

Vindicating Josiah Litch's Dates

by Edwin de Kock

Two paragraphs in E. G. White's *Great Controversy* have perplexed and challenged the ingenuity of Seventh-day Adventists as well as their opponents to an extraordinary extent:

In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest. Two years before, Josiah Litch, one of the leading ministers preaching the second advent, published an exposition of Revelation 9, predicting the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to his calculations, this power was to be overthrown "in A.D. 1840, some time in the month of August; and only a few days previous to its accomplishment he wrote: "Allowing the first period, 150 years, to have been exactly fulfilled before Deacozes ascended the throne by permission of the Turks, and that the 391 years, fifteen days, commenced at the close of the first period, it will end on the 11th of August, 1840, when the Ottoman power in Constantinople may be expected to be broken. And this, I believe, will be found to be the case."—Josiah Litch, in *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, Aug. 1, 1840.

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. (See Appendix.) When it became known, multitudes were convinced of the correctness of the principles of prophetic interpretation adopted by Miller and his associates, and a wonderful impetus was given to the advent movement. Men of learning and position united with Miller, both in preaching and in publishing his views, and from 1840 to 1844 the work rapidly extended.¹

Dr. Josiah Litch (1809-1886) was an itinerant Methodist Episcopal minister, himself a learned man, who remained a Millerite until the Great Disappointment, but afterwards turned away from Historicism to become a Futurist.² He never accepted Seventh-day Adventism.

Every detail of the cited passage and especially Litch's reckoning has been contradicted, as well as his historical data. At stake is more than his reputation, but also the idea that Ellen G. White, who endorsed his figures, was an inspired writer. Even more, through their attacks the critics have cast doubt on the year-day principle and prophetic Historicism itself. So what is Rev. 9:14-15 all about?

According to Larry Wilson, a former Seventh-day Adventist and minister, "the translation should read: '**And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.**' Greek scholars around the world (who have no position to defend one way or another) widely agree that the syntax of Revelation 9:15 points to a specific point in time and is therefore punctiliar. The phrase should not be regarded as the sum of chronological units of time (See the NIV, NEB, NEV, RSV, AND ASV.) In other words, the sixth trumpet says nothing about 391 years and 15 days."³

Wilson's use of the word *syntax* is peculiar. In any case, his "Greek scholars around the world" ignore the many erudite men who have over the centuries translated this text in much the same way as the learned people who gave us the Authorized/King James Version (1611).

The examples that follow are far from complete. Among them, we note men of giant intellect like the Catholic St. Jerome and Martin Luther, the great Reformer. Please note that the Greek text is from the authoritative Nestle-Aland, 28th edition of 2012.

Rev. 9:14-15:

The Original Greek Text, 1st Century:

λυσον τους τεσσαρας ἀγγελους τους δεδεμενους επι τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ
Ευφρατῇ. και ἐλυθησαν οἱ τεσσαρες ἀγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμενοι εἰς την ὥραν
και ἡμεραν και μηνα και ἔνιαυτον, ἵνα ἀποκτεινωσι το τρίτον των ἀνθρωπων.⁴

Jerome's Latin Vulgate 4th Century: solve quattuor angelos qui alligati sunt in flumine magno Eufrate et soluti sunt quattuor angeli qui parati erant in horam et diem et mensem et annum ut occiderent tertiam partem hominum.

Martin Luther, September 1522: Losze auff die vier Engel gepunden an dem grossen wasserstrom Euphrates/und es wurden die vier Engel los/die bereyt waren auff eyn stund unnd auff eyn tag und auff eyn monden und auff eyn iar/das sie todten das dritte teyl der menschen.

Martin Luther, 1954/1964 revision: Löse die vier Engel, die gebunden sind an den großen Wasserstrom Euphrat. Und es wurden die vier Engel los, die bereit waren auf die Stunde und auf den Tag und auf den Monat und auf das Jahr, das sie töteten den dritten Teil des Menschen.

Authorised/King James Version, 1611: Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

Spanish, Casiodoro de Reina (1569), 1960 revision: Desata a los cuatro ángeles que estan atados junto al gran río Eufrates. Y fueron desatados los cuatro ángeles que estaban preparados para la hora, día, mes y año, a fin de matar a la tercera parte de los hombres.

French, Louis Segond (1910), 1963: Délie les quatre anges qui sont liés sur la grand fleuve d'Euphrate. Et les quatre anges qui étaient prêts pour l'heure, le jour, le mois et l'année, furent déliés afin qu'ils tuassent le tiers des homes.

Afrikaans, 1933, 1953 ed.: Maak die vier engele los wat gebind is by die groot rivier, die Eufraat. Toe is die vier engele losgemaak wat gereed gehou was vir die uur en dag en maand en jaar, om 'n derde van die mense dood te maak.

New American Standard Bible, 1995: "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind."

Significant in the foregoing is the word **for** (Spanish **para**, French **pour**, Afrikaans **vir**) which mirrors the Greek $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ + the accusative case, as do the Latin **in** and German **auf** of the earlier versions, with the same meaning.

The original text and what excellent translators have settled on reveal that Larry Wilson and others like him are mistaken. Common sense also suggests that the wording “kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year” is nonsensical. Nobody talks like that. For instance, when we arrange to meet someone, we could say: “I’ll see you tomorrow at 10:00” or possibly “at 10 o’clock,” but not: “I’ll see you tomorrow at 10:00 o’clock, March 2012,” since both already know what month and year it is. The text must mean something else.

Before proceeding to demonstrate what this is, let us put the reader in the picture by providing a larger framework for Litch’s calculations.

According to the lead article about the Seven Trumpets in *Ministry* magazine of January 2012 by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, Seventh-day Adventist prophetic interpreters have espoused at least seven positions since Uriah Smith (1832-1903). From the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, they have shown little consensus. The first view presented is that of Smith, whom none of the other writers follow exactly. They especially all differ from him about the first four trumpets. He did, however, have residual influence on some of the others. Most notably, though, only E. Thiele still adhered to 1840 as the final date for the sixth trumpet.⁵

Two views that feature in Rodríguez’s comparative table make no reference to Islam, espoused by R. Naden as well as J. Paulien, H. LaRondelle, and R. Stefanovic. These do not overtly conflict with Historicism. But are they “compatible with the historicist approach”? According to Rodríguez, who focused on Paulien, LaRondelle, and Stefanovic, they are because they are not Preterist, Futurist, or Idealist.⁶ Well, this is true, but such compatibility has limited if any value. The fact is that they are not Historicist, for they simply ignore a most important part of history and its very significant impact.

After Muhammad had founded his new religion during the early seventh century, his warlike converts swiftly spread it like a runaway fire in all directions. “The army, mainly Arab and largely Syrian, extended the frontiers of Islam. It carried the war against Byzantium into Asia Minor and besieged Constantinople; eastward it penetrated into Khorasan, Turkistan, and northwestern India; and, spreading along the northern coast of Africa, it occupied much of Spain.”⁷

Even more successful than those Arabian and Syrian zealots were their successors, the Muslim Turks, who created the Ottoman Empire. “One of the most powerful states in the world during the 15th and 16th centuries, it spanned more than 600 years and came to an end only in 1922, when it was replaced by the Turkish Republic and various successor states in southern Europe and the Middle East. At its height the empire included most of southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna, including modern Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia, Romania, Greece, and Ukraine; Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Egypt; North Africa as far west as Algeria; and most of the Arabian Peninsula. The term Ottoman is a dynastic appellation derived from Osman (Arabic: ‘Uthmān), the nomadic Turkmen chief who founded both the dynasty and the empire.”⁸

Even more so than the Arabs, they harassed the Byzantine Empire and the Eastern Orthodox Church while these were still holding on to Constantinople precariously. When they captured that city in 1453, they also terrorized Western Europe.⁹ That Naden, Paulien,

LaRondelle, and Stefanovic did not consider them important in a prophetic account of salvation history is most unfortunate.

Rodríguez's article further makes it plain that Smith's view of the seven trumpets went back to the Millerites and specifically Dr. Litch's interpretation, which Ellen G. White endorsed. About this, Rodríguez was ambiguous. Perhaps she was really just reminiscing as a former Millerite.¹⁰

In 1888, when she wrote *The Great Controversy?* That is most unlikely—though all Seventh-day Adventists at least partly still follow in the footsteps of William Miller. Ellen G. White undoubtedly agreed with Litch, including the calculations of those dates, not only in the period ending with 1844 but also in 1888. It is incorrect to say that here she wrote as a Millerite. No, she still believed that Litch had been correct.

A major problem of our prophetic expositors is, to put it mildly, a sadly insufficient knowledge of history. Uriah Smith was on the whole a better Historicist than most Seventh-day Adventist writers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He knew more history.

We can therefore most fruitfully turn to his *Daniel and the Revelation* (1944 revision) as well as *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (1908) by Stephen N. Haskell (1833-1922). The latter adds a very significant detail regarding 11 August 1840: "In 1838 Josiah Litch and William Miller, after a careful study of the prophecies, came to the conclusion that on this last date nations might expect to see the Turkish sultan surrender his power."¹¹

Haskell was, so to speak, a belated Millerite. He began preaching for the First-day Adventists in 1853, though in the same year he also read a tract about the seventh-day Sabbath and began to keep it. Therefore, he would supposedly have been knowledgeable about William Miller and his association with Litch. Stephen Haskell was an almost exact contemporary of Smith, although he outlived him by nineteen years. He was also a close associate of Ellen G. White. She "wrote more letters to Haskell than to any other church leader."¹² The writings of these three people reflect great similarities in their interpretations of prophecy.

According to Smith, the seven trumpets represented the downfall of the Roman Empire, centered in both Rome and Constantinople, allied to an apostate Christianity. The first four trumpets (Rev. 8:2-13) announced the onslaughts of, respectively, the Goths under Alaric, Genseric the Vandal from North Africa, Attila the Hun, and Odoacer the Herul, who ousted Romulus Augustus, the last Western emperor in 476. The fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev. 9:1-21) heralded the demolition of the Eastern or Byzantine Empire by the Muslim Saracens, Arabs as well as the Ottoman Turks.¹³ The seventh trumpet goes beyond the Saracens to usher in the judgment as well as the end of the world. Then the Lord will reward his servants but destroy the destroyers of the earth (Rev. 11:15-19).

We now focus on two sets of time prophecies under the fifth and sixth trumpets. These are also called the first and the second woes.

About the former, we read: "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. 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. 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. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass or the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God

in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months . . .” (Rev. 9:1-5, emphasis added)

According to the Smith-Haskell interpretation, these locusts represent, first, the Muslim Arabs and, later, the Ottoman Turks, who were also converted to Islam and later predominated. During this period of five months, under the fifth trumpet, they tormented those whom they afflicted but mostly did not kill them. What, however, does the Apocalypse mean by the *bottomless pit*?

The expression used in the original is το φρεαρ της ἀβυσσου (to frear tēs abussou, “the well/reservoir of the abyss”). But what was the ἀβυσσος (abussos)? This very word occurs in various parts of the Septuagint as in Genesis 1:2. There it describes the formlessness of the earth as it first emerged from the Creator’s hand: Ἡ δε γη ἦν ἀκατασκευαστος, και σκοτος ἐπάνω της ἀβυσσου (hē de gē ēn akataskeuastos, kaj skotos epanō tēs abussou, “But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished, and darkness over the deep. . .”) Elsewhere *abussos* has other applications. The SDA Commentary says: “With respect to the Arabs, the bottomless pit may be thought of as representing the vast wastes of the Arabian deserts, whence these followers of Mohammed issued forth, to spread their conquests over vast areas.”¹⁴

According to the year/day principle, five months of prophetic time symbolize 150 calendar years. When and in what context did these begin? About this, Haskell is particularly clear.

The close of the thirteenth century was near. The Crusades had thrust Europe against the Turks in a most reckless manner. Constantinople had numerous emperors, but the Greek government grew weaker, and the time of its destruction was stealthily approaching. “It was on July 27, A.D., 1209,” says Gibbon, “that Othman first invaded the territory of Nicomedia; and the singular accuracy of the date seems to disclose some foresight of the rapid and destructive growth of the monster.” More than human foresight recorded this date with such definiteness. To the prophet on Patmos, it had been revealed that “their power was to hurt men five months.”

Five prophetic months is the equivalent of one hundred and fifty literal years, one day meaning a year, and counting thirty days to the month. Since the exact day for the beginning of this power is given, the expiration of the five months may be reckoned to the day. It closed July 27, 1449. It is these dates which enable the student of the trumpets to locate the events which take place under each trumpet. These dates are “nails in a sure place” for both the first and the second woe.¹⁵

Some critics have tried to fault this date. To do so credibly, they would need to peruse the material available to that great historian Edward Gibbon and whatever else remains available from the European and Middle Eastern sources. That, however, is difficult, since it requires a good knowledge of Latin as well as ancient, Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Greek. The ability to read Arabic and Turkish texts would also be advantageous. In these things, Gibbon enjoyed a great advantage that most of us do not have. Like other educated Englishmen of his day, he could easily read Latin and Greek—whether ancient, Biblical, or Medieval—as well as French. Even Modern Greek would not have been a problem for a man of such giant intellect, though he probably did not know the Asiatic languages.

Under the sixth trumpet, the Ottoman Turks became dominant and established an empire. In this stage of their career, they cunningly blended political negotiations with force and became lethal, killing huge numbers of those who resisted them.

It is about them that we read: “And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men” (Rev. 9:15). Larry Wilson, remember, pooh-poohed the idea that these are components of prophetic time, especially since he rejected the year/day principle. But after the verse about the hundred and fifty days, the principle of consistency surely requires that this period should be approached in the same way.

Haskell continued as follows:

Called to contend with a Scythian force from the East, the Turks were obliged to postpone activities in Greece for a number of years. The Byzantine court, instead of profiting by the imminent danger, grew weaker. The one hundred and fifty years of torment, not destruction, was about to close. “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.” The restraining hand of God had held contending forces in check, waiting, waiting, until the extreme limit of time, for men to acknowledge the righteousness of Jehovah. But at the sounding of the sixth trumpet a voice was heard from the four horns of the altar,—the altar before which Christ offers the prayers of saints,—saying, “Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.” During the one hundred and fifty years, the Turks had power to torment, but when their armies seemed on the very verge of victory over the Greek Empire, their force was abated by troubles from the regions of the Euphrates. (See Gibbon, Chap. 65). The time was coming when they would not only torment, but kill. In 1448 the death of John Palaeologus left the throne of Constantinople in a weak and precarious condition. Constantine [XI], his successor, could claim no territory beyond the limits of the city, and the throne was already held by virtue of the grace of Amurath, the Turkish ruler. The gracious approbation of the Turkish sultan announced the supremacy of Constantine, and the approaching downfall of the Eastern Empire.¹⁶

As history has recorded, that would be finalized when the Ottoman Turks broke down the walls of Constantinople and captured it in 1453. But before this could happen Constantine was playing for time. He virtually yielded the sovereignty though not the city to his Muslim enemies on July 27, 1449.

Something similar happened fifteen days and three hundred ninety-one years later. This time it was a Turkish sultan who virtually gave up his sovereignty, also to save his throne at the same city; though now it was mostly no longer called Constantinople but Istanbul. About what then transpired Haskell wrote:

The power which came on the stage of action July 27, 1449, was to bear sway for an hour and a day and a month and a year,—three hundred ninety-one years and fifteen days, literally speaking. This is a wonderful prophecy, the only one in the Bible where the time of the fulfillment is given to the very day. At the end of this period, Turkey would cease to be an independent power. Three hundred and ninety-one years and fifteen days from July 27, 1449, brings us to August 11, 1840.¹⁷

Here is Haskell’s account of how this came about and what was involved:

In 1838 Josiah Litch and William Miller, after a careful study of the prophecies, came to the conclusion that on this last date nations might expect to see the Turkish sultan surrender his power. This prophecy was published to the world, but there were events transpiring which also called the attention of nations to Constantinople. The sultan of Turkey and Mehemet Ali, pasha of Egypt, were at war, the pasha refusing an indemnity demanded by the ruler of Turkey. In 1839 the pasha was victorious in battle over the Turkish army, and he sent another force under command of his son into Syria and Asia Minor, and threatened to carry his victorious arms against Constantinople. At this juncture, England, Austria, Prussia and Russia, combined in the demand that the pasha should confine himself to Syria and Egypt. A council of these four powers was held July 15, 1840. The ruler of Turkey agreed to abide by their decision, and was only too glad to have his life saved by their intervention. He thereby voluntarily surrendered all rights into the hands of the combined forces of Western Europe. In the official document drawn up by the representatives of the nations concerned, are these words: "It having been felt that all the zealous labors of the conferences of London in the settlement of the pasha's pretensions were useless, and that the only public way was to have recourse to coercive measures to reduce him to obedience in case he persisted in not listening to pacific overtures, the powers have, together with the Ottoman plenipotentiary, drawn up and signed a treaty whereby the sultan offers the pasha the hereditary government of Egypt, . . . the pasha, on his part, evacuating all other parts of the sultan's dominions now occupied by him and returning the Ottoman fleet, . . . If the pasha refuses to accede to them, it is evident that the evil consequences to fall upon him will be attributed solely to his own fault."

This treaty was signed, and the ultimatum was officially put in the power of Mehemet Ali on August 11, 1840. Since that time Turkey has been known everywhere as the "Sick Man of the East."¹⁸

Let us now return to Larry Wilson. Among other things, he pointed out that the Ottoman Empire did not fall in 1840 but during World War I. Subsequently it became a republic in 1923. Anyhow, he asserted, 11 August 1840 was the wrong date since Litch made a calculation error.

His first objection is trivial. Of course, the Ottoman Empire did not "fall" in the sense of going out of existence. It did continue as the "sick man" of Europe, nursed and kept artificially alive by the great powers which had come to dominate that continent. It expired in the early twentieth century.

We look more closely at his second objection. In his own words: "The final problem with the August 11, 1840, date is that Dr. Litch failed to adjust his 391 year, 15 day prophecy according to a change in the calendar which occurred in October, 1582. Pope Gregory XIII removed ten days from the Julian Calendar that year to reset the Julian Calendar with respect to the Sun. Therefore, Dr. Litch's August 11, 1840 should have been adjusted to August 21, 1840 and absolutely *nothing* of historical consequence occurred on that date."¹⁹

Of course, it did not; for there is much more to this than meets the eye. We begin by looking at this adjustment during 1752, when Protestant Britain made the changeover. Eleven days were in some countries omitted from September according to the Catholic, Gregorian calendar. Wednesday 2 was followed by Thursday 14. For that year, September

had only 19 days. The year itself was also shortened accordingly. In passing, we note that this change did not affect the weekly cycle. Saturday, August 29, was followed a week later by Saturday, September 16. Incidentally, by now (for the years 1901-2099) the discrepancy between the two calendars has increased to 13 days.²⁰

Why was this necessary? The time it takes the earth to go round the sun is called the *tropical year* or the *solar year*. With this, after a few centuries since its introduction by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C., the Julian calendar was out of step with the seasons. It had only one rule for determining a leap year: if it can be divided by four. In this case, February has 29 instead of 28 days. But the Julian year was fractionally too long; by 1582 it had added 10 days too many. The Gregorian year has more rules for determining whether a year is a leap year: 1. It must be evenly divisible by 4; 2. If it can be evenly divided by 100, it is not a leap year, unless 3. The year is also evenly divisible by 400. Then it is a leap year.

Pope Gregory's calendar originated in response to concerns expressed in the time of the Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent. It sought to ensure that Easter would always fall on a Sunday and always be tied to the spring equinox, as it had been in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicaea. In that year, the date of the vernal equinox was 21 March. But the Julian year is almost 11 minutes longer than it should be. This causes dates to drift in relation to the seasons by about 3 days every 400 years. In the centuries between 325 and 1582, this had added up to 10 days, which the pope—advised by his astronomers—deleted.²¹

For the 15 days and 391 years, the adjustment would have to be smaller: approximately 3 days. This the critics of Litch's calculations usually overlook. They simply add together the year, the month, the day, and the hour of Rev. 9:15, namely 360 years + 30 years + 1 year + 15 days = 391 years and 15 days. Yet even this reckoning is biblically incorrect.

The prophecy does not say “a year, and a month, and a day, and an hour” of prophetic time. It says: “an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year.” Not 391 years and fifteen days, but fifteen days and 391 years. Does this make any difference? It is surely the same thing. But it is not, especially since we need to add them piecemeal, as follows:

Dates	Real Time Added	Prophetic Time	Julian-Gregorian Drift Adjustment
1449, July 27	11 minutes		11 minutes
1449, July 27	15 days	1/24 of a day	
1449, August 11	1 year	1 day (24 hours)	
1450, August 11	30 years	1 month (30 days)	
1480, August 11	360 years	1 year (360 days)	
1840, August 11			

For one calendar year, there is a difference of only 11 minutes between the Julian and the Gregorian years. No further adjustments are necessary. That one-year addition takes place before 1582 on the Julian calendar at a time when the Gregorian calendar had not yet been invented. From 1450 to 1840, further adjustments are unnecessary, since on a year-to-year basis the two calendars are identical.

Some may, of course, be tempted to the view that all dates should be Gregorianized, right back to the time of Julius Caesar—or before him, back to the great pyramids, when the ancient Egyptians did not have leap years. (At one stage, they had a year of 360 days plus 5

extra days at its end.) There have been all manner of other calendars. Based, for the most part, on the circuits of the moon around the earth, these differed among themselves in many ways; yet they all made accommodations to the solar year—the fact that the earth revolves around the sun with specific recurring seasons. A common adjustment device was a thirteenth month that was added from time to time to correct for seasonal drift. In this way, the average length of a year will always even out. A good example is the 2300 year/days which are so important in Seventh-day Adventist theology. In other words, a year is a year is a year.

And was 22 October 2300 calculated according to the Julian or the Gregorian calendar? The answer, according to Leroy Edwin Froom, is “neither.” It was based on the barley harvest in Judea, according to the Karaite calendar.²²

The Bible uses symbolism in prophecy, but its Author desires those who follow him to understand it. This can be thwarted by numerical over-complication, especially for a certain type of mentality. Albert Einstein, one of the greatest geniuses that this planet has produced, once warned: “Raffiniert is der Herrgott, aber boshaft nicht” (The Lord God is subtle but not malicious).

Let us now rather see whether 1450 and 1480, which figure in the foregoing calculations, are also—like 1449 as well as 1840—significant in Ottoman history vis-à-vis the Eastern Orthodox or the Western, Catholic world. They were. Events in both years were crucial to thwarting a Turkish invasion of Italy directly aimed at Rome. What happened in 1450 and 1480, which were 30 years apart?

In 1450, the Ottoman sultan Murad II with his son who would soon succeed him as Mehmed II (Mohammed II) and capture Constantinople, laid siege to the Albanian town of Krujë. It is situated in a hilly and mountainous area, 20 km (less than 13 miles) from Tirana, the present capital. The Ottoman army consisted of 100,000 warriors. Arrayed against them were the forces of George Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1405-1468), a military genius. He had served the sultan for twenty years as a Muslim. But in 1443 he rebelled. Reverting to Christianity, he organized and led an Albanian League. At Krujë, he beat off the attack of the Ottomans with heavy losses to the Turks. His major stratagem was to leave a garrison in the city but also to have forces outside it to harass the enemy. Despite some successes, the Ottomans could never finally defeat him. Moreover, he forged links with the West, in part with the Venetians—who were envious and fearful of his success—and above all with Alfonso V of Aragon, who ruled over Naples, as well as the pope.²³

With the former, Skanderbeg had a special and lasting relationship, even becoming his vassal. He “recognized King Alfonso’s sovereignty over his lands in exchange for the help that King Alfonso would give to him in the war against the Ottomans.” Some western troops did go to help him in Albania. After 1450, the Turks could never vanquish Skanderbeg for the rest of his life. When Alfonso died, he was succeeded by his son Ferdinand I. But his right to rule over the Kingdom of Naples was disputed by rivals. Skanderbeg had “vowed fealty to the Aragon family, especially in times of hardship.” He therefore arranged a three-year armistice with the Ottomans and with 1,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry crossed over to Italy where he defeated “the Italian and Angevin forces of Giovanni Antonio Orsini, Prince of Taranto, secured King Ferdinand’s throne, and returned to Albania.”²⁴

The great Mehmed II could and did capture Constantinople but he was never able to defeat Skanderbeg. The Turks besieged Krujë, but unsuccessfully. They did, however, manage to detach the support of many Albanian noblemen. Therefore, Skanderbeg wanted the

remainder to reorganize and shape a new war strategy, for which a conference was held in January 1468. But a mosquito struck him down; that month on the 17th he died of malaria at the age of 62.²⁵

Just as the prophecy indicated, 1450—one prophetic day or literal year after 1449—provides a key date. The siege, took place in three stages. It began on 14 May and was lifted on 14 October 1450. The eleventh day of August occurred toward the end of that period. We have not yet been able to establish exactly what event took place on that day. For the Turks, the outcome was disastrous. They suffered 20,000 casualties and thousands more as they retreated and were attacked by local Albanian militias. Sultan Murad II contracted disease and died early the next year at his capital city of Edirne²⁶ (formerly Adrianople).

The Ottomans would have dearly liked to cross the Adriatic to invade and conquer Italy. From Albania, at its narrowest point, the Strait of Otranto is less than 45 miles/72 kilometers wide.²⁷ But while Skanderbeg was still alive, Murad's forces could not even reach it. If it were not for that great Albanian, the Turks could have invaded Italy from the South, proceeded up the Peninsula, and captured Rome as the Western Allies were to do in World War II. The seat of the pope might have fallen to the Turks, and he could have been driven into exile.

But in those circumstances, Mehmed II had to turn away. He then rather concentrated his energies and ingenuity on taking Constantinople, assailing it with between 80,000 to 200,000 troops plus a navy of 320 ships. He captured it after a fifty-seven-day siege on 29 May 1453. Under its new name of Istanbul, he made it his capital, calling himself the *Kayser-i Rûm*, which is the Turkish for “Caesar of Rome.” He did, in fact, have “a blood lineage to the Byzantine Imperial family, Sultan Orhan I had married a Byzantine princess, and Mehmed claimed descent from John Tzelepes Komnenos.”²⁸

After restoring the damage inflicted on the city by the siege, he took measures to ensure its peace and prosperity. One of these was to firmly establish the *millet* system. Derived from the Arabic word *millah*, this literally means “nation,” but for the Turks it was not an ethnic or linguistic distinction. It was primarily a religious classification and “closely linked to Islamic rules on the treatment of non-Muslim minorities.” The system actually derived from fourth-century Persia under the Sassanids while they still espoused pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism, before Muhammad's time. It tolerantly accommodated the Christian Church of the East.²⁹

In Constantinople, Mehmed invited back the Greeks who had fled from the city. Their Orthodox Patriarch became the head of the Rum millet, which meant that he was not only again their religious but now also their secular head. Under him, they regulated most of their affairs. They had their own “separate legal courts pertaining to personal law under which minorities were allowed to rule themselves (in cases not involving any Muslim) with fairly little interference from the Ottoman government.” Their millet even collected and distributed its taxes. The same enlightened system applied to other minority religious groups, such as the millets for Armenians, members of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and Jews. While Muslims had Sharia law, these communities were governed respectively by Christian Canon law and Jewish Halakha law. Their leaders were directly responsible to the sultan. “When a member of one millet committed a crime against a member of another, the law of the injured party applied, but the ruling Islamic majority being paramount, any dispute involving a Muslim fell under their sharia-based law.”³⁰

Islam regarded Jews, like Christians, as a people of the Book. Therefore, they were protected by sharia law. “Though not regarded as equal to Muslims, they were still treated

relatively well at points during the Ottoman Empire.” Subsequently, as it declined, their situation worsened. Nevertheless, “given their rampant persecution in medieval Europe, many Jews looked favorably upon the millet.” Materially they flourished. For instance, “the city of Thessaloniki received a great influx of Jews in the 15th century and soon flourished economically to such an extent that during the 18th century it was the largest and possibly the most prosperous Jewish city in the world. By the early 20th century Ottoman Jews—together with Armenians and Greeks—dominated commerce within the Empire.”³¹

Even so, they were not completely safe from anti-Semitism, especially just before Easter. At that time, “Greeks and Armenians were driven into frenzy by the old accusations, invented in ancient times by the Greek Orthodox Church, that Jews murdered Christian children in order to use their blood for religious rituals. The sultan intervened to provide protection for his Jewish subjects as much as possible . . .”³²

The influx of Jews at the end of the fifteenth century was largely the result of their expulsion from Catholic Spain in 1492, by King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile. The loss of those economically savvy Hebrews impoverished Spain but enriched both Protestant Holland to the North and the Ottoman Empire to the East. When the Catholic monarchs expelled the Jews and Muslims, Mehmed’s son and successor, Sultan Bayezid II, in 1492 sent out his fleet, commanded by Admiral Kemal Reis, “to evacuate them safely to Ottoman lands. He sent out proclamations throughout the empire that the refugees were to be welcomed. He granted the refugees the permission to settle in the Ottoman Empire and become Ottoman citizens.” He also, concerning the Jews, ridiculed the conduct of Ferdinand and Isabella. “‘You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler,’ he said to his courtiers—‘he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!’” He ordered the governors of his European provinces to welcome these refugees and treat them well. “He threatened with death all those who treated the Jews harshly or refused them admission into the empire.” The Muslims and Jews from Spain endowed the Ottoman Empire with new ideas, methods, and craftsmanship. For instance, “the first printing press in Constantinople was established by the Sephardic Jews in 1493.”³³

Both Bayezid II and his father Mehmed II were truly remarkable men. But it is to the latter that our narrative must now return and shift a little back in time.

He rebuilt the defenses of Constantinople after it fell in 1453 and had a new palace constructed for himself. “To encourage the return of the Greeks and the Genoese who had fled from Galata, the trading quarter of the city, he returned their houses and provided them with guarantees of safety. Mehmed issued orders across his empire that Muslims, Christians, and Jews should resettle the City; he demanded that five thousand households needed to be transferred to Constantinople by September. From all over the Islamic empire, prisoners of war and deported people were sent to the city. . . .”³⁴

But Mehmed had not given up his other idea of invading Italy from the South. With Skanderbeg gone, he conquered the rest of Albania. In 1478, after a fourth siege, Krujë finally fell to his forces, and the way lay open. Other factors also affected his plans. His northerly advance through the Balkans had been checked by the Hungarians at Belgrade and Vlad III Tepes, a Wallachian ruler “known to history as Vlad the Impaler, or Vlad Dracula.” On the other hand, a peace treaty with Venice in 1479, removed the danger of interference by the Venetian fleet.³⁵

And Mehmed’s appetite had been whetted when he named himself the *Kayser-i Rûm*, so he “announced his intention to invade Italy, capture Rome, and bring together both halves of

the Roman Empire. The campaign would also mark the final defeat of the Christian cause in Europe by the conversion of the city of the popes. St. Peter's Basilica would serve as a stable for the Ottoman cavalry."³⁶

For all these reasons, he crossed the Adriatic in 1480. His fleet consisted of "at least 90 galleys, 15 heavily armed galleasses, and 48 lighter galliots carrying over 18,000." The commander, Pasha Ahmet, was one of Mehmet's ablest generals. The expedition headed for Brindisi, because it had a large harbor and could accommodate his ships; but fickle winds diverted them fifty miles to the south, so they landed near Otranto on the heel of the Italian boot-like peninsula. The city's garrison consisted of only about 400 soldiers. Their commander refused to surrender and also immediately sent messengers to alert the rest of the peninsula with the hope that help would arrive to save them.³⁷

Mehmed's army had "reached the shore on 28 July 1480 and the city was captured in two weeks, on 11 August 1480."³⁸ This was a prophetic month or 30 literal years after 1450. It was also exactly one prophetic year or 360 calendar years before 11 August 1480, Litch's date!

The Turks butchered many of the 20,000 inhabitants. They also demanded that the survivors convert to Islam. But 800 Catholics refused and were beheaded. The Roman Church has never forgotten them, regarding them as martyrs and saints. On 12 May 2013, Pope Francis formally canonized them.³⁹

Back in 1480, the pontiff, Sixtus IV, "was reportedly so concerned for the safety of the Eternal City that he renewed the call first made in 1471 for a crusade against the Turks. Hungary, France, and a number of Italian city-states answered the call." He also laid plans to evacuate Rome if the Ottomans neared its gates.⁴⁰

But fortunately for him the resistance of the people at Otranto had bought enough time to blunt the Turkish offensive. Ferdinand I, the king of Naples, had "quickly gathered his available forces and charged his son Alfonso, duke of Calabria with the campaign." Though Pasha Ahmet attacked other cities in the South, Lecce, Taranto, and Brindisi,⁴¹ the campaign bogged down and a northward lightning strike could not materialize. The Turks controlled and hung on in Otranto for thirteen months. But Mehmed II, who wanted to renew his efforts, "died en route to capture the rest of Italy." Sultan Bayezid II, the son who succeeded him, then, for his failure, "ordered Pasha Ahmet to be hanged, and the Turks retreated at the end on 11 September 1481."⁴²

The two attempts, of 1450 and 1480, to break the power of the Holy Roman Empire as well as the papacy were both aborted. For the time being, men and women in the West could breathe more easily, at least for the next few decades. The Turks would henceforth settle for their former line of advance: up through the Balkans toward Vienna. And the Lord had plans of his own.

The Ottoman Empire approached the zenith of its power in 1517, which was the very year when Martin Luther began the sixteenth-century Reformation by nailing 95 theses to the castle church door at Wittenberg. During that year, Sultan Selim I defeated his Mamlūk rivals, headquartered in Egypt. Their "army fell easily to the well-organized and disciplined Ottoman infantry and cavalry supported by artillery." Through his campaign of 1516-1517, "Selim doubled the size of his empire, adding to it all the lands of the old Islamic Caliphate with the exception of Iran, which remained under the Safavids, and Mesopotamia, which was taken by his successor."⁴³

From 1517, the Roman Church and those who supported it were threatened on two fronts: Luther at Wittenberg and the Turks at the gates of Vienna. Intent on capturing it, the Muslims had plans for thrusting westward into Europe. The Habsburg emperor, Charles V, the great champion of Catholicism, wanted to crush the so-called Lutheran heresy, yet when he tried to do so, he was thwarted by the enemy in the East. Incidentally, though 1517 is historically important, it was not foreshadowed in prophecy.

Selim was succeeded in 1520 by his son Süleyman I, “the Magnificent.” In 1529, he was besieging Vienna, which was “the principal European bulwark against further Muslim advance.” Although in this case, Süleyman was unsuccessful, “the siege frightened the other states of Europe sufficiently for them to agree to a Roman Catholic-Protestant truce (1532).”⁴⁴

In those days, the Spanish armies of Charles V and his son Philip II were, humanly speaking, invincible; and theirs was an empire on which the sun never set. But during the sixteenth century the One who rules on high ensured the survival and ultimate triumph of the Protestant Reformation. One of his instrumentalities was the Ottoman Turks. In the purposes of God, the Lord of history, they performed a double service to complete his design, which was to vanquish an apostate religion.

Through the Saracen scourge, predicted in the prophecies of the fifth and sixth trumpets, he severely afflicted its members—although “the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.” (Rev. 9:20-21)

And then he used the Ottoman Turks to ensure the very survival of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation.

The time of the sixth trumpet, or second woe, ceased on 11 August 1840, when the period of 15 days and 391 years ended.

Thereupon, the seventh trumpet announced the final events of our earth’s history. This period, in which we now live, began on 22 October 1844 with the Investigative Judgment and will culminate at the Second Coming. Also called the *third woe*, it brings not only salvation and eternal life to the redeemed but universal destruction for the finally impenitent.

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thundering, and an earthquake, and great hail. (Rev. 11:16-19)

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