

Many Tribulations (Acts 14:19-22)^a

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Context

1. **Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey, preached Christ in Antioch of Pisidia (in modern-day Turkey).**
2. **Kicked out of Antioch of Pisidia, traveled to Iconium where Paul preached Christ in the synagogue.**
3. **Persecution arose: opposition attempted to stone them, fled to Lystra and Derbe.**
4. **Preaching the gospel in Lystra.**
5. **Healed a man born lame, barely able to prevent sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas as gods.**

Passage (Acts 14:19-21)

[19] Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul [and] dragged [him] out of the city, supposing him to be dead. **[20]** However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. **[21]** And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch **[22]** strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting [them] to continue in the faith, and [saying], "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."¹

The Stoning of Paul

1. Paul gets a taste of his own medicine

A. *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there [Lystra]; and having persuaded the multitudes [apparently mainly Gentiles], they stoned Paul (Acts 14:19).*

I. Barnes notes: "Men will often travel farther to do evil than they will to do good; and many men show more zeal in opposing the gospel than professed Christians do in advancing it."

B. Zealous Jews travelled from Antioch to Lystra, approximately 115 miles²

I. Like Paul, on the road to Damascus, these Jews are "on the road to Lystra" to stop those proclaiming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the Christ!

II. Except that Christ doesn't intervene to stop them

- C. As Paul had guarded the clothes of those who once stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58), so now he stands in Stephen's shoes.
- D. Such is the quandary and experience of those who, having come to Christ, previously persecuted Christ — they may be given the opportunity to taste their own bitter medicine!

2. Stoning according to OT law

- A. *"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which [are] all around you, near to you or far off from you, from [one] end of the earth to the [other] end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deu. 13:6-10).*
- B. Paul's message concerning the resurrected Christ was seen by the Jews as tantamount to serving another god.

3. Fickleness of religious practitioners and the dangers of crowd dynamics

- A. Only a minority of participants in various religious activities are actually seeking truth
- B. Much of the diversion which passes as religious activity is a result of the flesh
 - I. *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23)*
 - II. When religious rituals and practices are exposed as “useless things” (Acts 14:15), the response can be intense and vicious
- C. Only a very short time after proclaiming Paul and Barnabas to be gods, the multitude are persuaded to stone Paul!
 - I. Trapp: “Was there no mean between deifying and stoning? How soon turns the wind into a contrary corner!”
 - II. Wesley: “[The crowd] moved with equal ease either to adore or murder him.”
 - III. Burkitt: “What wise man will value himself by the applause of the multitude, and live upon the breath of the people, (that contingent judge of good and evil,) which rather attend the vain than the virtuous? But thus the common people dealt with Christ himself, crying one day, Hosanna! and the next day, Crucify!”

IV. They now stone the man who healed the cripple!

Did Paul almost die — or actually die?

1. **The text says, *they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up . . .* (Acts 14:19b-20a)**

A. Some commentators suggest that Paul actually died, but was subsequently raised from the dead by the intercession of the disciples.

2. **About 7 years after this, Paul refers to this experience of being stoned in his second letter to the church at Corinth:³**

A. *Are they ministers of Christ? —I speak as a fool—I [am] more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty [stripes] minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; [in] journeys often, [in] perils of waters, [in] perils of robbers, [in] perils of [my own] countrymen, [in] perils of the Gentiles, [in] perils in the city, [in] perils in the wilderness, [in] perils in the sea, [in] perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness — besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches (2Cor. 11:23-28)*

B. Some see another possible reference to this event in the very next chapter of 2 Corinthians where Paul describes being caught up to heaven

I. *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2Cor. 12:2-4)*

II. If 2 Corinthians was written in A.D. 55-56, as many date the letter, then the catching up that he mentions would have occurred in approximately A.D. 41

III. But reputable bible chronologists place Paul in Lystra on his first missionary journey around A.D. 48{N {N |Ref-1307||342}345}

IV. So the timing doesn't seem to be correct.

V. Nor is there anything in Paul's description of being caught up to heaven which infers it was in connection with his death or a near death experience

VI. A modern tendency to connect heavenly visions with near death experiences is probably more a reflection of the numerous bogus accounts of heaven by those

who claim to have died and been subsequently revived—usually to describe heavenly scenes and activities which are completely out-of-step with biblical truth.

3. **But then how are we to understand the phrase that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 11:23, that he was, “in deaths often”?**

- A. “Deaths” = **θανάτοις** [*thanatois*]
- B. Is Paul saying he was killed and raised multiple times?
- C. **θανάτοις** [*thanatois*], the plural form of **θανάτος** [*thanatos*], can refer to being “in danger of death”⁴
- D. Paul experienced many dangerous, *potentially deadly situations*

4. **Luke tells us that Paul's opponents dragged him outside the city, “supposing him to be dead” (**νομίζοντες αὐτὸν τεθνηκέναι** [*nomizontes auton tethnēkenai*])**

- A. “[while] supposing” = to think, expect, or consider
 - I. Most frequently used in passages where what was thought to be the case turns out not to be the case (e.g., Mat. 5:17; 10:34; 20:10; Luke 2:44)
 - II. Describes an incorrect assumption
- B. “to be dead” = perfect tense, could be translated, “having [already] died”
- C. In summary, they “presumed him to have already died.”
- D. If Paul was actually dead, then why would Luke — a medical doctor, of all people — have described it this way?

5. **Evidence of supernatural healing nonetheless**

- A. Disciples gathered - it seems likely that Paul rose in response to intercession for healing on the part of the disciples
- B. Next day, Lystra → Derbe: approximately 30 miles!
- C. Soon thereafter, Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Antioch: approximately 145 miles

Many Tribulations

- 1. **As Paul and Barnabas returned through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they preached the unpalatable message, *We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22).**

2. How and when do we enter God's kingdom?

A. The kingdom itself is yet future, as we express frequently in the "Lord's prayer"

I. *Our Father, Who is in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come.* (Mat. 6:9)

II. A future condition that believers throughout history have prayed and continue to pray for.

III. But when does the kingdom come? How will we know when has arrived?

IV. The kingdom will be present when, *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* (Mat. 6:10)

B. The kingdom begins at the Second Coming of Christ

I. Jesus taught a parable indicating that it is only upon His return that the kingdom begins

a. In the 19th chapter of Luke we read, *[Jesus] spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return"* (Luke 19:11-12)

II. From the book of Daniel, we learn that the kingdom will not come until *after* the dominion of the antichrist has come and gone,

a. In a vision, Daniel saw the antichrist *making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made [in favor] of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom* (Dan. 7:21-22)

b. It is only after the antichrist's dominion is taken away that . . . *the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.* (Dan. 7:27a)

III. In the 21st chapter of Luke, Jesus tells his disciples that it will only be after Jerusalem has been trampled by Gentiles and the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and believers see signs in the sun, moon, and stars that *the kingdom of God [will be] near* (Luke 21:24-31).

IV. The book of Revelation records that it is only at the sounding of the seventh trumpet that loud voices in heaven declare, *the kingdoms of this world have become the kings of our Lord and of His Christ* (Rev. 11:15)

a. This event triggers the out-pouring of the final 7 bowls of God's wrath which climax in the Second Coming—the return of Jesus, having received the

kingdom.

- b. *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory (Mat. 25:31).*
- c. Paul also links Jesus' Second Coming with His kingdom, *I charge [you Timothy] therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom (2Ti. 4:1).*

C. Although the kingdom is still *future*, those who believe find entry into it *when they believe* — their participation is guaranteed in the present for when it becomes a reality in the future on earth.

- I. In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus refers to the wheat — believers — as “sons of the kingdom” (Mat. 13:38).
- II. Paul tells the believers in Colossi, *the Father . . . has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [us] (past tense) into the kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:12-14a)*
- III. James describes the poor of this world who are rich in faith as “heirs of the kingdom which He promised” — not yet possessors, but guaranteed participants and beneficiaries (Jas. 2:5).
- IV. Peter instructs fellow believers to, *be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pe. 1:10-11)*

3. Strengthening the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:22)

- A. On the return journey, Paul no-doubt refers to his stoning experience when, *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting [them] to continue in the faith, and [saying], "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).*
- B. Our entrance into the kingdom is “through many tribulations”
 - I. Exhorting them to continue: unless we recognize this reality, we may faint when adversity comes
 - a. To continue is ἐμμένειν [emmenein], to “remain faithful”
 - b. Our faith will be tested through many tribulations
 - II. The tribulations occur because of the delay between our entry into the kingdom and its future reality on earth

- a. We represent a King who is absent, ridiculed, and rejected by the present age
- b. We uphold principles of the His kingdom, which are also rejected by the present age
 - i. Man created with a purpose by God and, therefore, accountable to God
 - ii. Man created in the image of God, not evolved, not just another animal
 - iii. Sexuality to be expressed in accord with God's purpose and design
 - iv. Refusal to go along with the sinful norms of society
 - Paul links a godly manner of life with persecutions and afflictions such as what happened to him in Lystra
 - *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of [them] all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2Ti. 3:10-12)*
 - Our very existence, as sons and daughters of God and upholders of God's Word, places us in the cross-hairs of this world.
 - Many times, we needn't say anything: our mere existence is enough to raise their spiritual hackles—our very presence is an unpleasant reminder for the godless of the coming judgment.

III. Through . . .

- a. There's no getting around it, no other way, not around, not over - the narrow path
- b. This is why our faith will be tested and steadfastness is required

IV. Tribulations certify we are on the right path - the same path as Jesus, doing the Father's will

- a. Jesus promised the same
 - i. *If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before [it hated] you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me* (John 15:18-21)
 - ii. He chose us *out of* the world — we are not *of the world*, but aliens.
 - If, as believers, our desire is to “fit in” with the culture, to “lay low culturally,” then we are confused about our very nature and purpose in God.
 - iii. Jesus tells his disciples that the world won't keep “your word” because it won't keep “My word”

- That's why we see bumper stickers that say things such as
 - "Keep your laws off my body!"
 - "My body, my bedroom, none of your business!"
 - "Stop preaching the holy babble!"
 - b. Without tribulation, we would have to wonder if that path we are treading is truly leading to the kingdom?
 - i. If we are not going through, then we are probably compromising: failing to testify of the truth, either by word or deed
 - c. Caveat: tribulation *for the cause of Christ - all these things they will do to you for My name's sake*

4. Severe tribulation - martyrdom

A. Statistics about martyrdoms in this age?

I. Accurate numbers are difficult to come by due to the nature of the incidents

- a. "According to a study done at Regent University, there were close to 164,000 Christians martyred around the world in 1999. An estimated 165,000 will be martyred in 2000."⁵
- b. "According to the *1997 World Christian Encyclopedia*, between 155,000 and 159,000 Christians are killed for their faith throughout the world every year."⁶
- c. "During the height of communism worldwide, an average of 330,000 Christians were killed each year."⁷
- d. "More Christians were martyred in this century alone than in all the past centuries combined."⁸

B. One relatively recent example of the ultimate tribulation of a Christian couple in Pakistan

- I. "ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — A mob accused of burning alive a Christian couple in an industrial kiln in Pakistan allegedly wrapped a pregnant mother in cotton so she would catch fire more easily, according to family members who witnessed the attack. Sajjad Maseeh, 27, and his wife Shama Bibi, 24, were set upon by at least 1,200 people after rumors circulated that they had burned verses from the Quran, family spokesman Javed Maseeh told NBC News via telephone late Thursday. Their legs were also broken so they couldn't run away. "They picked them up by their arms and legs and held them over the brick furnace until their clothes caught fire," he said. "And then they threw them inside the furnace." Bibi, a mother of four who was four months pregnant, was wearing an outfit that initially didn't burn,

according to Javed Maseeh. The mob removed her from over the kiln and wrapped her up in cotton to make sure the garments would be set alight.”⁹

What are believers to make of all this? How are we to respond to this reality?

1. **Expectation - Tribulation is unavoidable if we sincerely follow God.**
2. **Validation - When we experience tribulation for the cause of Christ, it validates our identity in Christ. In the absence of such tribulation, we should take stock of whether we are more like the world than our Lord: ultimately misrepresenting what it means to be a *CHRISTian*.**
3. **Sovereignty - We must learn to understand and rest in God's sovereignty. Paul was stoned and given up for dead. But God had other plans for Paul—he was healed and continued for many more years of ministry. Yet, even Paul ultimately lost his head at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero. In cases of extreme tribulation, many Christians down through the ages — such as the Pakistani couple I just mentioned — have been destined to give their ultimate testimony and witness in death for the cause of Christ.**
 - A. In the 8th chapter of Romans, one of the strongest passages emphasizing God's sovereignty, Paul reminds believers of this sobering fact: *For [God's] sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter* (Rom. 8:36).
4. **Overcomers - Ultimately, we find encouragement because the Word of God declares us to be overcomers through our identity and unification with Jesus.¹⁰**
 - A. Immediately after Paul writes to the Romans reminding them they are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, he states, *Yet in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor [many other things] shall be able to separate us from the love of God* (Rom. 8:38-39).
5. **Peace - We can have peace in the midst of the storm. Jesus said, *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33)**

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Endnotes:

1. [Acts 14:19-22](#), NKJV
 2. <http://www.biblecharts.org/newtestament/paulsfirstmissionaryjourney.pdf>
 3. The first missionary journey ended in A.D. 48, the letter of 2nd Corinthians was written in A.D. 55-56.
 4. [Ref-0617](#), #2505
 5. [Ref-1376](#), -
 6. [Ref-1375](#), 326
 7. [Ref-1375](#), 326
 8. [Ref-1375](#), 323
 9. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pakistani-christians-burned-alive-were-attacked-1-200-people-kin-n243386>
 10. Believers are overcomers through Christ: 1Cor. [15:57](#); Rom. [8:37](#); 1Jn. [5:4-5](#); Rev. [2:7,11,17,26](#); [3:5,12,21](#); [12:11](#); [21:7](#).
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Sources:

- Acts 14:19-22** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0617** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-1375** John Foxe, Harold J. Chadwick, *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1997). ISBN:[0-88270-672-1^d](#).
- Ref-1376** dc Talk, Voice of the Martyrs, *Jesus Freaks* (Tulsa, OK: Albury Publishing, 1999). ISBN:[1-57778-072-8^e](#).
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Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/48_Acts_14_19-22/index.htm.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-88270-672-1>.
- e** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?1-57778-072-8>.