

Revelation 9:13-21 – The Sixth Trumpet

The second part of Revelation 9 describes the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the last warning before final judgement—but people didn't change: [read vv21-22]. These trumpets leading up to the seventh, announce increasingly severe punishments on people who refused to love Jesus for who He is. That's what Jesus taught in John's Gospel: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (Jn. 3:18-19). That's not just people in ancient times. The number one reason people reject Jesus today is because of what we have to give up to follow Jesus. It's a question of love. We embrace what we can't live without. Most decide they can live without Jesus, but will discover in the end: nobody can live without Jesus. One way or another. That's what Revelation 9 is about.

In this vision God gave John, symbols appeared before his eyes like actors on a stage, but these symbols were predictions of real events in the future (when he saw the vision). Now in the 21st century, 1900 years later, many of these predictions have come true. The completed symbols we've looked at so far in these sermons took us through events all the way through the first 8 centuries, up until the end of the Muslim Arab conquests in the late 700s. Then we get to this set of symbols announced by the sixth trumpet: four angels at the river Euphrates, an impossibly large army of horsemen, shrouded in ominous colours, shooting fire and sulfur out of their mouths—an awful apocalyptic plague. We already read what happened as a result—the rest of the people who weren't killed by these plagues still refused to give Jesus the love and worship He deserves. Maybe you think that sounds like coercion? That God is forcing people to worship Him? But how do you feel about Tent City's escapades? Does God have any less right over His property than you do over yours? You and I are camping illegally on God's property. *And* we are His creatures. Maybe it hasn't occurred to you, but you and I have committed a tonne of scandalous hate-crimes against the Creator who still keeps paying our bills, who hasn't yet evicted us.

The Turks evicted the Byzantines, c.1050-1453.

I'll explain in a few minutes why I believe these symbols predicted the Turkish invasions of the Byzantine Empire, and why the Byzantines were guilty of hate-crimes against Jesus, but let me first jump into verse 16. While it's true that the Ottoman armies were huge, this number in verse 16 isn't about the size of the Ottoman army, but a direct quote describing the size of God's army: God's eviction squad. After all, verse 15 said the four angels were released to destroy; verse 16 out of the blue mentions "mounted troops", who appear when God summons them. No matter how many earthly mounted troops there were, the four angels were more powerful. This number is not an estimate of the size of the Ottoman forces, it's part of the symbolic picture John saw and heard on stage to remind us that no matter how big an army is on earth, the force at God's disposal is infinitely greater. This is the only time this number, "twice-ten-thousand" is used in the New Testament.ⁱ "Twice-ten-thousand" is unique, and oddly specific. Like it's a clue. And it is. The Hebrew equivalent only occurs in Psalm 68:17, where the Hebrew reads,ⁱⁱ "*The chariots of God are twice-ten-thousand and multiplied thousands*" [my trans.].ⁱⁱⁱ In Hebrew it's not a precise number, just a vast number. That's how we should read the quotation here also.

Here's the thing: the army can't take salvation away from believers, but Jesus did send it to take life from unbelievers, evicting rebels from His land. We still look back at how Islam overran the Middle East like Elisha's servant in 2 Kings 6:15, "Alas my master! What shall we do?" Elisha's response was that it is

the enemies of God's people who are outnumbered, if only we had eyes able to see the spiritual forces of God's armies available at His command! (c.f. 2 Ki 6:16-17). Psalm 68:17 says this is the size of God's army. And the next verse is quoted in Ephesians 4 saying that Jesus is in command of this army. No earthly king in history has had 200,000,000 troops. But Elisha saw what Psalm 68 says, and John affirmed in Rev 9, that no matter how numerous and how powerful our enemies are, Jesus is the LORD of Hosts, the Commander of the armies of the Lord. He is the Lord. He is also the Advocate before God for everyone who by faith relies on Him. This Lord calls us to repent of our unbelief, repent of doubting whether He can be trusted and neglecting the salvation He won for you and me. Or else. This is an eviction notice. These armies were serving their Sultan, but he was unwittingly serving Jesus! (**Rev 1:5a**)

People loyal to the High King have nothing to fear. One of the most beautiful, most comforting verses in the Bible, that inspires genuine love for Jesus in the hearts of those who trust Him, is 1 John 2:1, which John wrote not long before God gave him the vision of Revelation: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Why does John call Jesus "our Advocate" and "the Righteous"? What sinner could represent us to God? But Jesus has earned His Father's favour by His righteousness. It makes every difference that "the Righteous One" is our intercessor with God! So I love seeing how righteous Jesus is in the Gospels! It strengthens my confidence in Jesus to see it. And the more confident we become in Him, the more we love Him so that He wins our loyalty by His faithful goodness. Don't you long to become more confident in Jesus? Tell me this: if you were two-hundred million times more confident in Jesus tomorrow than you were yesterday, would it make any difference? Think about that. The vision of the golden censer and altar in Rev 8, with the prayers of the saints made holy and acceptable to God because of the finished sacrifice of Jesus—so that God accepts us on account of the righteousness of Christ!—this wonderful love and acceptance with God is what so many reject to this day.

[The voice from the golden altar \(v13; 8:3b\)](#)

The trumpets came because the Lamb and His altar were rejected [**read** 8:5-6]. The sixth trumpet sounds and a voice comes from the horns of *that* altar of gold (Rev 8:3b)--where the prayers of every Christian are made holy to God--this verse takes us back to show that the sixth trumpet judgement also happens because of what was shown in chapter 8 [**read** v13; 8:3b-4] That symbolic scene taught us that Jesus is our righteous advocate before God. But even the plagues of the fifth and sixth trumpets didn't change people's hearts toward Christ. The fifth trumpet, the first 150 years of Islam, sounded on an era when Christians actively denied Jesus is a righteous enough advocate. Church councils during this time, in 553, 680, and 787, tried to correct the false teachings being taught in churches--that last council concluded that the widespread practice of praying to icons of saints, or to Mary, or even images of Jesus, is the same as idol-worship.^{iv} But Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches encouraged people to pray to icons. And they still do. In an Internet article officially endorsed by the Catholic Church, the writer defends praying to the saints by arguing (with lots of Bible quotes) that praying to a dead saint is like asking another Christian to pray for us, except that dead saints are more righteous than ordinary believers are, so God will be more accepting of their prayers for you.^v The article would be pretty convincing except for three big mistakes: 1) when we think another Christian's prayers are more acceptable to God because they are more righteous than we are, it shows that we aren't depending on Jesus Christ the Righteous, but ours or someone else's righteousness. And it shows that the basis of our religion is works-based righteousness--not faith in Christ. 2) It ignores the fact that all believers in Christ are called "saints" in the Bible.^{vi} 3) It's a false analogy: Though it is a good thing to ask other Christians to

pray for us, asking dead Christians to pray for us is praying to dead Christians instead of praying to God. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father who art in Heaven..." (Mat 6:9). Every time someone prays to Saint Christopher or to Mary they are literally disobeying Jesus. So praying to saints adds insult to injury: it is disobeying Jesus, and it denies Jesus is righteous enough to make us acceptable to God. [read vv20]

Let loose the angels to destroy [read v14]

The four angels who we met earlier, in Rev 7:1-3—ordered to hold their fire until God's people were all sealed and saved—are now released.^{vii} We saw they were described as having "been given power to harm earth and sea",--the Roman Empire and everything alive in it. The first 5 trumpets were warnings. With the sixth trumpet, the time has come to let them loose! From the Euphrates River of all places! In chapter 7 they are standing at the edges of "the earth", i.e. the edge of "the Roman Empire" in the symbols of Revelation. So it lines up with this interpretation, that they are let loose from the Euphrates River, which Mounce explains: "The Euphrates was... the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire..."^{viii} After the 150 years of Muslim conquest predicted in Trumpet #5, the region east of the Euphrates belonged to the Islamic Caliphate in Baghdad. But by the end of the 15th century, everything from Iraq to almost Vienna, was ruled by Turkey. This trumpet judgement predicted how the longest-lasting "Christian" empire in history (5 x older than the USA) became Turkish and Muslim.

[read v15] From around 800-1000, the so-called "Christian" Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, and the Arab Islamic Caliphate in Baghdad, on the other side of the Euphrates, were both too weak to seriously threaten each other. Then a Turkish Sultan named Tughril Beg burst on the scene. He dreamed of uniting Islam, and founded the Seljuk Empire. His son managed to wrestle most of Turkey (today) away from the Byzantines by 1075.^{ix} Turkish people moved in. Time passed. The Crusades wreaked havoc for a while. Until a small Turkish tribe called the Ottomans, came out of nowhere in the 1300's.^x In a series of breathtaking victories, the Turkish Ottoman armies swept through the Balkans (Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Greece), defeating the united Crusader armies of Europe at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396.^{xi} Byzantium found itself surrounded by the Ottoman Empire, only the fortress of Constantinople was left. That proud city that had ruled the former Roman Empire, the capital of European civilization for a thousand years! It finally fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. For centuries afterward, its absence was felt more than if New York was suddenly wiped off the map tomorrow.^{xii} Those four angels had been prepared to bring the Turks to Turkey and end the Byzantines. And how long did all this take? Tughril Beg set out from Baghdad to unite the Islamic Caliphate on January 19, 1057.^{xiii} Constantinople finally fell on May 29, 1453. On the year day scale, (a day in prophecy = a year in history, c.f. Num 14:34; Eze 4:6; Dan 9:25-27) the time between those events is (**verse 15**) "an hour, a day, a month, and a year" (adding it up you get about 396 1/3 days = 396 1/3 years).^{xiv} [read v15] The first four trumpets targeted "the third" (one of the three parts at that time) of the Empire governed by the city of Rome, this "third" (**v15b**), final part of the old Empire died out when Constantinople became Istanbul.

The description John saw is a clue to how the city fell [read vv17-19]. The actual colours, in Greek, are "fiery, hyacinth, and sulfurous" (see the NKJ). Some respected NT Greek experts argue "hyacinth" or "sapphire" in the ESV, should actually be the "dusky blue colour as of sulphurous smoke"^{xv, xvi}. So then the 3 colours are better translated, "fiery red, smoky blue, and sulfurous yellow". A Turkish historian described the battle, and the "fiery jaws", and the "smoke which spread", from the sulfurous gunpowder of huge canons the Ottomans built^{xvii} for the siege of Constantinople.^{xviii} Those massive weapons made military history: *Wikipedia* says one of their great Bombards, "was 27 feet (8.2 m) long,

and able to hurl a 600 lb (272 kg) stone ball over a mile (1.6 km).^{xix} The prophetic description of wounding by serpent tails is an analogy that became recognizable after it was fulfilled. Verse 18 makes it clear the fire, smoke, and sulfur are really plagues, “divine blows”: [read v18] like the 10 plagues on Egypt, but as divinely ordained punishment for choosing to live without relying fully on Jesus Christ our Righteous Advocate. [read v19] Get this: The sulfurous gunpowder was even called “serpentine powder”.^{xx} And their Sultan and officers wore horse tails as badges of rank!^{xxi} I couldn’t make this up. The way the events so closely answer to the symbols in the sixth trumpet was so convincing that Protestant scholars were almost unanimous that this was how chapter 9 was fulfilled from the Reformation until the middle of the 1800s.^{xxii} ^{xxiii}But so what?

We should never be afraid of Islam, or think about it the same way again. Like the Babylonians against Judah, God raised up invaders who deny Jesus Christ to punish so-called believers who were disloyal to Jesus Christ. It’s the same irony Habakkuk complained about when God sent Babylon to punish Judah: God used a more wicked nation to punish the wicked nation (Hab 1:13). Verse 20 is stunning: the rest of Christendom either didn’t believe God did this, or didn’t care. We don’t have that excuse: knowing how the prophecy came true should wake us up! European Christianity turned away from the Gospel and embraced corruption. In the next series of sermons we’ll see how that turned out. But if we don’t repent, that could be us: do we embrace the open access Christ gives us to God in prayer? Do we fight the love of sin in our hearts by remembering why it is so much better to love Jesus Christ the Righteous? Before you look down on apostate Christians, or on Muslims, look at your own prayer life: *Judging from our love for Jesus, how Christian are we?*

ⁱ The first part is literally, a “double-myriad”, or “double-ten-thousand”, followed by the multiple, “myriads” or “ten thousands”. “Myriad” occurs 7 other times in the NT (31 times in the whole Bible). Nowhere but here, however, has “twice-myriad”—a direct equivalent as possible to the Hebrew רַבְתִּים, which is dual in form, not singular or plural. “Twice-ten-thousand” is as close as you can get to the same thing in Greek.

ⁱⁱ For other commentators who see the connection, see Thomas, John Christopher. *Revelation* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary) (p. 188). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ See J.A. Alexander’s translation: “...two myriads, multiplied thousands” (*The Psalms Translated and Explained* [3 vols., 1850. Online Bible Edition.], “Psa 68:17”).

^{iv} Wikipedia, “First seven ecumenical councils”

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_seven_ecumenical_councils#Second_Council_of_Constantinople_\(553\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_seven_ecumenical_councils#Second_Council_of_Constantinople_(553))]. Accessed October 26, 2018.

^v Catholic.com, “Praying to the saints” [<https://www.catholic.com/tract/praying-to-the-saints>]. Accessed October 25, 2018.

^{vi} c.f. Rom 16:15; 2 Co 1:1, 13:13; Eph 1:15, 3:8, 18, 6:18 [showing these are ordinary believers, not dead ones]; Phil 1:1, 4:22; Col 1:4; Heb 13:24 [showing they were local believers who could be greeted!]

^{vii} MacArthur, John. *Revelation 1-22* MacArthur New Testament Commentary Two Volume Set (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (Kindle Locations 5230-5231). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition. Dr. MacArthur takes too narrow a view of the word “to be bound”. He says angels are never “bound” in the Bible. Yet, the four in 7:1-3 received a divine command they were required to obey. Hence “they were bound” by it. In Acts 20:22, Paul uses the same word to say he is “constrained by the Holy Spirit”, to obey Him (also see Rom 7:2, 1 Co 7:27, 39). It is in this sense in Rev 9:14, that these four angels were previously “bound” by the command from God “do not harm...” (Rev 7:3). This is the same way the word “bound” is used in the LXX of Prov 25:12—a gem is “bound” in a gold ring like wise reproof binds a listening ear.

^{viii} Mounce, Robert H.. *The Book of Revelation* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 194). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition. Dr. Mounce previously said these angels could not be the

same as in 7:1-3 for the reason that in that place they are at the four corners of the earth. The solution is in his own words in this quote: the edge of the "earth", interpreted as "the Roman Empire", was at the Euphrates River.

^{ix} *Wikipedia*, "Seljuk Empire: Alp Arslan" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seljuk_Empire#Alp_Arslan]. Accessed October 26, 2018.

^x "The dissolution of the Seljuq state left behind many small Anatolian beyliks (Turkish principalities), among them that of the Ottoman dynasty, which eventually conquered the rest and reunited Anatolia to become the Ottoman Empire." [From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sultanate_of_Rum]

^{xi} *Ibid.*, "Battle of Nicopolis" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Nicopolis]. Accessed October 26, 2018.

^{xii} "The cumulative influence of the city on the west, over the many centuries of its existence, is incalculable. In terms of technology, art and culture, as well as sheer size, Constantinople was without parallel anywhere in Europe for a thousand years." [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople#Importance>]

^{xiii} Richards, D.S.. *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh of Ibn al-Athir* (Routledge Studies in the History of Iran and Turkey) (p. 108). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition. Also, "By 1054 his forces were contending in Anatolia with the Byzantines and in 1055 he was commissioned by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Qa'im to recapture Baghdad from the Buyids." [Wikipedia, "Tughril: Reign", [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tughril>]. Accessed October 25, 2018]. He had been summoned previously by the Caliph to come and protect his lands which is why Tughril Beg went to Baghdad [Richards, *Annals*, pp101-102].

^{xiv} Or a year of days (365.25), a month of days (30), a day (1), an hour (1/24th of a day) = 396.29 years / 144,745.5 days, OR 396.33 years / 144,760 days (If "an hour" is 1/24 of a day, or 15.21 days on the year-day scale, then adding that to January 19, 1057 arrives at May 5, 1453. If "an hour" is 1/12 of a day (the ancient concept of a day, c.f. John 11:9), or 30 days on the year-day scale, then it comes to May 20, 1453).

[<https://www.timeanddate.com/date/dateadded.html?d1=19&m1=1&y1=1057&type=add&ay=&am=&aw=&ad=144760&rec=>]

^{xv} Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p647.

^{xvi} Mounce, Robert H.. *The Book of Revelation* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 196). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

^{xvii} Collins (below) cites the historian Chalcocondylas, p215, fn. 72.

^{xviii} Cited in Oral E. Collins, *The Final Prophecy of Jesus* (Wipf and Stock, 2007), p.215, fn.73.

^{xix} *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Constantinople#Ottoman_dispositions_and_strategies]. Accessed October 26, 2018.

^{xx} Geoff Smith, *Academia*, "Serpentine gunpowder: Wet or Dry?"

[http://www.academia.edu/29232651/Serpentine_gunpowder_Wet_or_Dry]. Accessed October 26, 2018. C.f., *Journal of the Arms and Armour Society*, Vol. XIX No.2 p. 54.x`

^{xxi} The military leaders and governors of the Ottomans were called *Pashas*, where the word "shah" comes from, and their badge of rank was a horse tail. The more horse tails, the higher the rank. The Sultan had four. C.f. Collins, p. 216, and fn.75. Also see *Wikipedia*, "Pasha" [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pasha>]. Accessed October 26, 2018.

^{xxii} Collins, p. 215.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, p.222, fn.84.