and of the spread of his too popular creed? This deadly evil came out from Arabia at the very time we speak of, a creed the invention of fanaticism and fraud. In its system the blessed God is described as cruel and unholy; and in its morals pride, ferocity, superstition, and sensuality are held up for admiration, and show palpably whence it had its origin. It was just after embracing Mohammedan principles that the Saracens, as "locusts from the abyss," issued forth on Christendom. It was the adoption of this creed, the creed of Mohammed, that made them what they were; that united these hordes as one; that gave them the impulse to fly, locust-like, to propagate their faith over the world, and that imparted to them, as to raging lions of the desert, their destructive fury of fanaticism. Their scorpion venom was thereby prepared to torment such of the Christians as they should bring under their yoke, while the hope of gross licentiousness to be indulged in both here and hereafter added sensualism to their ferocity. Well does the Saracen history accord with the prophetic emblem concerning them!

III. "Hurt not the grass or trees..."

We have to observe the peculiar nature of the commission, "Hurt not the grass or trees, but only the men who have not God's seal on their foreheads." Mohammed expressly declared that his mission was against "idolaters;" and such he considered Christians. But in urging forward his followers against them, the Caliph Aboubeker did but fulfill the precept of the prophet when he

gave the command, "Destroy no palm-trees, nor any fields of corn: cut down no fruit-trees, nor do any mischief to cattle." It was the dictate of policy, not of mercy; for by following this plan the Saracens had, soon after their conquest, formed flourishing countries round them. It was a marked peculiarity, for in other invasions, as the Gothic, fire, sword, and devastation tracked the invader's progress, and was accordingly prefigured in the Apocalyptic imagery; but with the Saracens it was the very reverse, and this reverse still more connects it with the prediction now before us.

IV. "A Star".

We have so far identified this passage with the Arabian heresy and irruption that the inference we clearly deduce is, that Mohammed was the star, or ruler, referred to. But why is this impostor mentioned as a star? and why, still more, since success followed his course for such a length of time, is he said to be a fallen star?

To answer this question we must trace Mohammed's history back to his birth. His origin was princely, being descended from one of the noblest families in 'Arabia'. Gibbon says, "The grandfather of Mohammed and his lineal ancestors appeared in foreign and domestic transactions as the princes of their country." They were, in the view of the Syrian Greeks, as among the stars on the political horizon. But just after the prophet's birth his father died, and soon after his grandfather. Then the governorship of Mecca and keys of the Caaba (or holy place of religion amongst the Arabians) attached to the office passed into another branch of the family. Thus Mohammed became a star fallen from power. He says of himself that at the opening of the seventh century "he was a desolate orphan." He was indeed fallen, when, as a poor widow's servant, he used to traffic in the markets of Damascus.

Mohammed, however, was imbued with a spirit calculated to struggle against and triumph over misfortune. That was already stirring in his mind which was to raise him far above a mere prince of Mecca, the scheme of reascending to the station he had lost by introducing a new system of superstition. About three miles from Mecca was a cave called Hera; it was a secret and a desolate spot. There he withdrew every year to consult, as he said, a spirit who was wont to visit him in his solitary hours and hold converse with him. Gibbon well calls it "the spirit of fraud and enthusiasm, whose abode was not in heaven, but in the mind of the prophet." This cave has aptly suggested to interpreters the idea of the pit of the abyss, whence the pestilential fumes and darkness were seen to issue.

When, privately at first, and then more publicly, he began to announce his creed, for awhile his uncle and the elders of the city affected to despise the orphan's presumption. They chased him from Mecca, and his flight marks in history the era of the Hegira, A.D. 622. Seven years afterwards was seen in Mecca's streets one to whom all bowed down in honor, whose words the multitudes revered, to whose command armies were obedient, who swayed the minds of men that they yielded implicit faith to his wild or crafty imaginations. The "fallen star" had come forth again. The key of office was restored to him. "The fugitive missionary was enthroned as the prince and the prophet of his native country."³ The key of God, asserted in the Koran to

have been given to Mohammed to open the gate of heaven to believers, continued to be borne by his followers both as a religious and a national emblem, and may still be seen sculptured on the proud gate of justice in the Alhambra or palace of the Moors. Even so in allusive contrast it is written in Revelation, "The key of the abyss" was given to him, and truly the smoke that arose upon his opening, was as the pestilential fumes and darkness of hell.

Having thus endeavored to illustrate the suitability of these emblems in the vision to the rise of Mohammedanism, and of the Moslem Arabs in the seventh century, let us follow on and try whether their subsequent history will verify the other intimations respecting them.

"There came out locusts on the earth." It was in A.D. 629 that the Saracens first issued from the desert and proclaimed war against Christendom. The year 639 saw Syria subdued, and the Muezzin, calling to prayer, soon after sounded from a mosque built on the site of Solomon's temple. There is he still heard to this very day, when the appointed hour comes round for remembering the prophet. The subjugation of Egypt followed quickly on that of Syria; then, some few years after, that of the African provinces; then, at the commencement of the eighth century, that of Spain. All this was within the limits of Roman Christendom, and consequently within the sphere of the Apocalyptic vision. But beyond this their conquests extended far and wide with terrible rapidity. Two short statements from history will give some idea of the progress of the Saracens, and of the desolations caused by them, of whom it might be said, as was said of the desolating force mentioned in Joel, "The land was as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." The one, — that in ten years, i.e., from A.D. 634 to 644, they had reduced three thousand six hundred castles to ruins, destroyed four thousand churches, (see footnote) and had built fourteen hundred mosques for the exercise of the religion of Mohammed. The other, that at the end of the first century of the Hegira, the Arabian empire had been extended from the confines of India and Tartary to the shores of the Atlantic.

Bitterly did the Christians feel the scorpion sting. They were deprived of the use of their arms, and, like slaves of old, made to pay annually a life-redemption tax. They were required to stand up always in presence of their tyrants, and were called by the names of opprobrium, as "infidel dog, Christian dog," etc. In further token of contempt of their religion, to which the Christians still clung with fond attachment, no new churches were permitted to be built, no church bells to be rung, while the scoffing Moslem had free access, even during divine worship, to all those which were allowed to exist. Insults of the grossest kind were continually offered to Christian females, and undefinable acts of oppression practiced on all. Every inducement was offered to apostasy, and the punishment of death was inflicted on any who, after apostasy, again professed the Christian faith.

These locusts, it is said, had a king over them, whose name was "Abaddon," or the "Destroyer." Mohammed professed that the spirit of the cave had dictated to him the Koran; this was accordingly the law that governed the Saracens. The Caliphs, or chief governors, held rule only as vicars of the false prophet. What the doctrine of the book was, as acted out by them, appeared on

the field of battle. There when we see not only the loss of bodily life resulting, but also the ruin of souls from the poisonous precepts of Mohammedanism, we cannot find more fitting title to express the perpetuation of the prophet's character in each successive Caliph than that of the "Abaddon," the "Destroyer" of Christians!

There was, however, a term and limit prescribed to these locusts, both as to effect and as to duration. For observe, they were not to kill, i.e., to annihilate the men of Roman Christendom as a political body, but "only to torment them." And this woe was to last 150 days, i.e., in prophetic language, 150 years.

Vain, accordingly, were the Saracenic efforts to destroy the State. Twice did they attack Constantinople, the capital of the eastern division of the Roman empire; they were defeated with ignominy and obliged to retire; the last of which repulses was in A.D. 718. Again, in the West, when they sought to destroy Pelayo and his band of Goths in the mountains of Asturias, they were twice driven back with disgrace, A.D. 711. Still more remarkably, when they attempted to subjugate France in 732, they suffered signal discomfiture from Charles Martel; though he did not succeed in driving them from Provence and Lyons till fifteen or twenty years after. Still, though hindered from driving further conquests, the locust-swarm remained to torment, and was united under one head. About the middle of the eighth century, however, a division took place among themselves. The Caliphate was divided; one Caliph being set up in the west, and an opposing Caliph in the east.

The eastern Caliph, resolving to build a new capital, laid the foundation of it at Bagdad, and thither the head of the locust tribe and the swarm took their flight. Once settled at Bagdad, the Saracens began to decline from the warlike spirit which had animated them. Gibbon says, "The luxury of the Caliphs relaxed the nerves and terminated the progress of the Arabian Empire." In the west, the son of Charles Martel drove back the Saracens beyond the Pyrenees, A.D. 755. Again, in the year 761, the Christian remnant in Spain turned back the tide of war on their oppressors.

The termination of the Saracen woe, at least in intensity, may date at this period, i.e., A.D. 762.

Observe now what had been the length of time occupied in these transactions. We date from the period when Mohammed publicly announced his mission to propagate his religion by violence and with the sword – a mission which made his followers a woe to all countries, but specially to Christendom. The destroying commission might be said to commence at that period when Mohammed, addressing his assembled followers, inquired, "Who will be my lieutenant?" Ali, called by him "the Lion of God," replied, "O prophet, I will be thy lieutenant. Whoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip him open. I am the man. I will be thy vizier." Mr. Hallam justly observes, "These words of Mohammed's illustrious disciple are, as it were, a text upon which the commentary extends into the whole Saracenic history."

Thus then, reckoning from A.D. 612 to A.D. 762, when the Caliphate was

removed to Bagdad, we find the intervening period to be precisely 150 years.

To two remarkable coincidences which occurred during this period we should give attention. It has been observed that the apostasy of the Church was the assigned and predicted cause of this judgment. Now Mohammed's asserted commission was specially directed against idolaters; and it was in that character, as an idolatrous people, that Christendom appeared when the Saracen woe fell upon it. Up to the close of the seventh century, the reproach of image-worship might seem deservedly to give cause for the scourge which they suffered under the Moslem sword; but about the year 717, the Isaurian family ascended the throne of Constantinople. For sixty years its princes, supported by many real Christians, though opposed by the Popes and the masses of the people, resisted image-worship, and endeavored to overthrow it. Mark, then, it was during this period of resistance to the error that the Saracen horde received its first defeat at Constantinople.

Again in A.D. 754 Constantine Copronymus called a council in order to condemn the idolatrous image-worship. It passed a solemn judgment against it; and, behold, it was the very next year that the Caliphate was divided, and the intensity of the Saracenic woe was brought to an end.

But, alas! the efforts of these emperors availed but little. In the year 781, the Queen Irene succeeded to the throne, having murdered her image-destroying husband. She convened what is called the seventh general council; and by a solemn act of the Catholic Church the worship of images was declared lawful. Just then the Saracenic woe seemed for a time to revive. The Arab forces swept through Asia Minor into Greece, again and again bearing down all before them. Was there in all this no warning from God? The Eastern Church, however, persisted. In A.D. 842 the struggle ended under the reign of the Empress Theodora, and image-worship became indisputably established; Through the ninth and tenth centuries it so continued; yet such was the long-suffering of God, no judgment seemed to follow. But the time of retribution came at last.

Here we close as far as regards this vision. But a fact or two relative to the downfall of the Saracenic power may be added. Luxury, we have said, weakened its strength. In A.D. 841 the Caliph, distrusting his guards, was forced to hire a protective force of 50,000 Turks. These, like the Praetorian guards at Rome, in their turn became tyrants, and accelerated the sinking of the Saracens. At Fez and Tunis, in Egypt and Syria, in Khorasan and Persia to the east, new and independent powers were formed. A third Caliphate arose at Cairo. The Persians, in A.D. 934, stripped the Caliph of Bagdad of all temporal power, and left him only the title of Pontiff of Islamism. In the west a century after the Saracens were driven out, and though they continued as marauders, and even gained victories in Crete and Sicily, the woe might be said to have passed from Christendom.

Footnote

The number of churches destroyed may at first sight appear incredibly large; it may be well, therefore, to form an idea of the extent and power to which the nominally Christian Church in these parts had extended in the early centuries. In Palestine alone were 74 bishoprics, and 50 in Phoenicia and

Arabia. The ruins of churches and cathedrals shew how great their grandeur had been. Antioch itself had 360 churches. Between this city and the sea is a hill called Ben-ki-liseh, or the thousand churches, from that number being erected on it. The see of Antioch exercised power over 203 bishops, besides 12 archbishops, etc. Exclusive of this, attached to Tyre were 13 bishoprics; to Ahamea, 7; Hierapolis, 8; Seleucia, 24; Damascus, 10; Caesarea, 19, etc. Many other similar lists are given in Roland's History of the Episcopal List of the Three Palestines, alluded to in Dr. Keith's Land of Israel p. 187, from which the foregoing is extracted. Edifices of Saracenic structure, scattered over Syria, show that these invaders sought to perpetuate their conquest, and made it their work to build as well as to destroy.

The ecclesiastical tyranny, which continued for centuries after, had at this period reached to great power; church architecture and church offerings forming a large part of church religion.↵

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