

Acts 14:19-28 NIV "Bible Tribulation facts"

"Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. ²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

"²³Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples."

You likely know of the *Tribulation* and *Rapture*.
Many church groups highlight them.

Some talk of the *Rapture* nonstop.

Few people know the facts about the terms *Rapture* and *Tribulation*.

To my knowledge, the word *rapture* doesn't appear in any popular English translation.

Ideas of the *Tribulation* mostly arise from a phrase in Revelation 7:14:

"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from? I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, **'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;** they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Grasping Revelation challenges even scholars.

Martin Luther wrote a famous commentary on the *Book of Romans*. He could not make sense of *Revelation*.



Luther thought the book should have been written in, "plain language, not in symbolical terms."¹

**Luther asked a good question:
Why wasn't *Revelation* put in clear language?**

¹ *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, Dr. R.C.H. Lenski, Lutheran Book Concern, Columbus, Ohio, 1935. p -13.

For some reason, Luther never understood *Revelation's* mystery.

There's a reason for *Revelation's* secret language.

In the late first century, Christians in the Roman province of Asia (now western Turkey) were compelled to worship the Roman Emperor.

Domitian, who became Emperor in 81 AD, decreed that he was a god.

He ordered that when he and the Empress entered a theater, the crowd was to rise and shout:

"All hail to our Lord and his lady. In speech and writing, he demanded the address:

"Lord and God."² Folks referred to Domitian as god or faced death.

Revelation's seven cities enforced that edict.

Imagine the difficulty laws like that created for Christians.

Jesus taught us to be respectful, but when governments assume God's authority and forbid us to worship Him, we honor God, not men.

God gave John the *Revelation* to encourage, embolden, and warn God's people, who were challenged by the Emperor's decree.

Revelation's message: trust in God the Creator, live for Christ, be patient, and endure suffering.



1st century bust of Domitian

The Emperor was merely a mortal.

God our Creator is eternal and all-powerful.

***Revelation* helped God's people face a hostile government, and also an immoral society.**

Faithfulness to God makes us winners.

Here was the rub for Christians at the time.

If authorities caught early Christians with letters that urged them to obey God above the Emperor, those believers could be charged with treason.

To protect His people, the Lord used language and scenes encoded with numerous symbols.

To those not familiar with them, many of those cartoon-like symbols seemed nonsense.

What codes did the Lord use?

The Lord gave the Apostle John symbolic scenes from the *Old Testament*, from Jesus' and the Apostles' teaching, numbers, music, etc.

Christians knew the *OT*, and all the other named sources; the authorities didn't.

John himself firmly believed in God and witnessed Jesus' death, and resurrection. Authorities exiled John on a rocky island, "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"

We can see why he wrote:

² See *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1 Revised Edition, William Barclay, p 19

"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus . . ." (Rev. 1:9 NIV).

In this passage, the word translated "suffering" comes from the Greek term "thlipsis."³

That same term thlipsis is translated tribulation in *Revelation 7: 14*, which we talked about earlier.

Not many English words begin with the three consonants t, h, & l together.

The only two in my 50,000 word *Webster's Dictionary* are of Greek origin.

One of them is the medical term *thlipsis*, ***Thlipsis refers to pressure or compression.***

Some doctors use *thlipsis* to describe an exterior constriction of the blood vessels.



The term *thlipsis* is sometimes, but not always translated as "tribulation."

This inconsistency in translation creates confusion. In verse 22 of our Acts text, where the NIV renders *thlipsis* as "hardships," the NRSV has "many tribulations;" and the TEV reads, "many troubles."

Persecution, hardship, distress, and troubles put great pressure on us, don't they?

³ θλίψις

In **John 16:33** (King James Version), Jesus warned:

"In the world ye shall have tribulation (thlipsis): but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

There, the NIV reads: "you will have trouble."

Despite all this variation in translation, many think that at some point:

- God's people will be caught up (raptured) into heaven;
- there will be a period of great tribulation;⁴
- and Jesus will literally reign on earth for a 1000 years.

Folks who think these events will occur differ on how long this *tribulation* will last.

They also disagree on when this *tribulation* will occur.

That's why you hear expressions, e.g. *pre-tribulation* and *post-tribulation*.

The *Tribulation* issue isn't as clear-cut as advocates claim.

The variation in translation of *thlipsis* leads me to conclude that the *Tribulation* theory stands on very shaky, unstable stilts.

Recall what Jesus said:

⁴ Tribulum is a Latin term for a threshing machine. A related word refers to a thorny plant.

"In this world, you will have tribulation. Following Jesus isn't a cozy trip in your choice of a Cadillac, "Beamer" or Tesla.

It involves facing sacrifice and pressure in varying degrees.

In *Revelation*, the Lord assures those facing persecution that God will take care of them.

Enduring in Christ, they become winners. Ephesus Theater

In today's text, Paul and Barnabas revisited cities:

²² Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships (much thipsis) to enter the kingdom of God,' they said.⁵



Those accepting the *tribulation* theory don't seem to recognize the symbolism in Rev. 20:4b-6 NIV:⁶

"And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

⁵ As Paul told Timothy: "All who live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," 2 Timothy 3:12.

⁶ 4b-6 NIV

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

Recall that *Revelation* was written in figurative language.

Back in *Revelation* 7:14, we met those who had come out of tribulation—severe pressure.

They had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus.

The struggle was over for them.

God will wipe every tear from their eyes and guide them to springs of living water.

The New Testament gives us ample symbolism to understand this scene.

Long before John wrote the *Book of Revelation*, Paul visited Ephesus, the first of Rev. 's 7 churches. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he wrote:

"Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."⁷

Folks once dead in sin were made alive in Christ.

⁷ Ephesians 2:4-6 NIV

When did that occur?

How and when did they go from death to life?

To the church in Colossae, neighboring city to Laodicea, the last of *Rev.* 's churches, Paul wrote: "Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins."⁸

The above Scriptures describe the believers' first death and resurrection.

John, himself wrote in one of his Epistles:

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."⁹

Recall the robes made white by the blood of the Lamb in Rev. 7:14?

When we give up the world and its sin,
are baptized into Christ,
and come up cleansed by the blood of Jesus,
that's our first death and resurrection.

If we continue in Christ,
the second death has no power over us.

When does the second death occur?



Ruins at Colossae near Laodicea,
7th church of Revelation.

Jesus himself explained:

John 5:28, 29 NIV

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."

This agrees with what Jesus taught:

Matthew 24:39b-41 NIV:

"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

Where will you taken on that Day of Judgment?

Christ invites everyone; he invites you.

Have you accepted his invitation?

After that day, there will be no tomorrows.

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com

⁸ Colossians 2:12, 13 NIV

⁹ 1 John 1:7 NIV