Kids’ Prophecy Corner

The Role of Islam in Bible Prophecy

Welcome to the Kids Prophecy Corner. This is part 9 of our series on Daniel and Revelation. In our previous study, we looked at Josiah Litch’s understanding of Revelation 9. In this and the following studies we will delve deeper into the subject of Islam. The Islamic world has grown significantly since its beginning in the 7th century. However its interactions with the world were and still are largely characterized by conflict and war with other civilizations and religions. This warfare has produced a lot of devastation such as the rise of sectarianism, religious intolerance, the spread of international terrorism, economic depression, and constant shifts in the balance of global of power. We will try to understand the reasons of these conflicts and their implications for us at the end of the world by studying Islam from a biblical perspective.

**Who is Ishmael?**

God made a promise to Abraham that he will have a posterity as numerous as the number of the stars. However Abraham was old and still had no son from his wife Sarah. Sarah decided to give him her Egyptian servant Hagar as a wife. From their union Ishmael was born. The Bible says the following about Ishmael in Genesis 16:

*16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou [art] with child, and shalt bear a son, and* ***shalt call his name Ishmael****;* ***because the LORD hath heard thy affliction****.*

 *16:12 And he will* ***be a wild man****; his hand [will be] against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.*

Ishmael’s name means “God shall hear.” This was a direct response to Hagar’s sufferings from her mistress Sarah. But his name also speaks indirectly to the role his children would play in making the sufferings of God’s people less severe. That was a positive thing!

The Bible describes Ishmael’s character as being a wild man with his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him. From our previous study we know that the Hebrew word for “wild man” literally means a “wild ass man;” taken from the imagery of the wild Asiatic or Arabian onager. This wild and untameable animal is known to roam free within the deserts of Arabia. Sister white says that *“Ishmael was driven to choose the wild, maurauding life of the desert chief”* (see Patriarchs and Prophets p. 174.1). Moreover, the fact that his hand is against every man and every man’s hand against him, denotes that his life would be one of constant warfare. This, in contrast to his name, was a negative thing.

An important point to understand is that Ishmael’s immediate descendants were not Muslim but heathen who followed pagan practices. They would in the course of time adopt the religion of Islam. The Bible refers to Ishmael’s descendants as children of the East.

**The Historical Context of Revelation 9**

The rise of Islam is found in chapter 9 of Revelation within the framework of the seven trumpets of Revelation 8-11. The books of Daniel and Revelation touch on the same subjects, they complement each other. The book of Daniel talks about the rise and fall of the kingdoms (Judah,Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome). The Book of Revelation talks about Rome who is also referred as Babylon (please see part I – Daniel 2 - and part V – Revelation 17- of this series for further details). John the Revelator wants us to have a closer look at the religious and political forces of the Roman Kingdom and **the Trumpets - the series of calamities** - that were used to break it down. The first four trumpets were the Goths under Alaric (A.D. 410), The Vandals under Genseric (From A.D. 429 to 468), the Huns under Attila (From 451 A.D. to 453 A.D.) and Odoacer - the Germanic leader who deposed the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire in 476 B.C.

Revelation 9 introduces the concept of the **woes**, which communicate that **the intensity of the calamities would grow stronger.** It was the turn of **Eastern Rome** or the Byzantine Empire to suffer and be broken down. Its political and military power was weakened for 150 years by **Arabic Islam**. Then by **Ottoman Islam** under the first and second woes.

**The Rise of the Caliphate**

In order for God to increase the punishment on Rome, he had to use a darker power. This power is found in **Revelation 9: 1-4**

In Bible prophecy a star is a symbol of an angel or a messenger; and not necessarily a righteous messenger. In this case, it was **Muhammad the founder of Islam.** He was the unrighteous messenger, **the star** that fell and this was in the **year 606 A.D**. From his rise to his death in 632 A.D., his goal was to establish a strong Islamic presence in the region and unite Arabic tribes under his control. He accomplished this from 622 A.D. to 632 A.D.

The **key** that the star has is the **battle of Nineveh in 627 A.D.** This was a famous battle fought between the Sassanids or Persians, and Eastern Rome or the Byzantines - two big superpowers. It was an awfully long, drawn-out war. The Byzantines launched a surprise attack and managed to turn the war in their favour and win.

When Mohammed died in 632 A.D., his close friend **Abu-Bakr** became the **first caliph** which was known as the Rashudin Caliphate. When he came to power a revolt started that created the two major groups within Islam that we know today - Shia Islam and Sunni Islam. However, the majority of the Muslims sided with Abu-Bakr. And from **633 A.D.,** like locusts, they conquered a lot of the Persian territory. This phase of history is called **Rashudin conquests**.

The **Umayyad caliphs** continued the expansion of Islam even further. They acted as locusts. They were organized and persistent in their attacks on their enemies. This caused the complete conquest of Persia and the weakening of the Byzantine influence in the Middle East.

The early history of Islam can be illustrated in the following way:



622 A.D.

632 A.D.

633 A.D.

661 A.D.

750 A.D.

606 A.D.

Umayyad Conquests

Rashudin Conquests

Arabian Conquests

627 A.D.

Abassids

Abu-Bakr becomes Caliph,

Sunni-Shia split

Founding of Islam by Muhammad



Battle of Nineveh

Before the Muslim conquests the Middle East had a lot of different Christian groups. But these Christians came under Muslim rule. However they were well treated and called the “**people of the book”** or “dhimmis”. They were allowed the right to life and freedom of worship as long as they paid tribute. They even got protection from the Muslims during the 1260 years. However the Muslims did not behave the same with the people from the Byzantine Empire. They tormented those who had politicised Christianity and sough to push back their influence.

**The First Woe**

The **first woe** is presented in **Revelation 9: 5-12**. In these verses we see the experience of those who were afflicted by the torment and the experience of those who inflicted that torment. The killing of an empire refers to the total loss of its political power and status and the loss of its spheres of influence (see Revelation 13:3,9,10). So when the Byzantine empire is tormented for 5 months or 150 years its power and influence is damaged.

This torment was inflicted by the Ottoman Turks under **Othman I** who was the “king over them.” He was the first sultan who unified his Turkic warriors into a state power. His dynasties – The Ottoman Empire – was one of the mightiest and longest-lasting dynasties in world history! This Islamic superpower ruled large areas of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and North Africa for 600 years!

The supreme leader of the Ottoman Turks - the Sultan - fulfilled the same role as that of the caliphs in Arabia. They assumed full religious and political authority. In other words they applied a unified church and state relationship model. Another interesting fact is that the Ottomans claimed to be the leader of the Muslim world because they protected the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina. They dominated the Muslim world and from their creation we can mark the fulfillment of the five prophetic months of **the 1st woe from July 27, 1299 (battle of Nicomedia) to July 27, 1449**. In this time the Byzantine Empire lost a lot of territories and spheres of influence.

The Bible describes the Ottoman Muslims as having heads of horses and lion’s teeth. The sharp teeth denote how a lion tears into its prey. The heads of the horses denote the political and military aspects of the Ottoman Empire. In like manner, the Turks tore the Byzantine empire apart with sharp toothed weapons like spears, bows and arrows. In the Old Testament they are known for their archery skills. The first woe is complete. The second woe begins.

(For more details, please go to part 8 of this series and the Millerites curriculum).

**The Second Woe**

The second woe is presented in **Revelation 9: 13-19** and it starts at the same time as the sixth trumpet on **July 27, 1449**. During the 150 years of the first woe Ottoman Islam weakened the Byzantine Empire but did not overthrow it. Now we learn in verse 13 that **the four angels which are around the great river Euphrates are loosed** for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

The angels referred here are a representation of the **Sultans of Islam** and their territories surrounding the regions around the river of Euphrates and beyond (what would become the Ottoman Empire). Its dominance, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean would threaten the power of Christianity in the west. It would also disrupt Western Europe’s oriental trade and ultimately its security. The Byzantine empire was providing both economic and military security to the West, but that was about to end.

The positive aspect of the loosening of this Islamic power is that they allowed the protestant reformation to progress. The Diet of Spires in 1529 started the Protest against the Holy Roman Empire which was working to take away the liberty of Conscience (civil and religious) of the people. Luther has been declared an outlaw and was forbidden from teaching his beliefs. And while Charles the V (of the Roman Empire) was trying to destroy the reformation, he was distracted from that work by **the Turkish armies** (Ottoman Islam) on the eastern frontier (see GC p.197.2).

The Ottoman Empire had so much power that it was also able to crown the last emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantine XI in 1449. The previous emperor died but had no child. That created a dispute between his two brothers, Constantine and Demetrios Palaiologos, over the throne. As a result they asked the Ottoman Sultan Murad II to arbitrate in their disagreement. Murad chose Constantine who was crowned on January 6, 1449.

In **1451** Murad II died and his son Mehmed II ascended to the throne in his place. His ambitions were greater than those of his father as he wanted to conquer the city of Constantinople. In **1453 the city of Constantinople fell** after a lengthy siege led by Mehmed. The Ottoman’s used canons to destroy the city walls. From this time we see “the third part of man” being destroyed. The Ottoman Empire tried to extend its presence into the West. Many battles were fought but which at the end only weaken its power. (For more details on those famous battles, please refer to study called September 11).

But it was really at the end of the 18th century, especially from **1798 – The time of the end** – that we can see a **decline of the Ottoman Empire** that culminated in the events on and around August 11, 1840.

There was a war going on between France and England over the Middle East since 1789. England had colonized India and needed to use the short Suez passage through the middle east to reach India rather than taking the longer route around the African Continent. France wanted to block this shorter trade route and establish their presence in the Middle East. France invaded Egypt which was a territory of the Ottoman Empire. And in order to avoid any possibility of invasion from the Ottomans, they wanted to take control of Syria as well. But their efforts were unsuccessful. The Ottoman Empire declared war on France in **September 1798**. And after three years Napoleon lost all his conquests in the Middle East including Egypt; and **the war ended in 1801.**

From the early 1800’s different states in the Ottoman Empire started to revolt as they noticed cracks forming in the Ottoman administration. The Ottoman Empire requested the help of Egypt to crush these revolts. Egypt was promised the territories of Syria and Crete if they were successful. Egypt did crush the Mameluks and the Wahhabis but was unable to suppress the Greeks who had European supports. But the Ottoman Empire did not respect its promise which led to Egypt to **declare war against them in 1831**. Egypt moved to capture Crete and various Syrian provinces, thus strengthening their position in the region. This led Turkey to ask Europe and Russia for help. They responded positively in 1833. France and Britain were the mediators. Terms of peace were agreed and Egypt was given control of the Syrian provinces. In return Egypt was required to submit to Ottoman rule. This was the **first Egyptian-Ottoman war or Syrian war from 1831 to 1833.**

**In 1839** the hostilities started again. This time **Egypt under Mehmet Ali declared itself an independent country**. Of Course the Ottomans disagreed and sent military forces to reconquer his territories. **The war was fought over the provinces of Syria**; hence it is also called a Syrian war. Egypt won the Battle. The Europeans intervened because they saw a threat in the stability of the region. But in order to check Egyptian expansion **Ottoman affairs were to be managed by the Europeans**. The process was completed **on August 11, 1840**, right on time for the **end of the second woe!** A peace treaty was signed and the Ottomans **voluntary** surrendered by ceding their independence in exchange for regional security. Although the peace treaty was in place, the conflict officially ended on July 1841. It gave Britain free access to the Mediterranean sea as the Ottomans were under its control. **This was the second Syrian war from 1839 to 1841**.

To conclude:

The Muslim world has been very present in the affairs of the world since its creation. From Ishmael we see the principles that govern the Arab world which are war and conquest. But what Islam shows us is the spirit that controls humanity, a fighting spirit.

Fall of Constantinople

End of the 2nd woe

1st woe

2nd woe

6th Trumpet

1453

July 27, 1449

August 11, 1840

July 27, 1299

Third part of men killed

“Torment”

1451

391 years 15 days

150

End of Ottoman dominance in the region

Ottoman dominance in Eastern Mediterranean

Battle of Nicomedia