

Revelation's Third Woe

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to make an argument for a more literal interpretation of events under the sixth plague of Revelation 16. I have written a paper that gave a literal interpretation of Daniel 11. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that Revelation 16:12-16 is the third woe and that it is closely related to Daniel 11:40-45.

Europeans have a deep historical memory of Muslim-inspired terrorism that continued off and on since the 8th century. For the third time in history, the expansion of Islam is threatening Western Civilization. The initial expansion of Islam in the 8th century spread across the Middle East, North Africa, and into Spain and Southern Europe. During the middle ages, the Ottoman Empire organized the Muslim world and threatened Europe. The 20th century saw a resurgence of a revitalized Islamic faith. Fueled by oil wealth, it spread a conservative brand of Islam. It is estimated that Saudi oil money built 1,300 mosques around the world. The Koran promised great rewards to those who risked their lives in a holy war or Jihad. The promise of eternity in paradise proved to be a powerful motivation for the warriors of Mohammed.

Many commentaries on Revelation since the 16th century Protestant Reformation have provided evidence that the first two woes correspond to the first two expansions of Islam. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed the beginnings of the third and final woe. During this period, Islam burst from its traditional boundaries. It has had a significant impact on most of the modern world. This is of special interest because, based on Biblical prophecy, this third movement will lead to the end of the world and the return of Christ.

Revelation is built around the messages to the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets. We will focus on the last three of the trumpets which are each connected to one of three woes.

The Seven Trumpets:

In response to the prayers of the persecuted saints, the sounding of the trumpets were judgments of God on their tormenters. Because of the reference to the altar of incense, which is in the holy place, we know that the seven trumpets begin before the time of the judgment.

As in the messages to the seven churches and the seven seals, there is a significant difference between the first four trumpets and the last three. The last three trumpets are far more extensive. Also, a woe is connected to each of the last three trumpets.

It is generally acknowledged that the first four trumpets are judgments against Rome which finally led to the collapse of the empire. There is a noticeable change at the beginning of the fifth trumpet by the introduction of three woes.

The Three Woes:

Revelation 8:13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

The woes represent a religion founded by Satan.

Revelation 9:1,2 Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

The "fallen star" produced smoke so thick that it hid the light of the sun. Its errors dimmed the gospel.

The 5th Trumpet and the First Woe:

The fallen star is Satan, the angel of the bottomless pit.

Revelation 9:11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

The bottomless pit is the abode of Satan. He will eventually be confined to the pit for a thousand years (Revelation 20:3). Smoke arose from the pit and darkened the sun and air. The Muslim religion obscured the truth and hid the gospel of Christ for the entire Eastern Church. It arose from the Arabian desert and within the first century of its existence, it spread from the Arabian desert through the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain. Except for Constantinople, the Eastern Empire was

controlled by Islam. Even Europe was under siege from the early advances of Islamic forces until they were turned back at the Battle of Tours in AD 732.

In lands under Moslem rule, the Christian Church was forced underground. Christians were second-class citizens who, along with other non-Muslims, were called dhimmi and subjected to extra taxes and restrictions. The first woe had a major impact on a large portion of the civilized world.

According to Revelation 9:5,10, Moslems would be permitted to torment men for five months. Understanding that a day represents a year in these prophecies, we know that for 150 years, most likely between 674 to 823, the Christians in the Eastern Empire suffered a scourge represented by the spread of desert locusts. But even those who dispute the placement of this period of time agree that it had to end before AD 1453 when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire. The first woe had ended.

Revelation 9:12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

After failing to take Constantinople for 150 years, the Islamic people gave up trying. They fought with each other and were divided into several nations.

The 6th Trumpet and the 2nd Woe:

Two centuries later the Seljuk Turks were moving across southern Russia. After invading the territory that is now Iran, they adopted the Muslim faith. They were headed for Asia Minor but were held in check by the Byzantine Empire at the headwaters of the Euphrates River which was a barrier to invasions from the East. The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Byzantium. However, the Byzantine army was largely killed off at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, thus opening the way for the Turks to take over most of Asia Minor.

Revelation 9:13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year (391 years), were released to kill a third of mankind.

The golden altar was in the Holy Place, which puts this before the time of the judgment. The “great river Euphrates” in Revelation refers to a geographic area that runs through Iraq, Syria, and Southeastern Turkey. Efforts have been made to connect the Euphrates with Babylon in this text, but the 2nd woe is not about Babylon. Babylon is never referred to in the Bible as the great river Euphrates.

The four angels at the Euphrates represent the four divisions of the Turks. The period of 391 years (using the day for a year principle) applies to the Ottoman Empire which lasted from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to 1844. The 2nd woe is about the Ottoman invasions into Europe.

Osman became the leader of the Ottoman Turks and the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. The dynasty bearing his name later established and ruled the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire controlled much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa between the 14th and early 20th centuries. It was founded at the end of the 13th century in northwestern Anatolia. After 1354, the Ottomans crossed into Europe and with the conquest of the Balkans, the Ottoman beylik was transformed into a transcontinental empire. The Ottomans ended the Byzantine Empire with the 1453 conquest of its capital, Constantinople.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, at the height of its power, under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire was a multinational, multilingual empire. At the beginning of the 17th century, the empire contained 32 provinces and numerous vassal states.

The Muslim conquest of so much of the Christian world was an epochal catastrophe for Christendom. We should certainly expect that Bible prophecy would address such earth-shaking events that would impact the church..

Rev. 9:17-19 “The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.”

For the siege of Constantinople, Muslim forces deployed cannons. For the final conquest of Constantinople, in 1453, a Hungarian armorer cast a 27-foot long

cannon that was used to lob massive stones at the ancient walls of the city. This enormous and loud weapon doubtless left a deep impression on all who saw and heard it; it heralded a new kind of warfare, with exotic new weapons that belched fire and smoke. Revelation gave a fitting description of this new weapon.

The second woe was simultaneous with the sixth trumpet. The description in Revelation 9 fits the Ottoman Empire too well for it to be anything else. There are a few facts from these verses that should be kept in mind because of their importance to the interpretation of later parts of Revelation.

1. The second woe represents the period when the Ottoman Empire was a major threat to “Christian Europe.” It encompassed the entire 391 years of the prophecy.
2. The “great river Euphrates” refers to a geographic area in eastern Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.
3. The reference to the golden altar places these events before the judgment.

The pillaging by the Ottoman Empire, the world-wide announcement in Revelation 10, and the French Revolution took place under the sixth trumpet. This woe ends with this text:

Revelation 11:14,15 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”

Unlike the extensive attention given to the 1st and 2nd woes, nothing is said at this point about the 3rd woe except that it is coming quickly. Keep in mind that the trumpets are about God’s judgments on the enemies of His people. At the end of Revelation 11, there is a transition into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary and the final judgment. During this time, the 3rd woe must take place.

Revelation 11:19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

The covenant was God’s law of the Ten Commandments which was kept in the ark of the covenant in the most holy place. The scene was now set for the final judgment and the coming of Christ.

Revelation 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The next chapters in Revelation concern the events and issues during the judgment. The issues concerning the judgment included the sealing of God’s people, and a judgment-hour message already alluded to in chapter six. These themes would now be expanded and become the subject for the rest of the book and conclude when “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ...”

After the three angels’ messages have been given and God’s people sealed, Revelation 15 sets the stage for the outpouring of God’s wrath. The theme is justice. Those who have gained victory over the beast and his image (Revelation 16:2) stand on a sea of glass and sing of their experience.

Revelation 16:3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

“Great and marvelous *are* Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true *are* Your ways,
O King of the saints!
⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For *You* alone *are* holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested

Seven last plagues full of the wrath of God are poured out on the world.

Revelation 15:5 After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.

The judgment of God poured out on those responsible for persecuting God's people is the theme of the seven trumpets which indicates that this is the seventh trumpet and the third woe.

The Third Woe:

Revelation 11:14 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Considerable attention is given to the first two woes. The rest of Revelation is devoted to the proclamation of the judgment-hour message and the judgment that would fall on the whole world. Like the sounding of the earlier trumpets, the persecution of God's people would lead to judgments and plagues to be poured out on the world.

Revelation 8:13 And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

These three woes are related. The first two were about the rise of Islam and its subsequent conquest of much of the Christian world. It is reasonable to conclude that because the three woes were introduced together (Revelation 8:13), the rise of Muslim terrorism is the third and final woe. There is no other reason for the three woes to be included in the seven trumpets. Seven trumpets could have stood on their own without introducing three woes. The woes bring in a new element to the trumpets. Islam was raised up to punish an apostate Christianity.

Under the first woe, the locusts were sent to torment mankind.

Revelation 9:4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months.

Under the second woe, the angels bound at the river Euphrates are released

Revelation 9:1 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

Under the seven last plagues, God's wrath is poured out on the earth and it appears to be unlimited. After the third angel's message, chapter 14 concludes with the harvest of the earth.

First, the Son of Man, seated on a white cloud and having a sharp sickle, reaps the harvest of the earth. Following this an angel coming out of the temple in heaven, also having a sharp sickle, gathers the vine of the earth and throws it into the winepress of the wrath of God.

Revelation 14:19 So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered *the clusters* from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God

The 7th Trumpet and the 3rd Woe

The wrath of God is further explained in the next two chapters, Revelation 15 and 16.

Seven angels are sent from the temple in heaven to pour out seven plagues from seven "golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever (Revelation 15:7). The last message has been given; the warning sounded. Everyone has made his or her choice and received the mark of the beast or the seal of God. The sanctuary is cleansed. There is no more intercessory pleading for the human family.

Now God removes His protective care from a rebellious world. There is nothing to prevent a world in rebellion to reap what has been sown. The plagues, like the trumpets, are judgments of God.

There are many similarities between the trumpets and the plagues. Many have suggested that they are the same. However, there are also many differences. Here is a comparison chart fo the trumpets and plagues.

	Seven Trumpets	Seven Last Plagues
	Trumpets, sounded by Angels	Bowls full of the wrath of God poured out by angels
	Originates from Altar of Incense in the Holy Place	From Most Holy Place, 15:5
	Begun by noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake from the golden altar before the throne of God.	Begun by noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake from the throne.
#1	To the earth 1/3 of trees and green grass burned up.	To the earth Sores on men with mark of beast
#2	Into the sea 1/3 if sea became blood. 1/3 of creatures died, 1/3 of ships destroyed.	On the sea Everything died.
#3	Rivers and Springs Star fell from heaven. Fell on 1/3 of rivers and springs. 1/3 of waters became wormwood, men died.	Rivers and springs All became blood. Men had nothing else to drink.
#4	Heavens darkened: 1/3 of Sun, Moon, Stars stuck.	Sun scorched men with fire They did not repent.
#5	Sun darkened by smoke from the pit. Fallen star given key to bottomless pit. Commanded not to harm grass, greenery, or trees. Only men without seal of God. Could not kill but only torment 5 months. 1st woe	Poured on Throne of the beast. Kingdom in darkness and pain. Did not repent.
#6	A voice from golden altar. Four angels at the Euphrates are released for an hour, day, month and year to kill 1/3 of mankind. Fire & Brimstone came from the mouth of The horses. The rest did not repent. 2nd Woe	Waters of the Euphrates dried up to prepare the way for kings from the east. Spirits deceived kings of the earth to prepare for battle. The 3rd Woe brought on by the 3 rd rise of Islam. (Dan 11:40-45)
#7	Announcement: Christ's kingdom has come. Third woe to come.	Announcement: "It is Done." Plague of hail, Babylon is judged.

Summary of the differences between the trumpets and plagues.

1) The Trumpets:

- a) Originate from the golden altar in the holy place.
- b) The trumpets are limited in scope, indicated by the 1/3.
- c) Advent movement and judgment begin under the sixth trumpet
- d) The angels bound at the River Euphrates are released.

2) The Plagues:

- a) Originate from the Most Holy Place. (The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened (Revelation 15:5).
- b) Under the plagues, the judgment is over. The plagues fall on the earth and specifically on those who have the mark of the beast.

- c) The Advent movement concludes before the plagues begin.
- d) The waters of the Euphrates are dried up.

The similarities between the trumpets and the plagues clearly connect them with each other. The proposed conclusion is that the plagues are the seventh trumpet and the third woe.

There are other connections. The 3rd woe is related to the earlier woes. They are all generated by Islam. The 2nd woe was brought about with the angel's command, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." (Revelation 9:14). The Turkish tribes swarmed out of the Middle East, took Constantinople and invaded Europe to the gates of Vienna. By WWI the Ottoman Empire was finished. But before the world ended, there would be another resurgence of Islam.

Revelation 16:12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

Under the sixth trumpet, the Euphrates refers to a geographical area. There is no reason to think it represents anything different in Revelation 16. It also fits the context. The drying of the Euphrates, according to the typical use of "waters" in Revelation, means that the nations from that part of the world are overrun, preparing the way to a much broader war. This compares with events in Daniel 11:40-45.

Revelation 16:13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

In Revelation 16, the gathering of the kings of the earth has a religious basis. The dragon covers all pagan religions. Catholicism is the beast, and the false prophet includes all those so-called Biblical denominations that unite with the papacy at the end of time. They cooperate in motivating the nations to organize their forces for the final battle.

This is currently well underway. The world's religions are a part of the reason for so much interest in the Middle East. Islam is the dominant religion of the Middle East. The Jews, having established the nation of Israel, have aroused most of the Muslim nations against them. Many Christians have supported Israel against the Muslims.

After the end of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, it seemed that Islam had ceased to be a threat to the modern world. However, with the development of oil in Arabia and many other countries in the Middle East, enormous wealth poured into Arabia which enabled them to build mosques and schools. Arabia promoted an ultraconservative fundamentalist form of Islam (Wahhabism) that is responsible for a large share of the extremism which has contributed to the terror in many western countries. This is the third major expansion of Islam.

The world's superpowers have an interest in the Middle East. Russia has moved into Syria. Russia and China are involved in Iran. The United States has been involved in two major wars for over 20 years. The drying of the waters of the Euphrates is in progress. The kings from the east are very much involved in the region. This compares with "news from the east and the north shall trouble him," in Daniel 11:44.

The most straightforward interpretation is that the kings from the east are kings from the east. The Middle Eastern nations involved in this made up the ancient Seleucid Empire which was the King of the North in Daniel 11. (For a more detailed analysis, see my paper on Daniel 11.)

Daniel 11:40-45 compares well with events under the 6th plague in Revelation 16. Both texts describe events leading up to the last war and utter destruction.

Daniel 12:1 And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.

In Daniel 12, Michael stands up, indicating the end of the judgment that began when the court was seated (Daniel 7:10). In Revelation 16:17, at the pouring out of the 7th bowl, a voice from the temple in heaven states, "It is done." These are the same events.

Revelation 16:19-21 And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

These chapters, Daniel 11 and Revelation 16, describe the destruction of the wicked by war and plagues that take place just before the rescue of God's people and the second coming of Christ. In Daniel 11:40-45, unless it is all symbolic and

the meaning of all the nouns are changed, it describes a Middle Eastern war that pulls into it the nations of the world leading to destruction. In Revelation, under the sixth plague, the world's false religions deceive the kings of the earth and gather them to the battle of the great day of God at a place called Armageddon. It does not give the location, but it has something to do with the drying up of the River Euphrates.

While all these things are being fulfilled, God has a message for His people.

Revelation 16:15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

When the events described under the sixth plague become current events, anyone who is not ready should not put off getting ready because Christ's return is soon.

The gathering of the kings of the earth for the final conflict predicted under the sixth plague has been underway since the Gulf War (2 August 1990 – 28 February 1991).

The world changed after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. The war expanded into Afghanistan. The United States passed the Homeland Security Act and the Patriot Act. The National Security Agency was given broad power to eavesdrop on citizens without a warrant. Islamic terrorism changed the world. It has attracted all the world's superpowers to the Middle East.

The gathering for war takes place under the 6th plague. The actual battle takes place under the 7th plague. It begins with a loud voice from the temple in heaven which proclaims, “It is done.” (Revelation 16:17). This is not about the end of probation but the destruction of the world. It is the final plague. An earthquake greater than any before it begins the plague. Then it states that “the cities of the nations fell.” It is so cataclysmic that even the mountains and islands cease to exist. To top it off, 100-pound chunks of hail fall upon men.

The earth breaks up. Like most of the plagues, this one appears to originate in heaven. But it is the result of developments on earth that are finally brought to a conclusion when God removes His protection. It is a miracle of God that we haven't destroyed ourselves many times before this. The angels of God are commissioned to prevent the final destruction until God's people are sealed (Revelation 7:3).

Revelation 7:3 After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.

When the angels release the winds, the human race will finally suffer the consequences of the evil it has brought on the world. God will “destroy those who destroy the earth.” (Revelation 11:18).

Many modern commentators make the battle of Armageddon spiritual rather than literal. The evidence indicates that it is both. The literal follows the spiritual. One is before the close of probation, the other after. Under a time of persecution, the inhabitants of earth make their final choice.

Once everyone has made up their minds, the seven last plagues are released. The mark of the beast and the seal of God have been given. Revelation 16 specifically states that the plagues did not make them repent (vs. 9,11). And chapter 16 concludes with: “men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail since that plague was exceedingly great.” (Revelation 16:21).

The kings of the earth are gathering for the seventh plague. That leads to the statement, “The cities of the nation’s fell.”

Revelation 16:19-21 And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. ²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent.

This is the 7th trumpet and the 3rd woe. God’s wrath is poured out on a world that is persecuting His people. It is a real physical destruction. The most destructive weapons ever devised are waiting to be deployed. The nations are angry. Disaster after disaster is being suffered by the human race. Plagues, earthquakes, storms, and terrorism follow in quick succession.

Conclusion

Because of the similarities between the plagues and the trumpets, it seems reasonable to conclude that the plagues are a continuation of the trumpets and are the seventh trumpet. It would also be the third woe, which brings the third rise of Islam into the picture.

Events under the sixth plague compares to a literal interpretation of Daniel 11:40-45. If the river Euphrates refers to a geographic area, then the end of Daniel 11 parallels the sixth plague.

This means that we are in the middle of the third woe. Considering current events in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, the final events described in Daniel and Revelation are immediately before us and the advice in Revelation 16:15 applies right now.

Revelation 16:15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”