

THE DATES FOR THE FIFTH AND SIXTH TRUMPETS OF REVELATION CHALLENGED A Trend to Depart from our Adventist Historicist Legacy

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The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) interpretation of the fifth and sixth trumpets of Revelation has been officially established since the beginning of our existence as a prophetic movement. The agreement has been that the events portrayed in these trumpets were fulfilled in 1449 and 1840 respectively. During several sessions of the General Conference and in our magazines *Review and Herald* and *Ministry*, those dates were placed together with 1833 (the sixth seal) and 1844 (the seventh trumpet) and considered *landmarks* in SDA church history in connection with its prophetic interpretation. The main reason there was such firm conviction that led to an official statement of belief regarding the fulfillment of these prophecies had to do not only with the historical events many of our pioneers were actual witnesses of, but also with the endorsements of E. G. White in her book *The Great Controversy* (1888 and 1911 editions). We must remember she also witnessed the marvelous events that fulfilled these prophecies. For more details regarding the SDA church's official interpretation of the trumpets see my book *The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Trumpets Unraveled* (2012).

The challenges

This official view, however, was challenged after the death of E. G. White by W. W. Prescott (former president of the GC) and W. A. Spicer (Secretary of the GC) in 1914 and during a Biblical Conference that took place on July 17, 1919. See (<http://essaysbyellenwhite.wordpress.com/2008/04/>) and (http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/RBC/RBC19190717_B.pdf#view=fit). The difficulties some of our church leaders and theologians expressed at that time can be summarized into four basic points:

1. The date of July 27, 1299 offered by Gibbon (a secular historian) for the beginning of the 150 days/years would be wrong. The correct date for the beginning of the second wave of Islamic invasion would instead be 1301, according to what Von Hammer (a German specialist on Ottoman history) has now written.
2. Nothing happened 150 years later on July 27, 1449.
3. The 150 years should be recognized as taking place during the first Islamic wave of expansion accomplished by the Saracen conquest, not by the Ottoman power. There is inconsistency in referring to the Saracens to prove the fulfillment of the events of the fifth trumpet and then referring to the Ottomans to settle on the dates.
4. E. G. White's endorsement of Josiah Litch's interpretation concerning those dates (in the two versions of the book *The Great Controversy*) has hindered the ability to expand upon different interpretations.

It took 25 years for our church to answer the first challenge. The remarkable answer was prepared by Grace Amadon and published in *Ministry* in June and July of 1944 (see <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1944/06/a-landmark-of-history> and <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1944/07/a-landmark-of-history%E2%80%9427,-1299>). The correct date was indeed July 27, 1299, not 1301. This is today even astronomically confirmed.

The second and fourth challenges are discussed further below.

The third challenge is easily answered when we realize that the fifth trumpet deals with two military waves with a period of 150 years each. For details see my two books, *The Seals and the Trumpets. Biblical and Historical Studies* (2005) and *The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Trumpets Unraveled* (2012).

In more recent years several interpreters of our church added four additional challenges to the official interpretation of the prophetic dates of the fifth and sixth trumpets.

5. The Gregorian Calendar in the year 1582 dropped 10 days from the Julian Calendar (Desmond Ford), so the date of August 11, 1840 proposed by Josiah Litch is wrong.

6. The historical events of August 11, 1840 are not confirmed by history.

7. E. G. White was not a specialist in historical matters, so we should discard her endorsement of Litch's proposed dates.

8. E. G. White was not actually intending to say that the sixth trumpet of Revelation had been fulfilled. She instead was simply portraying what the Millerites believed at the time, and how the events taking place in Turkey strengthened their faith.

The fifth challenge is discussed further below.

Concerning the sixth challenge to our historical and official interpretation of the trumpets we may say that it is based on ignorance and intellectual laziness. Those authors or presumed scholars in our church that assure us nothing actually happened on August 11, 1840 to fulfill the prophecy have not taken the time to adequately and meticulously search history. They are thus ignorant of what many modern secular historians have been writing about these events that confirm what E. G. White and our pioneers had written. What is more disturbing, however, are the last two direct challenges of E. G. White which had the immediate consequence of initiating an open departure from our historical and official prophetic interpretation of the trumpets. They have introduced a tremendous amount of confusion and uncertainty in our church regarding our historicist legacy. Since the clear testimony of the Spirit of Prophecy is being put aside on this matter, this new trend of prophetic interpretation is reaching more and more visions of the Apocalyptic books of the Bible.

The unfortunate role of the Biblical Research Institute

During the 1980's the *Biblical Research Institute* (BRI) of the General Conference undertook several studies on the Apocalyptic prophecies that included the trumpets of Revelation. At the conclusion of those studies they acknowledged a lack of understanding regarding the majority of the first half of Revelation. They nevertheless offered general guidelines to study that section of the Bible even though they felt there was insufficient evidence at the time to settle on one particular interpretation, one they hoped could emerge in the near future after more study and new light. Still worse! They also concluded that we would probably never fully understand that section before the coming of the Lord (see F. B. Holbrook, ed., "Issues in the book of Revelation," in *Ministry* (January 1991), 10; reprinted in *Symposium on Revelation* (BRI, Review & Herald, 175-181).

During the subsequent years and now in the 21st century, the more recent leaders of the BRI (including Drs. Angel M. Rodriguez and Gerhard Pfandl) inherited the above problems from their predecessors and unfortunately have continued along the same vein. In January 2012 Rodriguez wrote an article in *Ministry* about the trumpets and stated, amazingly, that our church never had an official interpretation (something simply not true). He then proceeded to summarize several current interpretations held by some in our church and washed his hands of the matter, so to speak, concluding we had yet to reach a final solution to

the difficulties in understanding these prophecies. One year later, on Jan 14, 2013 at 3:58 PM, Pfandl wrote a message to one of my friends which continues the same trend. He stated, literally:

“The interpretation of the 5th and 6th trumpets of Revelation 9 by J. Litch and Uriah Smith was taken over from the Protestant interpreter A. Barnes, it did not come out of the biblical text [!!!]. In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White is recording what happened at that time. She is not saying that John’s prophecy was fulfilled, but that J. Litch’s prophecy was fulfilled (see Robert W. Olson, *One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981, p. 50). Now I believe that God used these events to strengthen the faith of the Millerites and our early pioneers, but the events themselves were not a fulfilment of Revelation 9” [!!!].

E. G. White's statement

Now let us briefly deal with E. G. White's actual statement so that you may see yourselves whether or not she wrote it with the intention of confirming the prophetic fulfillment of Revelation 9. Since I have already dealt with the details of 1840 in my two previously mentioned books (where I review both the biblical and historical perspectives in fulfillment of what E. G. White wrote), here I will simply point out the core issues involved:

1) Ellen G. White wrote: “In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest” (GC 334).

- Notice that she speaks of a remarkable fulfillment *of prophecy*, not about a fulfillment of Josiah Litch's prediction.
- Notice also that thus far in her statement she makes note of the year but not a specific date in that year.
- She also says “*another* remarkable fulfillment.” What were the other remarkable fulfillments of prophecy? As expected, these are also referred to in the context of that same chapter of the book *Great Controversy*, and include the stellar signs of the sixth seal (especially the last one that took place in 1833) and the fulfillment of the seventh trumpet in connection with the prophecy of the 2300 days of Dan 8 that took place in 1844. So this begs the question, was she also depicting those other *remarkable fulfillments of prophecy* as mere descriptions of what the Millerites believed without actually intending to endorse them either, or was she instead referring to the fulfillment of prophecy in those events? No wonder that some in our church are now also neglecting these other fulfillments of prophecy!

2) In referring to Josiah Litch's interpretation she says: “According to his calculations” (1911), “which was purely a matter of calculation on the prophetic periods of Scripture” (1888).

- Here she is not necessarily endorsing everything that Josiah Litch wrote about this prophecy. Litch took the “hour” of Rev 9 as a prophetic period of time of 15 days as many former Protestant interpreters had done in the past (something exegetically acceptable, though perhaps not necessary), and in doing so arrived at August 11, 1840. These were *his* calculations.

3) “At the very time specified, Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself *under the control of Christian nations. The event exactly fulfilled the prediction*” (GC 335).

- In this second statement she is referring to the prediction of one of the different expectations of Josiah Litch. History confirms that what happened at that time fulfilled the specific prediction referred to in her statement in connection, of course, with what was expected to take place in that year according to the sixth trumpet.
- For much more on this please see the many modern historical references I quote in my book *The Seals and the Trumpets*, along with how this has implications for us today in connection with Biblical prophecy.

4) Admittedly, the prophetic calculations of Josiah Litch for the specific date of August 11, 1840 have some problems.

- One of them has to do with the 10 days omitted from the Gregorian Calendar to correct the Julian Calendar, as this correction of the Julian Calendar does not fit the exact date of Litch: see time graph at the end of this article, as well as the wikipedia sites that reviews this alteration:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proleptic_Gregorian_calendar

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar

- Nothing of prophetic importance happened on July 27, 1449. The 150 days of the fifth trumpet were indeed fulfilled in that same year, but on January 6.

- If we follow a sliding scale principle, in which in addition to the dates of 1449 to 1840 we may also support the dates of 1453 to 1844 (March 21), and remove the 15 days of the presumed prophetic “hour” of Rev 9:13-15 (which is an acceptable exegetical alternative), the problem disappears. This exegetical alternative is known as *epexegetic* or *explanatory kai*, and leads to the translation of the text as follows: “for the hour [of judgment of the sixth trumpet]: even one day, one month, and one year” (Apoc 9:15).

Conclusion. I hope that this brief analysis of the current situation in our church concerning the dates of the fifth and sixth trumpets, as well as the solutions discussed to address recent challenges, will help many return to the tried and true paths of our historicist legacy of this important section of the book of Revelation.

