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Seven Trumpets of the Book of Revelation in the Interpretation of Oecumenius

Among the comments of the Church Fathers on the Book of Revelation, an important place is occupied by the comment of Oecumenius. It is considered to be the earliest Greek commentary on the Apocalypse. The article deals with the analysis of the interpretation of the passage of the “Seven Trumpets” (Rev 8:7–9:21; 11:15–19), by byzantine theologian Oecumenius. It was found that Oecumenius used a symbolic and allegorical method of interpretation. There some negative aspects of the excessive allegorization of biblical symbols were established. Oecumenius also puts sometimes into the biblical notions a meaning that is not present in the text itself. Oecumenius interprets the vision of the seven trumpets in the context of the doctrine of eternal torment and the doctrine of apocatastasis. It has been found that this understanding of the vision of the Seven Trumpets is inconsistent with the general teaching of Scripture about the fate of sinners and the salvation of the faithful. There are no texts in the Bible that support the doctrine of the salvation of the devil and demons. It is revealed that the Byzantine exegete sees the fulfilment of the vision of the Seven Trumpets in the distant future, after the general resurrection and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It was found that the futuristic interpretation of Oecumenius does not correspond to the biblical context and structure of the book of Revelation. Nothing in the text of the Seven Trumpets says that events will be after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Interpretation of the concept of the “third part” by Oecumenius corresponds to the context of seven trumpets representing God’s partial judgments mixed with mercy and expectation of repentance. Also important for Oecumenius is the doctrine of the Trinity, and therefore, when interpreting the seven trumpets, he refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although the text does not explicitly mention the Three Persons of the Deity, the context of the Book of Revelation confirms that the words of Oecumenius about the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are correct. Analyzing the interpretation of Oecumenius, we can conclude that its interpretation is filled with references to other Old Testament and New Testament texts. We see further consideration of the indicated scientific problems in clarifying the connection between the interpretation of the passage “Seven Trumpets” of Oecumenius and other commentators of his time; a detailed analysis of the interpretation of Seven Trumpets in connection with the vision of Seven Churches, Seals and plagues.

Keywords: *Seven Trumpets, Apocalypse, Book of Revelation, Oecumenius, Judgment, Hermeneutics, Futurism*

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Сім Труб книги Об’явлення в інтерпретації Ікуменія

Серед коментарів отців Церкви на книгу Об’явлення важливе місце посідає коментар Ікуменія. Вважається, що це найдавніший грецький коментар на біблійну книгу Апокаліпсис. Стаття присвячена аналізу інтерпретації уривку «Сім Труб» (Об. 8:7–9:21; 11:15–19), написану візантійським богословом Ікуменієм. Було встановлено, що Ікуменій використовував символічний та алегоричний метод інтерпретації. Були визначені деякі негативні аспекти надмірної алегоризації біблійних символів. Ікуменій також іноді вкладає в біблійні поняття значення, якого немає в самому тексті. Ікуменій тлумачить видіння Семи Труб у контексті вчення про вічні муки та вчення про апокатастасис. Було виявлено, що таке розуміння видіння Семи Труб несумісне із загальним вченням Святого Письма про долю грішників та спасіння вірних. У Біблії немає текстів, які б підтримували вчення про спасіння диявола та демонів. Виявлено, що візантійський екзегет бачить здійснення видіння Семи Труб у далекому майбутньому, після загального воскресіння та Другого пришествя Ісуса Христа. Було встановлено, що футуристична інтерпретація Ікуменія не відповідає біблійному контексту та структурі книги Одкровення. Ніщо в тексті Семи Труб не говорить, що події будуть після Другого пришествя Ісуса Христа. Інтерпретація Ікуменієм концепції “третьої частини” відповідає контексту Семи Труб, що представляють часткові суди Бога, змішані з милосердям та очікуванням покаяття. Також важливим для Ікуменія є вчення про Трійцю, і тому, трактуючи Сім Труб, він посилається на Отця, Сина і Святого Духа. Хоча в тексті прямо не згадуються Три Особи Божества, контекст книги Одкровення підтверджує, що слова Ікуменія про поклоніння Отцю, Сину і Святому Духу є правильними. Аналізуючи тлумачення Ікуменія, можна зробити висновок, що

його інтерпретація наповнена посиланнями на інші старозавітні та новозавітні тексти. Подальший розгляд зазначеної наукової проблематики ми бачимо у зв'язуванні зв'язку між інтерпретацією уривку "Сім Труб" Ікуменія та іншими коментаторами того часу; детальний аналіз інтерпретації Семи Труб у зв'язку з видінням Семи Церков, Печаток та Язв.

Ключові слова: *Сім Труб, Апокаліпсис, Книга Об'явлення, Ікуменій, Суд, Герменевтика, Футуризм*

Introduction

The Book of Revelation today is one of the most studied books of the New Testament¹. Unusual images written by the apocalyptic genre attracted the attention of many researchers throughout the history of Christianity². One of these passages is a vision of the "Seven Trumpets" which Ranko Stefanovic says is "one of the most perplexing subjects in the book of Revelation and in the entire New Testament" (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 275). Although recently there have been several serious studies of the Seven Trumpets, there are still questions unanswered, which leads to further discussions among scholars (Rodriguez, 2012). It is also worth noting that the lack of research on the history of the interpretation of the Seven Trumpets in the history of the Christian church actualizes the study of this issue.

Among the comments of the Church Fathers on the Book of Revelation, an important place is occupied by the comment of Oecumenius. It is considered to be the earliest Greek commentary on the Apocalypse (Oecumenius & Caesarea, 2011, 19). Oecumenius was a Christian exegete and called himself a philosopher and rhetorician (Kazhdan, 1991, p. 1528). Since he notes that he created his work V centuries after the Apostle John wrote the Apocalypse, scholars today distinguish him from the bishop Oecumenius of Trikka, who lived in the X century (Kazhdan, 1991, p. 1528). William Weinrich provides a brief overview of studies on the dating and identification of Oecumenius, and concludes that most likely the comment was written at the beginning of the VI century (Oecumenius & Caesarea, 2011, p. 20-25). Later, it was often used by Andreas of Caesarea, although he did not call the author by name (Oecumenius & Caesarea, 2011, p. 19). The importance of Oecumenius commentary to the

Byzantine tradition necessitates a detailed study of its interpretation specifically the interpretation of the Seven Trumpets.

The interpretation of the Revelation of Oecumenius began to be studied in the early twentieth century. Franz Diekamp in 1901 found his comment in a manuscript dating from the 12th century (Oecumenius & Caesarea, 2011, p. 20). Later, in 1928, the world saw the first critical edition of the text (Oecumenius & Hoskier, p. 1928)³. Herman Hoskier analyzed the use of other biblical texts by Oecumenius and created an index that shows what the verses he cites (Oecumenius & Hoskier, 1928, p. 5). Hoskier also investigated the philological features of the commentary, and mistakenly identified the author as Oecumenius of Tricca, who wrote it in the first half of the 7th century (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 4). Cliff Durlousseau published an article on the commentary of Oecumenius in 1984 (Durlousseau, 1984). In his article, Durlousseau highlights the contribution of Oecumenius to the study of Revelation and analyzes his exegesis (Durlousseau, 1984). John Lamoreaux wrote an article in 1998 that explores the origins of commentary of Oecumenius (Lamoreaux, 1998). Also, John Suggit cites the critical edition of Marc de Groote, published in 1999, in which the author analyzes the parallels between commentary of Oecumenius and commentary of Andreas of Caesarea (Groote, 1999)⁴. In 2006, a critical edition of Oecumenius's commentary translated into English by John Suggit was published in the series "The Fathers of the Church, a new translation" (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006). In the book, he also cites some other studies made by scholars (Schmid, 1938, p. 1959)⁵. In the introduction, Suggit briefly reveals the theology of Oecumenius and analyzes the relationship

¹ Current trends in the study of Book of Revelation, see (Koester, 2000; Paulien, 1988)

² The history of the interpretation of the Book of Revelation was committed in the following works: (Bauckham, 1978; Burdon, 1997; Newport, 2000; Wainwright, 1993)

³ (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 3-4)

⁴ (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 3, note 1)

⁵ (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 11)



between Origen and Oecumenius (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 6–13). He also describes the hermeneutic methods of Oecumenius, examines the text of the Book of Revelation, which he used and recalls the manuscripts of Oecumenius's commentary (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 13–16).

In 2011, the book "Greek Commentaries on Revelation" was published, in which two comments were presented: Oecumenius and Andreas of Caesarea, whose translation into English with brief introductions was made by William Weinrich (Oecumenius & Caesarea, 2011). The mentioned scholars of the Oecumenius's commentary focus more on its origin and pay little attention to its hermeneutical principles. Such passages of the Apocalypse as "Seven Churches", "Seven Seals", "Seven Trumpets" and "Seven Plagues" have not been separately studied by scholars, which necessitates the study of theological ideas of Oecumenius. Therefore, the purpose of this study is a comprehensive analysis of Oecumenius's interpretation of the "Seven Trumpets."

Oecumenius commenting on the phrase "and there were given unto them seven trumpets" (Rev 8:2), notes that this is about establishing the kingdom of Jesus, and the sound of these trumpets in the future will awaken the dead from mortal sleep (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 82). To confirm his interpretation, the Byzantine theologian refers to two passages of the Apostle Paul, in which he writes about the resurrection with the trumpet of the Archangel (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 83)⁶. It is worth noting that there is no connection between the Seven Trumpets of the book of the Apocalypse with the trumpet of the Archangel (1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52). First, the difference lies in the number of trumpets: in Paul's epistles there is one trumpet, and in the Book of Revelation there are seven trumpets. Secondly, the difference is that the dead will be resurrected from the trumpet of the Archangel, and the seven trumpets are given to lower-ranking spiritual beings – angels.

In an angel throwing a censer to the earth and the thunder and lightning that appeared after this (Rev 8:5), Oecumenius sees an allusion to the theophany of God on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16–19) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 83). In the time of Israel, the sounds symbolized the imminent appearance of God, and now the sounds of the seven trumpets indicate the close coming of Jesus Christ (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). The statement that there is a parallel with the Exodus is true because modern researchers also come to this conclusion. In particular, Ranko Stefanovic writes that "these are the symbols of the appearance of God, much like his appearance on the Mount of Sinai with fire, thunder, lightning, and earthquake (Exod 19:16–19)" (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 286). However, theophany on Mount Sinai symbolizes God's judgment rather than the close coming of Jesus Christ. Gregory Beale states that the sound of a trumpet in Rev 8:2,6 "echo that exodus imagery for the wrath of God" (Beale, 1999, p. 459). Besides, Oecumenius writes nothing about the main content of the passage Rev 8:2–6, which is that the Lord answers the prayers of the saints (Koester, 2014, p. 435)⁷.

First trumpet (Rev 8:7)

Oecumenius claims that the first trumpet refers to the last punishment of sinners. He refers to verse 1 Thess 4:17, which says that the righteous will be lifted into the air to the Lord and declares that faithful people will be freed from the catastrophes that God will direct against the wicked (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). Further, the Byzantine exegete reflects on what punishments will await people and believes that not all sinners will be executed the same way, since there are different types of death (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84)⁸. However, in his opinion, most of them will go through fiery torment, because the Apostle Paul wrote about this in 1 Cor 3:13 (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). The Byzantine theologian again recalls that the sounds of trumpets for the saved will bring resurrection, and for the sinners punishment (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84).

⁶ Oecumenius refers to the following verses: 1 Thess 4:16 i 1 Cor 15:52.

⁷ Koester states that "since the incense is given to the angel by someone near to God's throne, this action intimates that the prayers of the saints, which are about to be offered, will receive a hearing before God". The commentator also draws attention to the passage of Rev 6:9–11, in which the martyrs cry out to the Lord and ask for justice to be restored (Koester, 2014, p. 435).

⁸ Oecumenius to confirm his opinion refers to the verse John 14:2 and notes that "if there are "many resting places,"... there are also different places of punishment" (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, 84).

In our opinion, the futuristic interpretation of Oecumenius does not correspond to the biblical context and structure of the book of Revelation. Nothing in the text of the Seven Trumpets says that events will be after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, therefore the first trumpet cannot be interpreted through the prism of verse 1 Thess 4:17. On the contrary, the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15–19) indicates the establishment of the Kingdom of God at the time of the coming of the Lord (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 279). Correspondingly, the events of the first trumpet should take place before. Ranko Stefanovic notes that the answer to when the first trumpet sounds should be sought in the passage Rev 8:2–5, which “is built on a special service in the Hebrew Temple – the daily sacrifice known as tamid” (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 280). Stefanovic argues that interpretation in relation to the temple ministry suggests that “the scene of the blowing of the seven trumpets begins with the cross, as does the scene of the opening of the seven seals of Revelation 6” (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 281). Therefore, Seven Trumpets are God's judgments throughout the history of Christianity⁹.

Oecumenius calls to interpret the phrases “hail and fire” and “a third of those on the earth” not using the literal method of interpretation, but metaphorically since only in this case it is possible to understand “true meaning of the saying” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). Therefore, “fire” symbolizes the suffering of the people who rebelled against the Lord, and reveals their grief at the moment when they see that the righteous received salvation, but they were left with nothing (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). The burning of trees and green grass allegorically indicates “folly and the insensibility of their soul, their woodenness all ready for burning” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 84). It should be noted that the Book of Revelation is filled with various symbols which are taken from other texts of Scripture. Therefore, for their correct interpretation it is necessary to study these images in the context of the Old Testament. Researchers have noticed that the first trumpet has parallels with the

seventh Egyptian plagues (Exod 9:23–26) (Paulien, 1987, p. 237–239). Accordingly “hail and fire, mingled with blood” symbolizes “God’s weapons of judgment” (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 289). Edwin Thiele examines the images of trees and concludes that they symbolize Israel, over which God is judging (Thiele, 1949, p. 163–164). Burning green grass is a metaphor for God’s people who have been punished and point to the destruction of Jerusalem (Thiele, 1949, p. 164–165).

Second trumpet (Rev 8:8–9)

Oecumenius in the interpretation of the second trumpet gives two possible interpretations, one literal and the second allegorical. He refers to the text of the Apostle Paul (Rom 8:20–21) and notes that all nature awaits the liberation from the slavery of corruption, which will take place during the creation of a new earth and a new heaven (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85)¹⁰. Further, the Byzantine theologian makes the logical conclusion that since the earth will be changed so that all the consequences of sin disappear, therefore the sea must be cleansed. This transformation process is possible only with the help of eternal flame, which will destroy a third of living things in the sea (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85). Oecumenius calls this interpretation “literal, physical view”, but also allows allegorical interpretation (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85). In this case, the sea symbolizes “present life because of its turbulence and constant motion”, and fish and ships are a metaphor for evil people (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85).

There are several drawbacks of the Oecumenius’s literal interpretation of the second trumpet. As noted above, the fulfillment of the second trumpet cannot be attributed to the time that is written in Rom 8:20–21, since it deals with the creation of a new earth and a new heaven, and the events of the seven trumpets take place before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the opinion about the destruction of a third of living beings by eternal flame does not coincide with the chronology of last time events. However, the allegorical interpretation of Oecumenius is partially consistent with the

⁹ In the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary is written that there are seven trumpets “retrace, to a large extent, the period of Christian history already covered by the seven churches (chs. 2; 3) and the seven seals (chs. 6; 8:1)...” (Nichol, 1980, p. 788).

¹⁰ Oecumenius also quotes the verse 2 Pet 3:13, in which the Apostle Peter gives the Lord’s promise of a new heaven and a new earth.



correct interpretation. As John Paulien notes “the sea, especially in an unruly state, represents the peoples of the earth in their opposition to God” and “fish represent people (Ezek 29:5)” (Paulien, 1987, p. 261–262). Since “a mountain in the Old Testament often represents a kingdom or empire” (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 289)¹¹, Ranko Stefanovic concludes that the second trumpet symbolizes God’s judgment on the Roman Empire (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 290–291).

Third trumpet (Rev 8:10–11)

In interpreting the third trumpet, Oecumenius draws attention to the story that happened with Naomi. After the death of her two sons and husband, she asked: “call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20). The Byzantine theologian concludes that “bitterness then is a sign of extraordinary plagues” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85). Oecumenius claims that the “great star Wormwood” symbolizes the bitterness that sinners experience when they fall into despair from the loss of future eternal life, which they exchanged for the satisfaction of this world (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85). The commentator argues his figurative method of interpretation with reference to verses Ps 92:3–4, which in his opinion confirms the allegorical understanding of the term “waters” in the sense of “people” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 85–86). However, Oecumenius does not want to be categorical in his symbolic method of interpretation and notes that it is not necessary “reject the possibility that these and other such things were actually taking place then” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 86).

We regret to note that Oecumenius uses an allegorical method of interpretation, the weakness of which is that it allows finding a meaning in biblical texts that contradicts with the literal meaning. In fact, Naomi’s words in Ruth 1:20 are not related to the third trumpet, because the Apocalypse speaks about another bitterness. Researchers of the Revelation find parallels with the Old Testament texts that mention the plant “wormwood”. Robert Charles writes that in the Old Testament the Lord promises to punish his people for rebelling against Him “feeding them

with wormwood and giving them water of gall . . . to drink” (Charles, 1920, p. 235)¹². Kayle De Waal suggests, that “wormwood represented Yahweh’s punishment for Judah’s idolatry (Jer 9:14–15; 23:15), false prophecy (Jer 23:11–40) and apostasy (Jer 8:5, 14) and also appears as a metaphor for sin itself (Deut 29:18)” (Waal, 2012, p. 130). Therefore, it can be argued that the third trumpet is a punishment for spiritual deviation from the *träouth* (Beale, 1999, p. 480). This conclusion confirms the parallel between the fall of the big star (Rev 8:10–11) and the biblical passage Isa 14:12–15, which refers to the fall of the devil-star from the throne of God. Accordingly, it is possible to agree with the conclusion of Edwin Thiele, that the third trumpet symbolizes the historical period of the digression of the Christian Church (Beale, 1999, p. 166–169).

Fourth trumpet (Rev 8:12)

Oecumenius asserts that the fourth trumpet refers to the time of the Lord’s Day. The basis for such a conclusion, he considers the prophetic text of Joel, which says that “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah cometh” (Joel 2:31) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 86). The Byzantine exegete also makes reference to two other texts of the New Testament. Oecumenius quotes the words of the Apostle Peter that “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10), and the words of Jesus Christ who said: “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matt 24:29) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 86). The commentator believes that the Apostle John writes about these things in the Apocalypse.

The three biblical passages Oecumenius alluded to are indeed related to the approach of the Lord’s Day. However, it is worth noting that only the seventh trumpet refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Beale, 1999, p. 611)¹³. Besides, the two texts Joel 2:31 and

¹¹ To confirm his opinion, Ranko Stefanovic provides the following texts: Ps 48:1; 78:68; Isa 2:2–3; 13:4; 31:4; 41:15; Jer 51:24–25; Ezek 35:2–3; Obad 8–9.

¹² Charles gives the following biblical texts: Jer 9:15; 23:15; Deut 29:17; Lam 3:19; Amos 5:7; 6:12; Prov 5:4 (Charles, 1920, p. 235–236).

¹³ Beale writes that “the seventh trumpet, like the seventh seal and the seventh bowl, narrates the very end of history” (Beale, 1999, p. 611).

Matt 24:29 have a closer relationship with the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–14), since it speaks of the moon, which will become like blood, and of the starfall. Therefore, the three passages cited by Oecumenius, which speak of natural disasters, cannot be the basis for relating the time of the fulfilment of the fourth trumpet to the Lord's Day.

According to Ranko Stefanovic, light and darkness in the New Testament symbolize two kingdoms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of sin, evil and rejection of the Gospel (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 295)¹⁴. Edwin Thiele refers to the text of Ezek 32:7,8 and asserts that it is not necessary to interpret the eclipse of the light literally, since "this darkness was one that involved the whole being of man, a darkness that would involve the entire nation" (Thiele, 1949, p. 169). Therefore, the fourth trumpet symbolizes the concessions of Christianity and the period of the dark Middle Ages, when the Roman Church strengthened its position and began to persecute true believers (Thiele, 1949, p. 170).

Further, Oecumenius wonders why it is said that only the "third part" will be damaged. He finds the answer in the love of God and of patience when the Lord calls for repentance through partial punishments and those who resist are awaiting "total destruction in the future" (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 86). The Byzantine theologian also points to the words "He made a path for his anger; He spared not their soul from death" (Ps 78:50), and considers them an additional confirmation of his interpretation (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 86–87). In our opinion, although Oecumenius's reference to Ps 78:50 is not correct, his interpretation of the concept of the "third part" corresponds to the context of seven trumpets representing God's partial judgments mixed with mercy and expectation of repentance (Mounce, 1998, p. 178).

Fifth trumpet (Rev 9:1–12)

Oecumenius claims that the fifth trumpet is God's punishment for apostates after the resurrection (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 87). The commentator does not interpret the star that was falling from the sky literally, but

considers it a metaphor "Messenger of God because of its brilliance" (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 87). We cannot agree with this interpretation since we have already determined that the events of the seven trumpets will not occur after the resurrection. Also, the star of the fifth trumpet should symbolize evil forces, since the fall of the star in Scripture symbolizes the apostasy of the devil and demons¹⁵. Edwin Thiele believes this is about Mohammed, whom Satan used for his purposes (Thiele, 1949, p. 172–173).

According to Oecumenius, the star will fall to the place where the judgment of the Lord will be committed, namely, it will be "the valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 87). He assumes that this is about Gehenna, since the Apostle John describes the smoke that rises from it, which is a symbol of not only fire but also darkness (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 87). He refers to verse Ps 28:7, which says that the voice of God gives birth to fire, and in his opinion, it confirms the statements made by him since in this way the Church Fathers explained the text (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 87–88). Oecumenius claims that the words of the prophet John that "sun and the air were darkened" (Rev 9:2) should not be taken literally, as if the sun had really ceased to give its light, but this image indicates the filling of darkness with sinners who were blinded by punishment (Amos 8:9) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 88).

It is worth noting that when the Apostle John writes about the eternal punishment of sinners, he writes directly about it and uses the appropriate terminology. For example, the message of the third angel contains a warning about God's final anger, which is represented in the images of fire, sulfur and smoke (Rev 14:9–11) (Aune, 1998, p. 833–837). Also, Rev 20:7–10 describes the scenes of God's last judgment on the devil and his followers. Although smoke is mentioned in Rev 9, the contents of the trumpet and the context do not speak of the final and last judgment of the wicked, but only of God's partial anger over a period of the Christian church. Of particular note is the fact that the Apocalypse does not support the doctrine of the endless torment of sinners, but

¹⁴ Stefanovic quotes the following texts: Eph 6:12; Col 1:13–14; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 16:10; 2 Cor 4:4,6; 6:14–15; John 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46; Luke 1:79; Matt 4:16.

¹⁵ Rev 12:7–10; Isa 14:12; Luke 10:18 (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 300).



testifies to their ultimate destruction (Fudge, 2011, p. 234–252).

The Byzantine theologian explains the “locusts” as a symbol of the worms mentioned by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 66:24) and reiterates that they will harm when God establishes a new earth (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 88). The basis of his conclusion Oecumenius considers verse Ps 104:30, which states that the earth is restored from the Spirit of the Lord. The commentator then distinguishes between perfect believers and other Christians. The Byzantine exegete claims that the completely holy followers of Jesus Christ will forever be with him near the throne (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 88). However, other believers who, although they do not have perfect holiness, still did not defile themselves with iniquity and received the seal of God on their forehead. Accordingly, they will remain on earth but will be saved from punishment (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 88). To argue his position, Oecumenius refers to the parable of ten mines of silver, in which a man gave ten cities as a reward, and five cities to another (Luke 19:17,19). The parable, according to the commentator, indicates that the saints will rule over other people (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 88–89). The third part of the people who will be punished with the fifth trumpet symbolize sinners who have decided to side with evil and have not received the seal of God (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 89). In our opinion, the interpretation of Oecumenius locusts as worms is arbitrary, since locusts are not used anywhere in the Scriptures as a symbol of future suffering from worms. Accordingly, the two texts Isa 66:24 and Ps 103:30, to which the commentator refers, cannot be connected with the fifth trumpet of the book of Revelation. Most likely, according to the traditional point of view of Seventh-day Adventists, the “locust” symbolizes the Ottoman army (Nichol, 1980, p. 791).

Oecumenius commenting on the locust torment that lasted five months (Rev 9: 5) notes that this verse is the basis for the doctrine of apocatastasis, which was followed by some of the Church Fathers (Oecumenius & Suggit,

2006, p. 89). He shows the contradiction that exists between the opinions of the fathers and the texts of the Scriptures, where the torments of sinners are called eternal. The Byzantine exegete believes that it is not necessary to oppose these two views but to combine while noting that he says this as an assumption and not a statement since the prophet Isaiah and Jesus spoke of eternal torment (Isa 66:24; Matt 25:46) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 89). According to Oecumenius, the number “five months” should be interpreted mystically, that is, it indicates a certain period of terrible torment, which resembles the suffering from a scorpion, after which they will become easier (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 89–90). Note that the doctrine of the apocatastasis is not confirmed in the Bible and is a later invention of the Church Fathers (Cairns, 2002, p. 380)¹⁶. Therefore torments of locusts for five months can not be interpreted in connection with the universalism. As already mentioned, the locust symbolizes the army, so torments for five months can indicate the historical period of 150 years of political warfare if the hermeneutical day-year principle is applied (Thiele, 1949, p. 174–176).

The Byzantine theologian interprets the description of the appearance of the locusts (for him it symbolizes worms) and claims that the Apostle John either describes their form or gives such a detailed description to reveal the horror and power (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 90). He has no doubt that the words of the author of the Book of Revelation must be understood figuratively. In our opinion, Oecumenius rightly notes that the description of the locusts must be interpreted metaphorically. Ranko Stefanovic gives several arguments: 1. The Apostle John connects the locusts with the power of scorpions and their stings (Rev 9:3,5,10), 2. Locusts of the fifth trumpet harm not plants but living people (Rev 9:4), 3. Locusts represent the army, as in Joel 2:2–10 (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 300–301). Therefore, it is not necessary to interpret the description of locusts literally.

Then Oecumenius goes on to interpret the “angel of the abyss”, whose name was

¹⁶ Cairns states that “its supporters appeal to such passages as Acts 3:21; Rom 5:18, 19; 1 Cor 15:22; Eph 1:10; Col 1:19, 20. They impose upon these an interpretation which is at variance with the plain statements of Scripture, and which a careful examination of the context renders impossible. The Bible doctrine is totally opposed to either view of universal salvation” (Cairns, 2002, p. 380).

“Apollyon” in Greek (Rev 9:11). He assumes that this name was either made up, or is the real name of an angel (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, 90). The commentator confirms the second thesis with biblical texts. In particular, he recalls the existence of good angels who help the saved (Heb 1:14), as well as angels who were sent to perform God’s judgment on sinners (2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36; Gen 19:2) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 90). The term “woe” (Rev 9:12) Oecumenius interprets as “great distress”, and assumes that it “indicates present and future afflictions” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 90). One may agree that the angel of the abyss points to an evil spiritual being, but the devil always acts through earthly authority. It should be noted that since the locusts symbolize the human army, the angel of the abyss must also point to the human leader, the chief of the army. According to the interpretation of some researchers, it’s about Osman I (Nichol, 1980, p. 792).

Six trumpet (Rev 9:13–21)

Oecumenius supposes that the four horns of the altar symbolize special important angels, and the golden altar represents “the ministering spirits” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 91). The Byzantine commentator then begins to reflect on what the words mean that the angels were “bound at the great river Euphrates” (Rev 9:14). He cites Bible verses that say that evil angels were bound together (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4), and also other texts (Job 41:25; Ps 103:26; Isa 27:1; Ezek 32:2; Matt 25:41), to show that demons deserve punishment, not that they themselves will punish sinners (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 91–92). After that, Oecumenius asks the question of how to understand the contradiction, which at first glance appears when reading the words of St. John: if the angels are bound and punished, then how can they punish sinners (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 92)? The Byzantine theologian answers this question by inviting his readers to perceive the words of the book of the Apocalypse “figurative, in line with the manner of the whole vision” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 92).

Accordingly, this is not about evil demons, but about good angels, “spiritually bound to the joyful contemplation of God” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 92). Therefore, the word “the river” must be interpreted allegorically, which according to Oecumenius is confirmed by other texts of Scriptures (Isa 66:12; Ps 45:5; John 7:38), and four angels are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 92–93).

In recent studies, there are various interpretations of the four angels. For example, Uriah Smith, who sees the symbol of the Turkish army in the sixth trumpet, interprets the angels as four Turkish sultans (Smith, 1897, p. 480). It should be noted that the argument of Oecumenius that this is not about evil demons, but about good angels is weak and does not agree with the data of the Book Apocalypse. Craig Koester notes that “The angels set loose here do not appear elsewhere in Revelation” (Koester, 2014, p. 466). He claims that they cannot be compared with the angels in Rev 7:1, because there the angels restrain the winds from destructive actions, and in Rev 9:14,15 the angels themselves bring destruction and harm (Koester, 2014, p. 466). Accordingly, the four angels (Rev 9:14) represent demonic forces (Waal, 2012, p. 162).

A large horse army, according to the Byzantine theologian, points to powerful angels who have great power. He explains the different colors of horse armor (Rev 9:17) as follows: fire color symbolizes “wrath and punishment”, hyacinth color is a symbol of heavenly origin, and brimstone color “makes them pleasing to God, in that they are singing¹⁷ to God, for it is pleasing to sing” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 93). We can not agree with the interpretation of Oecumenius, because the horse army (Rev 9:16) does not symbolize angels, but represents a powerful army that can point to Turkish cavalry (Thiele, 1949, p. 177–180). Accordingly, describing its appearance John mentions the colors of the armor of horses (Rev 9:17) (Smith, 1897, p. 482)¹⁸.

Oecumenius further states that the symbols

¹⁷“A play on words: *θειώδης* means ‘like sulfur’, but can also mean ‘godlike’ (normally *θεοειδής*); *θεοαδείς* means ‘singing to God’” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 93, note 55).

¹⁸Smith writes that “these colors greatly predominated in the dress of these warriors; so that the description, according to this view, would be accurately met in the Turkish uniform, which was composed largely of red, or scarlet, blue, and yellow” (Smith, 1897, p. 482).



of lion heads, fire, smoke and brimstone (Rev 9:17) mean “fearfulness and irresistibility” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 93). He thinks that when the Apostle John writes about the death of people, then it means sinners who are punished in Hell. In his opinion, this is evidenced by the text Ps 6:5, which says that after death there is no memory of God, as well as Ps 76:4, where the author remembers God and enjoys it (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 93–94). Oecumenius then concludes that since they have not confessed their sins, there can be no repentance. The commentator also states that those who have not repented (Rev 9:20–21) are people who “are still living and who did not repent of their various unlawful deeds after hearing and seeing what the future holds” (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 94). Concluding his comment on the sixth trumpet, Oecumenius notes that sinners will suffer forever, and also expresses a wish to none of his readers to experience this (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 94).

It has already been noted that the interpretation of Oecumenius about the eternal torment of sinners is not only not related to the “Seven Trumpets” vision but also contradicts the teaching of the Book Apocalypse on the fate of the wicked (Fudge, 2011, p. 234–252). Fire, smoke and brimstone need to be interpreted in the context of the army, so these images may indicate the firearms of Turkish soldiers (Thiele, 1949, p. 180). Although the majority of the wicked did not experience harm, they continued to remain in their sins (Nichol, 1980, p. 794).

Seven trumpet (Rev 11:15–19)

Interpreting the seventh trumpet, Oecumenius points to God’s eternal rule, and therefore notes that the words “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev 11:15) must be understood in the sense that “the human kings on earth and the demonic tyrants had been destroyed and made an end of (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 105).” The worship of the elders to God and their thanksgiving to Him (Rev 11:16,17), the Byzantine theologian explains in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, claiming that they give glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 105).

Although the text of the seventh trumpet does not explicitly mention the Three Persons of the Deity, the context of the Book of Revelation confirms that the words of Oecumenius about

the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are correct. Particularly, the book itself begins with a greeting from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Rev 1:4,5), and also Jesus Christ accepts the worship of the whole universe on an equal footing with the Father (Rev 5:8–14) (Reynolds, 2006; Whidden, 2000). Also, Richard Bauckham convincingly proved that in the Book of Revelation there is high Christology and Pneumatology (Bauckham, 1993a, p. 118–173; 1993b, p. 40–65, 109–125).

The commentator assumes that the revelation of the temple of God in heaven and the ark (Rev 11:19) symbolizes the discovery of the secret things that the holy righteous had performed. He also adds that many things were closed to people, but will be revealed in the future (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 106). Oecumenius substantiates his view with references to the verse of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 2:9) and the promise of Jesus Christ not to drink wine until the Second Coming (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18) (Oecumenius & Suggit, 2006, p. 106). In our opinion, the interpretation of the temple of God and the ark is too allegorical. Nothing in the text speaks of the future revelation of things that today seem closed to understanding. We see no connection between the seventh trumpet and the texts of the epistle of Paul and the gospels. It is worth noting that the theme of God’s temple in the Book of Revelation occupies an important place, and it should be interpreted through the prism of the Old Testament temple ministry (Odek, 2017, p. 217–227).

Conclusion

An analysis of the interpretation of the seven trumpets of Oecumenius suggests that he used allegorical and symbolic methods of interpretation, although in some cases he allowed the possibility of literal understanding. While the symbolic method is consistent with the metaphorical nature of apocalyptic literature, the allegorical leads to the emergence of arbitrary interpretations that are not confirmed in the biblical text itself. It was found that the Byzantine exegete sees the fulfilment of the vision of the Seven Trumpets in the distant future when the resurrection and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will happen. Oecumenius believes that some texts of the passage “Seven Trumpets” describe the eternal torment of sinners and symbolize God’s

judgment on the wicked. In addition, he claims that the words of the Apostle John contain the doctrine of the apocatastasis. It has been found that this understanding of the vision of the Seven Trumpets is inconsistent with the general teaching of Scripture about the fate of sinners and the salvation of the faithful. There are no texts in the Bible that support the doctrine of the salvation of the devil and demons. Also important for Oecumenius is the doctrine of the Trinity, and therefore, when interpreting the Seven Trumpets, he refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Analyzing the interpretation of Oecumenius, we can conclude that its interpretation is filled with references to other Old Testament and New Testament texts, but

they do not always have a real connection with the Seven Trumpets. We regret to note that the Byzantine theologian does not take into account the importance of using the texts of the Old Testament to interpret Revelation. We see further consideration of the indicated scientific problems in clarifying the connection between the interpretation of the passage "Seven Trumpets" of Oecumenius and other commentators of his time; a detailed analysis of the interpretation of Seven Trumpets in connection with the vision of Seven Churches, Seals and plagues. We are sure that this will help to understand better the patristic interpretation of Revelation, which will contribute to a new understanding of the Bible.

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