

## Negative Physical Effects - Positive Spiritual Effects Revelation 8:7-9:12

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This morning we'll be continuing our study in the book of Revelation, in chapter 8. I loved the focus on prayer last week from Pastor Dave, from the first part of chapter 8. It was quite striking to imagine the prayers of God's people ascending up to Heaven along with incense smoke, and then fire from Heaven falling to Earth immediately afterwards. And after this description, what follows is what we might call the 2nd cycle of Apocalyptic tribulation events. There are 3 "cycles" of tribulation, describing 7 events- there's the 7 Seals, then the 7 Trumpets (some of which we'll be looking at today), and then lastly the 7 Bowls of Wrath. And as we've mentioned before, the way in which the events are described seems to point towards a possibility that these 3 cycles could be layered on top of each other, perhaps happening simultaneously in crescendo type fashion.

I was chatting with someone from One Church earlier this week on this subject, and they are drawn to the idea that the 3 iterations, not only do they seem to be layered in a crescendo type fashion, but the describing names themselves- "seals, trumpets, bowls," also seem to convey that the descriptions of these events could be indicating 3 different perspectives/or 3 different emphases of the events. Let me explain-

The 7 seals give us the imagery not only of just breaking seals that bind up a book, but in the description of seals we also have explained to us followers of Jesus being sealed- figuratively marked in some way that conveys the idea of being protected, marked as different, set aside for God's purposes. The perspective of the Tribulation events emphasis *here* would be from that of a strong believer who is whole heartedly prepared for the return of Jesus. Sealed and protected- ready for the arrival of His Kingdom.

Concerning the 7 Trumpets- a trumpet serves as an instrument to call people to attention- a trumpet sounds as a means to rally people together, or to call people's attention to an announcement or a warning being proclaimed. This Tribulation cycle description could be indicative of those who are being called to attention, a warning alarm- the intent being to wake people up- a wake up call to

non-believers, as well as nominal, cultural Christians who know about Jesus but who have yet to make Him King of their lives- and rally them all together to fully assemble on the side of Jesus' winning team.

And then lastly, the 7 Bowls of Wrath are poured out on who do not heed the prior warnings, who set themselves up against Jesus, refusing to turn to Him in repentance. After the 6th trumpet, there are 3 different places that tell us of people who still *do not repent*. If you want to note those 3 places on your study guide- the 1st one is under the 3rd column here, at the 6th trumpet, and then the other two are mentioned with the 5th and 6th *Bowl*, here under the 6th column.

I think this is a good perspective to add to our understanding of the 3 Tribulation cycle descriptions. The application to us today would be to make sure we heed the Biblical warnings and fully surrender to Jesus, so that we're sealed by His spirit and held in his protection no matter what happens on Earth. If we're kind of playing around with the idea of following Jesus, the encouragement would be to wake up and really get serious about following Him, before the last trumpet sounds.

Now, how many of you got to hear Bryan Glover's testimony week before last? I loved that time with Bryan. If you missed it, I highly encourage you to get on our website, [www.onechurchnc.org](http://www.onechurchnc.org), click on Live Stream on the top menu, and then click below on "Live Stream Archives," and the video's date is Feb 8th. One thing I think was super impactful was how Bryan expressed approaching prayer from the perspective of seeking God's work within our own hearts *more* than seeking God's work in our physical world. And it's not that God doesn't still work in our physical world- He does, and Bryan is a testimony to that fact- but sometimes the physical circumstances we find ourselves in do not change, no matter how hard we pray and no matter how much faith we have. And so, yes, we pray for physical circumstances to change- for God to heal, bless, provide, work things out- but the priority above that prayer, the more fitting prayer, is for God's will to be accomplished no matter what that looks like, and for us to pray for encouragement, strength, peace, trust in our God who is working all things out for us who love Him and are called according to His purposes.

I've been thinking about this concept this week, and our passage for this morning, I believe, reminds us of this concept as well. Let's go ahead and jump

into it, Revelation chapter 8- I'll read **verses 7-13**, and then walk us back through verse by verse.

Ok, **verse 7**- the first trumpet brings raining hail, fire, and blood. Now we're getting into the intense heavy apocalyptic type stuff, right? It's worth noting that this is not the first time such events have happened on Earth. Much of what we have described here is similar to some of the plagues that happened in Egypt, described in the book of Exodus. But- what we read in Revelation is described to be more wide spread- it's world-wide type events, in contrast to what is described in Exodus that only affected parts of Egypt. Exodus chapter 9 describes the 7th plague, hail and fire rained down on earth, it doesn't describe blood as does Revelation, but it says hail and fire ran down to earth, striking people, animals, plants, and trees. But **verse 26** of Exodus 9 says this "*Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, was there no hail.*" So in Goshen, which was an area within Egypt, where the tribes of Israel lived- it did not rain down hail. The people experienced a protection from God, a distinction, and were spared from that experience. And so in comparing that to today's passage in Revelation, in our passage today it doesn't directly say that followers of Jesus will be spared the hail/fire/blood trauma, but as we'll see in a moment, chapter 9 tells us specifically that those who have the "seal of God" on their foreheads are not harmed by the specific plague mentioned there.

I'll talk a little more about this subject when we get there, but for now I'd say it's hard to know for sure how much or how little believers in this Tribulation time will be physically affected by the events being described. On one hand, we have already read about the 5th seal in chapter 6 that talks about all the martyrs- followers of Jesus who will be killed because of their faith during the Tribulation; but then on the other hand, as we get deeper into the more intense Tribulation events, there seems to be described some protection for believers in Jesus. Not necessarily protection by means of a mid-tribulation rapture event to bring Christians out halfway through the Tribulation, (which I'm open to that possibility) but the language seems rather to indicate more the idea of protection *through* the events of the Tribulation.

And as we're wrestling with these concepts, it's worth noting that with trumpets 1-4, only *one third* of the Earth is affected. We aren't given details about which third is affected- we don't know if these things happen in one specific

generalized 1/3 portion of the world, or do they happen randomly in different spread out areas that end up adding up to 1/3? Another question would be: Is God targeting specific people who He knows have hardened their hearts- who He knows will never surrender to Him, or is it more like these events aren't intended to directly harm anyone, but only harm the Earth, thus only *indirectly* affecting people by way of road closures, food supply restraints, business and trade disruptions, limited water supplies, electricity problems? It does seem these events will eventually *indirectly* lead to the death of people, verse 11 says that many die because of the poisoned waters- but I think it's safe to say that the intent behind these events is for people to stop relying on themselves and the systems mankind has created, and instead turn to and rely on God. The 3 places I mentioned earlier that describe the people still not repenting- those 3 verses convey to us God's heart through all these circumstances- the whole point is not punishment and judgment (not yet!)- no, the whole point even up through the Bowls of Wrath is that God is attempting to wake people up to the reality that they need Him, and that He wants them to be in right relationship with Him.

The Tribulation period is actually God's mercy being displayed. He will be giving signs that should convey to rationally minded people, that He is real and that they need Him. And if we find ourselves experiencing these events one day, *if* we are not protected from all the effects of these events, prayers offered up to God asking to make whatever hard Tribulation thing go away immediately, will probably not be answered. Why? Because God will be achieving His purposes through these events- He will be extending a wake of call, an offer of mercy to those who have yet to place their faith in Him. And so, rather than asking for the circumstances to change, as I said earlier, our prayer should be one of asking for God's will to be accomplished no matter what that looks like- praying for encouragement, strength, peace, sustained trust in Him.

In **verses 8 and 9** we have the 2nd Trumpet, it sounds like maybe a volcanic mountain exploding into the ocean causing destruction to 1/3 of that which is *in* and *on* the ocean waters, turning those waters to blood. Again, this sounds similar to a plague from Exodus, the 1st one of water in the Nile turning to blood and thus the fish dying within it's waters. In **verses 10-11** the 3rd Trumpet is described- it seems a meteorite will hit the Earth, causing pollution of 1/3 of all freshwater. This star is described as "Wormwood." Wormwood is a plant that has green leaves and small yellow flowers, but it is very bitter tasting. In the

book of Deuteronomy, chapter 29, wormwood is mentioned and the context is that God was entering into covenant relationship with Moses and the people of Israel, and the terms of the agreement were that they follow Him and not follow idols that would result in figurative roots of poisonous fruit and wormwood growing amongst them. God didn't want His relationship with people to become bitter, He didn't want His relationship with them poisoned by them chasing after false gods.

In **verse 12** the 4th Trumpet is sounded, and 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars turn dark. Here we have language that should cause us to again consider that the 7 seals, trumpets, bowls are layered on top of each other, happening together simultaneously, because it doesn't make sense to interpret them as separate chronological events, being that previously, with the 6th seal, the stars of the sky all fall to Earth. If this is all chronological, 1/3 of the stars turning dark doesn't make sense if they've already all fallen to the Earth with the previous 6th seal. It probably makes more sense to consider maybe the 1st Seal, 1st Trumpet, 1st Bowl happening together, then the 2nd Seal, 2nd Trumpet, 2nd Bowl, then the 3rd and so on; and/or like I mentioned earlier, consider all these events as one combined cycle of progressing catastrophes and the revelation to John separates them out to emphasize different perspectives according to peoples' relationship status with Jesus.

But after these 4 Trumpets are described, **verse 13** gives a warning that things are about to intensify to a greater degree. An eagle is heard saying "Woe, woe, woe"- the Greek word and pronunciation would be "owEYEi" which was a Greek expression of grief. "owEYEi" is like the Greek equivalent of "arghhhhh," or "ahhhhhh," or "maaaannnnnn." So that's what's going on when the Bible says "woe." And let me point out that the Greek word for eagle is actually the same word they would have used for a vulture or a buzzard. For us as Americans, this is worth mentioning because in our culture we have an affinity for eagles- we think highly of eagles, they soar high, they fly fast, they can strike with precision, they represent some national identity; and in contrast we think poorly of vultures- they're always in the road, eating carcasses, they're ugly- but for our Biblical understanding, we have to note that the authors of the Bible saw these 2 birds as the same thing- a bird of prey. For the American mindset, here the Greek word would probably be better translated as *vulture* and not eagle- the sentiment here is not good vibes of eagle pride, but rather one of dark gloomy vulture type vibes.

And if you're reading from a King James or New King James Bible, you're probably really confused now, because those translations for some reason translate the Greek word "vulture" as "angel." The King James says "heard an *angel* flying." But again, vulture is probably a better translation from the Greek word and from the context of what is intending to be communicated. And before we look at the reasons for the dark vibe "woe" warning from the bird of prey, it's worth noting here that the previous, first 4 *seals* from the first mentioned Tribulation cycle- are also separated out to a degree from the last 3 seals. Back in chapter 6 we saw that the first 4 seals are associated with 4 different colored horses, and the last 3 are not associated with horses. The first 4 seals and the first 4 trumpets both seem to have a focus on the world and natural, physical realm happenings: conquering, war, famine, hail, fire, blood, volcano in the ocean, meteorite in the rivers, sun moon and stars- but when we get to the last 3 seals and last 3 trumpets, the focus shifts to more *spiritual* type happenings: Christian martyrs crying out to God, terror in the sight of Jesus, angelic incense, prayers of God's people, fire from Heaven; and as we'll see here in the following verses in chapter 9- the last 3 trumpets involve spiritual, *demonic* beings, and later on- bound angels released- then chapter 11 tells us the 7th trumpet ushers in the arrival of Jesus' Kingdom and the opening of the temple in Heaven.

Now, hold on to this thought of separating out the physical Tribulation events/effects from the *spiritual* Tribulation events/effects- I'm going to circle back to this concept after we read this next section that talks about what appears to be a very spiritual happening on the Earth that takes place with the 5th Trumpet. **Chapter 9, verses 1-12...**

Ok, let's break this down quickly- as with the seals, the 5th thing that will happen- the 5th Trumpet here, shifts to a more *spiritual* event. It says a star falls from heaven, but unlike the stars mentioned just previously- which seem to just be physical stars- this star is a "he" who is given a key to the abyss. We did read back in chapter 1 of the 7 stars mentioned *there*, that they were representative of messengers or angels, and so here we have a similar situation where "star" is representing a *living being*. "Abyss" is a word for a deep, bottomless pit. Abyss is a word used in the Bible and in Greek culture during this time to describe the place of the dead. The description in **verses 1 and 2** give us the imagery of a door opened to the entrance of a dark, smokey, smoldering *Hell*. And it's not stated specifically, but common thought is that this "star" is Satan. **Isaiah 14:12**

is worth noting here, very widely accepted as referring to Satan, it says *“How you have fallen from heaven, You star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who defeated the nations!”*

Another passage worth noting is **Luke 10:17-20**. Jesus sent out 72 of His followers out on a bit of a mission trip and it says: *“Now the seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” 18 And He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to walk on snakes and scorpions, and authority over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”*

Revelation chapter 12 also mentions Satan being thrown down to earth, and also mentions that word “woe” again because of Satan knowing that at that time, he will only have a short time to cause havoc on earth. And then **verse 11** gives us further confirmation that the star of verse 1 and 2 is Satan- who is king over these, who is the angel of the abyss, whose name is Abaddon or Apollyon- both words meaning “the destroyer.”

Now, there are several places in Revelation where something Satan does, mimics what God is doing, and here is one of them. We just read last week about incense smoke rising along with the prayers of followers of Jesus, and now we have Satan’s turn with his smoke rising from the abyss of Hell. But notice that Satan does not hold the authority to do this when he wants, rather the key must be given to him at the right time, and we know from chapter 1:18 that the one who holds the keys to life and death is *Jesus*.

And even when Satan is given the key to unleash powers of Hell, even in that his authority is limited. We read in **verse 3** that “locusts” come out of the smoke from the abyss, and have a stinging scorpion-like power; but they are not allowed to harm the physical earth, but only harm those who do not have the seal of God. And even with that, they are not allowed to cause death. Again the intended purpose behind this must be God’s patience and mercy- allowing difficulties only for the purpose that people might surrender to Him.

I've heard teachers attempt to suggest that these "locusts" are Apache Helicopters or some military vehicle- but I think we can cross that idea off our list with it being clear that the "sting" does not cause death. Apache Helicopter attacks would certainly cause harmful deaths, rather than torturous stings. Others presume to liken the locusts to turban wearing Arabs, which I think is also a pretty ridiculous interpretation. There was a plague of real life locusts, which are basically swarming, flying grasshoppers- a plague of them in Exodus, they were the 8th plague- and actually there are still parts of the world in which at certain times, locusts invade and destroy massive amounts of crops growing, even causing country-wide famines; but these mentioned here do not harm vegetation. I think at this point in the progression of events, events that are leading towards the physical world unraveling and thus the revealing of the spiritual eternal world- at this point in the progression, I think it's safe to assume that these "locusts" are indeed demonic, spiritual, fallen angel entities released from the pits of hell, and not just mutated locust insects, nor just some normal modern day technology thing that you and I know of that would have looked strange to John at the time. It seems as we get closer to the installment of the Kingdom of God, the fabric of our physical world starts to tear apart and the typically hidden spiritual world begins to enter in through those holes. We've already noted that the first 4 seals and the first 4 trumpets deal with physical earthly things, and then that the last 3 seals and last 3 trumpets deal with spiritual powers and effects. The scary description in verses 7-11 of these "locusts" resembling armored horses, crowns on their heads, human faces, long hair, giant teeth, loud large wings, scorpion tails, who report to their king- the star angel of the abyss Satan- I think it's pretty clear and safe for us to say these are indeed demons.

Now, while all this sounds pretty scary, notice back up in **verse 4** we see that those with the seal of God are *not* affected by these demonic creatures. As I mentioned early on, it's hard to know for sure how much or how little believers in this time will be physically affected by the events being described- again, there is the 5th seal in chapter 6 that talks about all the martyrs- followers of Jesus who will be killed because of their faith; but here we have described protection for believers in Jesus- at least protection for those *sealed*. Here's a place where we have to back up and ask ourselves again how do we interpret chapter 7, as well as chapter 14, concerning the 144,000 sealed. Are those passages to be taken literally and thus we interpret that only 144k Jewish virgin men will be sealed and thus protected from the stinging locust demons, while other believers alongside

non-believers will be *tortured* by the stinging locust demons? That would be kind of rough and would seem to rub against the rest of scripture to have a bit of a caste system where certain “special” Christians aren’t stung by the demonic locusts, but all the rest are? *Or*, do we interpret that 144k more *symbolically* as representing all of Christianity throughout history, whether of Jewish decent or not, married or virgin- and thus interpret it as any believers alive during the Tribulation will be sealed and will thus be protected from the demonic locusts? Personally I think that later interpretation probably makes a little more sense here. If we as believers in Jesus are sealed with the Holy Spirit, as Paul talks about in the 1st chapter of Ephesians- then we thus have a protection from other, demonic Spirits.

What seems to me to be the case in Revelation, as we wrestle with who’s being protected from what- it seems to me that what Revelation tells us is that Christians still alive during the Tribulation will experience and will be affected by many of the *physical* events of the Tribulation- the wars, the famines, the persecution- but there seems to be some kind of limit, there is some kind of protection, provision offered for followers of Jesus, some kind of help in order to remain strong *spiritually*, no matter what happens around them. And I think this concept rings true for us even today. As Bryan shared 2 weeks ago- we’re not always completely shielded from the hardships of life, or always protected from really bad things that happen- struggle, sickness, pain, death; but God in His mercy is working towards refining us and protecting us *spiritually*. God is intending for any negative physical effects -whether before or during the Tribulation- He is intending to use those *negative physical effects* to move us toward *positive spiritual effects*. There is a heart position before Him, a dependance on Him, a surrender to His will- that has to take place in order for us to be able to one day fully enjoy the amazing Kingdom life that He is preparing for us. And it seems to me that, He loves us so much that He is willing to *not* shield us from some things- *if* those things give us more opportunity to tune our hearts to His and prepare us more fully for the experience with Him that is to come.

This morning I want us all to consider if there is anything in our lives that we feel like “God should have protected me from that.” Or anything that we have experienced that has us questioning quietly “Why is this happening to me God?” I have felt like that in the past, I do feel like that at times- is there anyone else

who would raise their hand with me saying- “Yeah I’ve been there, or I am there even right now currently”? We’re going to do something a little different this morning, I’m going to ask if you raised your hand, would you come and gather here at the front, and I’m going to pray over us asking for God’s work in our hearts as we process through these things.